

Reflective Teaching as a Strategy for Effective Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The challenges of 21st century skills require equipping children with essential dispositions and reflective skills as a relevant dimension of education. Reflection is a valuable skill that can produce considerably high level learning and is also very important to the planning process. It includes describing, analyzing and evaluating our thought-process, assumptions, beliefs and actions. Reflection is a significant human activity in which facilitator and practitioner revisit their experience, ponder it and evaluate it. Different academicians identified different types of reflections to strengthen their teaching practices but, they unanimously suggested that reflective teaching practices are inevitably vital to effective instruction. One can start reflective teaching by asking 'what and why' questions. Reflective teaching is an approach that enables teachers and teacher educators to understand how they use their knowledge in classroom situations and how they combine theory and practical in a more effective manner. A reflective teacher can get input from different sources such as senior faculty members, students, colleagues to improve his/her teaching by using reflection. This paper provides some insights on few moot questions such as, "what is reflection", "what is reflective teaching", "why is reflective teaching important", "why should teachers be reflective", and "what is meant by being a reflective teacher"?

Keywords: Reflection, Reflective Teaching, Reflective Teacher

In the field of education, Dewey realized, amply emphasis should be given on improving problem-solving and critical thinking skills instead of merely memorizing the content matter. Dewey has taken into account the concept of reflection to be a specific form of problem-solving (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Boud *et al.* (1985) described reflection as a generic term for those intellectual and productive activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences to lead to a new understanding and appreciation. It is a form of the response of the learner to experience. Richert (1990 as cited in Farrell, 2007) sees reflection as a critical component of teacher development, helping to move teachers from being primarily guided by "impulse, intuition or routine, to a level where their actions are led by reflection and critical thinking."

According to Fines (2014) Reflection as a tool for self-assessment is an integral part of the learning process. It is the process of critically reviewing

the quality of one's performance in an activity. Reflection can also serve as a tool for learning from observation when a student places themselves in the shoes of the person he or she is observing and asks, "Why did he/she do that?" Reflection is a way of getting students to realize that learning is about drawing on life experiences, not just something that takes place in a classroom. It enables students to think about *what* and *how* they learn and to understand that this impacts on how well they do (UKCLE, 2002).

Reflection

A famous quote by Confucius seems appropriate here in expressing the significance of reflection in any educational setting denoting 'by three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest' (as cited in UKCLE, 2002). It can be understood that

since ancient times reflection attained its credibility and relevance in the knowledge society. Reflection cannot be defined directly by any pre-established assumption as it carries diverse opinions by different critical thinkers from time to time. It is a transformational process. Reflection provides meaning to experience; then it turns the experience into a practice followed by linking past and present experience; hence, it becomes preparation of future training for individuals (Fines, 2014).

Boud *et al.* (1985) stated that Reflection is an essential human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. Biggs (1999) explained that “A reflection in a mirror is a replica of what is in front of it. Reflection in professional practice, however, gives us back, not what is, but what might be, an improvement on the original.” Daudelin stated that “Reflection is the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences; learning is the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behavior” (UK Essays, 2018).

The common element in above-said definitions is that they provide a comprehensive understanding of reflection. That’s why Reflection is not “just thinking hard about what you do” (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). It becomes vital when a teacher can understand the complex nature of the classroom setting. Because, as a teacher started command over classroom management, he/she also has the capability of problem-solving.

Most literature in this area seems to be based either explicitly or inexplicitly on the work of Dewey (1998), or on some of the better-known thinkers on the topic such as Van Manen (1977), Zeichner (1983; 1987), Schon (1987), Biggs (1999), Hinett (2002), Loughran (2002) and Fade (2005). From a practical viewpoint, reflection on teaching occurs when teachers take time to think about what they are doing, why they are doing it and the consequences that their teaching has for students. Reflective teachers accept that their teaching practices, and the motives for those practices, should be questioned, and then actively pursue ways to improve their teaching (Killen, 1995, pp. 3).

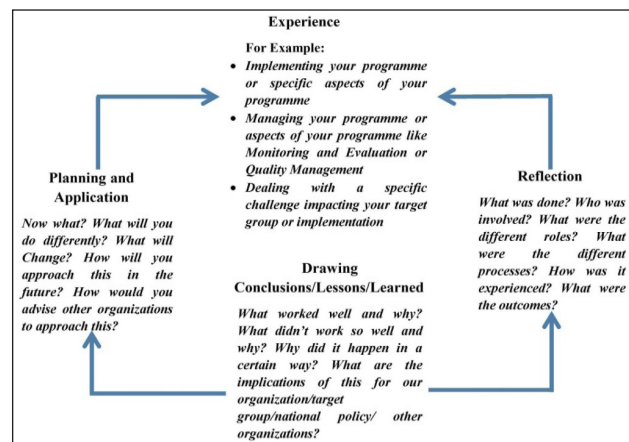
Schon (1983) thoroughly described the concepts of

reflection-in-action and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-in-action refers to the process of interpreting, analyzing, and providing solutions to complex and situational problems during an action, “the period time in which we remain in the same situation” (p. 278). Reflection-on-action takes place when the practitioner has left the arena of endeavor and mentally reconstructs that arena to analyze actions and events.

Liston and Zeichner (1987) described the following four levels of reflection:

1. Factual (reflection focused on routines and procedures of classroom teaching);
2. Procedural (reflection centered on the evaluation of teaching outcomes);
3. Justificatory (reflection about rationales for education); and
4. Critical (reflection focused on a critical examination of education as it impacts social justice and the pre-service teachers own professional development).

The act of reflecting is one which causes us to make sense of what we’ve learned, why we learned it, and how that particular increment of learning took place. Moreover, reflection is about linking an increase of learning to the broader perspective of learning-heading towards seeing the bigger picture (Race, 2002, pp. 1). Kolb (1984) developed a learning cycle that is a useful and straightforward tool for illustrating to students the linkage between reflection and improved learning. According to Kolb, reflecting is an essential element of learning. This is shown through an experiential learning cycle illustrated below.



Source: Pinterest

Van Manen (1977) suggested that reflection can take three different forms. The first level of reflectivity focuses on technical means to reach a given end goal. The second level of reflectivity is the process of analyzing meanings, assumptions, and perceptions underlying practical actions. The third and highest level of reflection incorporates critical questions related to moral, ethical, and political aspects of teaching and schooling. Van Manen (1977) argued that this level of reflectivity is the most desirable, noting that “universal consensus, free from delusions or distortions, is the idea of a deliberative rationality that pursues worthwhile educational ends in self-determination, community, and on the basis of justice, equality, and freedom” (p. 227).

“The relationship between time, experience, and expectations of learning through reflection is an important element of reflection, and to teach about reflection requires contextual anchors to make learning episodes meaningful” (Loughran, 2002, pp. 33). Reflection involves a dialogue between students and their peers, students and teachers and students and works placement tutors, all of whom can provide useful feedback necessary for the representation. To begin to reflect on their learning, students need to be encouraged to make sense of new knowledge concerning their current understanding (UKCLE, 2002, pp. 2).

According to UKCLE, Reflection helps learners to:

- understand what they already know (individual)
- identify what they need to know to advance understanding of the subject (contextual)
- make sense of new information and feedback in the context of their own experience (relational)
- guide choices for further learning (developmental) (2002, pp. 1-2).

Principles of reflection and Aims of reflection

Reflection might be seen as both an approach and method for improving the quality and depth of student learning, where it focuses on the practitioner and their practice. It does involve the students to develop themselves in an organized manner. It also allows us to value, utilize and learn from experience. According to Schon (1983), reflection can be seen

in two-time frames, reflection-on-action, and reflection-in-action. Reflective teachers reflect both “in” and “on” action. First, in reflection-on-action reflection can occur before and after an activity. Second, in reflection-in-action occur during the experience. In teaching, reflection-on-action occurs before a lesson when we plan for and think about our lesson and after instruction when we consider what occurred. And reflection can also occur during the action as well. Frequently, teachers have reflective conversations with situations while they are engaged in their efforts. That is teachers, attempt to frame and solve problems on the spot. When teaching, teachers frequently encounter an unexpected student reaction or perception. During teaching, teacher attempt to adjust their instruction to take into accounts these reactions. It is called reflection-in-action (Zeichner & Liston, 2014).

A reflective model encourages the development of both cognitive and affective theories of moral and ethical behaviour, challenging students to integrate these into their belief systems as a result of their experiences instead of passively absorbing the ‘rules’ of professional conduct (Macfarlane, 1998). Johns (2000) described critical reflection as “a window through which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of his/her own lived experience in ways that enable him/her to confront, understand and work towards resolving the contradictions within his/her practice between what is desirable and actual practice” (p. 34). The reflective teacher promotes the students to take an active part in their learning. For personal growth and professional development, the reflective teacher facilitates self-awareness along with self-reflection and self-evaluation. They create personal records to identify their own learning needs and style to set individual learning outcomes. In the view of Boud (1995), active learning will not occur unless you reflect. To do this, one must think of a particular moment in time, ponder over it, go back through it and only then will one gain new insights into different aspects of that situation.

Reflective Teacher

Reflective teachers ask questions, consider evidence, and search for ideas that they can use to help their students succeed. The reflective teacher sets aside regular blocks of time to think about

teaching activities and make new plans. Orlich *et al.* (2010) described some characteristics of the reflective teacher, such as they understand the social context of schooling and accordingly use various instructional strategies. They know content matter and also care about students. They identify a problem then construct a plan of operation. The Reflective teacher uses problem-solving strategies for tackling complex issues and always thinks prospectively and retrospectively.

To become a reflective teacher, one will need useful information about how students are responding to lessons as well as several critical attitudes and abilities. Gaining insight into the effectiveness of teaching is best accompanied by continually monitoring students' progress through formative assessment. To become a reflective teacher, one needs both the willingness and the ability to question their assumptions about teaching and learning.

Schon (1983) speaks of reflective practitioners who are not just skillful or competent but "thoughtful, wise and contemplative," whose work involves "intuition, insight, and artistry." As per the suggestions made by Eggen & Kauchak (2004), teachers can acquire the tendency to reflect by continually asking questions themselves, such as given as under, as they teach:

- Did I have a clear goal for the lesson? What was the specific target?
- Was the goal important? How do I know?
- Was my learning activity consistent with the goal?
- What examples or representations would have made the lesson clearer for students?
- What could I have done to make the lesson more interesting for students?
- How do I know whether students understand what I taught? What would be a better way of finding out?
- Overall, what will I do differently to improve the lesson the next time I teach it?

According to the Hinett (2002) "reflective teaching is a realistic and attainable way of promoting student learning while developing the types of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are expected from students of higher education institutions in

today's challenging world. It is also a way to make sure that students gain the flexibility and creativity they need to continue to be lifelong learners.

As Killen described, Reflective teachers analyze their teaching to make sure that learning activities fulfill the requirements of all students. Reflective teachers think critically about all their teaching practices and accept that what happens in their classrooms should be questioned and, if necessary, changed. It does not mean that reflection is concerned just with teaching techniques. It does mean that all aspects of teaching, including the teacher's attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions, should be open to review (1995, p. 127).

The reflective teacher is deliberate, rational, and organized (Distad & Brownstein, 2004). Reflective teachers embody social aspects in their instructional planning. They cognitively make the necessary adjustments in their instruction so that all students have an opportunity to succeed (Orlich *et al.* 2010, p. 21).

What is reflective teaching?

Reflective teaching stems from John Dewey's concept of "reflective inquiry" (Dewey, 1998). Dewey viewed the student as an inquirer and an active participant in learning. Dewey describes the reflective thought as "*active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends*" (Dewey, 1933, p.9).

Moon defined the reflective practice as "a set of abilities and skills, to indicate the taking of a critical stance, an orientation to problem-solving or state of mind" (1999, p. 63). It summarized the broad range of activities linked with the thought process about your learning. Zeichner and Liston (1987) argued that teachers and teacher educators could place different kinds of criteria when reflecting. When using technical standards, teachers concentrate on how they can apply their knowledge to achieve a given set of objectives. When using what Zeichner and Liston suggested namely educational standards, teachers consider how the contexts in which they teach influence teaching and learning process, and they believe the value of different educational goals. When using ethical criteria, teachers think about the moral and ethical aspects of teaching and education (1987).

Reflective teaching is something more than thoughtful and intense instruction. It is that form of education that seeks to problematize various situations of professional performance so that they can become potential learning situations and so the teachers and teacher educators can continue to learn, grow and develop themselves through reflective teaching (Jarvis, 1992). The reflective teaching requires the teacher to “elicit and identify their personal theories, to explore these by examining their rationale, by problematizing and looking for alternative analyses, then to compare these with peers and with public theories before attempting to re-formulate the theory and test it against further practice” (Tann, 1993, p. 57). Reflective practice can be seen as both a structure to support critical thinking and enhance existing understanding and a method for facilitating independent and in-depth learning through inquiry. Reflective teaching is the process of conducting a decisive self-examination of one’s education (Cruickshank, 1987; Schon, 1983).

Why should teachers be reflective?

What can be the possible reason and logic to defend this notion that “why should teachers be reflective”? Mull it over this notion and see the considerable advantages of being a reflective teacher. Korthagen and Wubbles (1991) found that reflective teachers have better interpersonal relationships with students than other teachers and also revealed their higher satisfaction level of the job. They further suggest that reflective teachers have sound feelings of security and self-efficacy and are more probably than non-reflective teachers to allow their students to learn by exploring and constructing things for themselves. Zeichner (1992) stated in their finding that the sociological basis is the reason why teachers should be encouraged to be reflective. Some other educationists suggested that through reflection, teachers can improve the teaching-learning process in the classroom (Cruickshank, 1987; Troyer, 1988; Killen, 1991). Onosko (1992) also found a positive relationship between teacher reflection and thoughtfulness in the classroom.

It is supposed to be said that Reflective teachers will contribute more time and effort to analyze their teaching critically along with the same for their students’ learning than those who are not reflective teachers (Walker *et al.* 1992). Consequently, they are

probably having more considerable interest in self-improvement, having higher self-esteem, having more attention on their teaching behavior and numerous efforts to promote their students to be reflective and to think critically and trust that they have more potential to impact on students’ learning relevantly (Nolan & Huber, 1989).

CONCLUSION

A dedication to the principles of reflection and involvement in the process of thinking and self-awareness is the pre-requisite for a teacher and teacher educator to facilitate reflection. Generally, reflection contributes more to motivation, confidence level and shared an interest in the subject area (Hinett & Thomas 1999; Boud 1995; Orsmond *et al.* 2002). Reflective teaching has been advocated increasingly because of the complexity of education and pedagogical concern. In the light of 21st-century challenges, teacher training programmes (D.El. Ed., B.El.Ed., B.Ed., & M.Ed.) seems irrelevant and unequipped without adequate reflective teaching practices to prepare teacher educators into thoughtful decision-makers. Reflective teachers and teacher educators first collect information about student’s performance in the classroom and then use this information to think about what they do in class, why they do it, and how their teaching methods affect students’ performance (Snowman & McCown, 2012). Developing habits of continuous growth and improvement requires self-reflection. As a teacher, as we reflect on our actions, we get information about the quality or effectiveness of our thinking. These types of experience enable us to practice the habit of continuous growth through reflection.

In concluding remark, five thinking skills of reflective teachers as observation, communication, team working, judgment, and decision making can be applied by reflective teachers and teacher educators based on some reflective thinking tools such as recording lessons, writing, drawing, photography, learning journal, portfolio, lesson plan, co-teaching and collaborative practitioner enquiry in their classrooms (Mirzaei & Phang, 2013).

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External link

http://pcwww.liv.ac.uk/ehls/prescott/Practice-Education/_20.htm

<http://escalate.ac.uk/resources/reflection/02.html>

<https://www.google.co.in/>

