

The Role of Teachers in Reflective Teaching in the Classroom

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to discuss the role of teachers in reflective teaching. The scope of this study is focused on explanations of reflective teaching from three experts. Reflective teaching is a holistic thought that enables a teacher to make choices and take alternative actions and allows teachers to think to improve teaching and learning decisions in the classroom. This study also discusses critical situations that can be created for good reflection practices such as strong support from the administration, reflection opportunities, collaboration with colleagues, storage of teaching portfolios and reflective writing, or journal writing. Reflective teaching also faces several constraints, such as time constraints, school culture, and assessment problems.

Keywords: Role, Teacher, Reflective, Thinking, Teaching, Classroom.

Introduction

Since the mid-80s until now, teaching and reflective thinking being discussed among educators around the world. It is considered as a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in the United States "... one can hardly read an article about teaching without mention of reflection". It is considered so important as educators, in particular, curriculum designers, policy makers, theorists, and educational philosophers, have an opinion that the implementation of reflective teaching can create teachers who always think to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. That is why Reflective Teaching is considered as the *latest educators' fad*" (Cliff, 1991). If Reflective Teaching is applied and practiced in earnest, it can create an efficient and effective generation of teachers in dealing with the misunderstandings, confusion, and ambiguity that often engulfs teachers in the classroom.

Definition of Reflective Teaching

Teacher educators generally agree that it is impossible or even difficult to provide a precise definition of reflection. However, briefly, reflection can be understood as thinking. In the context of education, it is a rigorous thought that enables a teacher to make choices and to make decisions on alternative actions in the classroom. Reflective Teaching indicates that there are three sets of meanings about reflection. The three sets of meanings are as follows:

Reflective Teaching - Cruikshank

For Cruikshank, Reflective Teaching is the ability to analyze his teaching practices. (Cruikshank, 1987). This definition only focuses on the achievement of the objectives of a teaching session. According to him, Reflective Teaching described as an opportunity to apply the principles and theories of teaching and learning in a real situation. In other words, the meaning conveyed by Cruikshank is technical and requires that our teachers always appreciate the following two sentences.

- When I think about teaching
- When I think about learning

Reflective Teaching - Schon (Reflection in Action)

For Schon, however, he focused more on competency and artistry. Schon defines Reflective Teaching as "... one who can think while teaching and then be able to respond to uncertain, unique, and conflicting situations in the classroom". In the meantime, Schon also brings with it important concepts like "tacit knowledge," "knowing in action," and "reflection in action," which is a practice knowledge developed by professionals, and such knowledge is usually "tacit." According to Schon (1987), "... we reveal it by our spontaneous, skill application of the performance: and are characteristically unable to make it verbally explicit".

While "reflection in action," according to Schon, is through observation and reflection, one can obtain explicit imagery and use it to think during the "thick of thing." In other words, it is an immediate situation. Overall, Schon's interpretation of Reflective Teaching, as illustrated by Adler (1991) is

as follows:

"Schon takes as problematic the teaching context as well as practice. Curriculum content or goals are not necessarily questioned".

Reflection as a Critical Inquiry

The third perspective is by Kenneth Zeichner (1987). He saw more than two definitions earlier. For him, there are three levels of reflection. The first is technical. At this stage, the emphasis is on the application of professional knowledge to achieve specific goals. The second stage places teaching in the context of situations and institutions. Here teachers are expected to reflect on why they are choosing their practices. Meanwhile, the third level of reflection introduces moral and ethical issues.

Thoughts on teaching and learning at this stage are guided by matters of justice and equity. In other words, in this stage, teachers will be "transformative intellectuals," which will enable them to evaluate and question the ways of the school in general and their teaching in particular whether they are contributing or fail to contribute to building a fair society. In addition to developing skills, this set also requires one to think critically about all contexts, such as classroom context, curriculum goals, curriculum implications in ethics, politics, history, and so on.

Ideal Situations for Reflection

As described above, the promotion of reflection is generally accepted as an important goal in teacher education. However, the trend of these situations in schools or teacher training colleges and the attitude of professionalism is not suitable for teacher reflection. Teaching in general or more precisely since has long been considered a lonely profession, and what ever happens in the classroom is an individual responsibility. As such, our teachers have very limited professional partnerships when they are in school. So teachers do not have the opportunity to reflect fully with their peers on the practice and understanding of pedagogical experiences. In addition to these very limited interactions, the time to reflect on the various decisions made during teaching is limited in the classroom. In reality, all reflection needs the element of time. The question here is, do our educators have the time and space to reflect on the behaviors in the classroom?

Wilman and Nites (1987) found there are three situations that are essential to the practice of reflection. The first is the strong support of the administrators. Second, there is the opportunity for reflection, and the third is the opportunity for cooperation from colleagues. Opportunities and time for reflection need to be created for teachers in collaboration with administrators. Time is also an important factor in understanding and applying it either individually or with a colleague. Time is also needed to discuss specific issues related to teaching and learning.

Whereas colleagues provide the emotional and technical support that professionals need to make connections with their practice. When called for co-operation with peers, it shows how well teachers communicate with each other about their work as well as confidence in their own and others' abilities as teachers and as partners to improve teaching. Another situation in which reflective practice can be established is through teaching portfolios. A portfolio is a clear and accurate record of the work that a teacher has done. A structured portfolio will certainly give teachers the opportunity to reflect well and pave the way for improved teaching.

Accordingly, the reflective writing, or commonly known as journal writing, can also help a teacher as well as promoting reflection to improve the quality of teaching in the classroom. Although there are many different types of substitutes that may promote Reflective Teaching, journal writing is considered a commonly used one. Journals are a collection of real events about pedagogical practice. Indeed, journal writing is a useful technique towards self-development, and professionalism of a teacher. Journal writing helps a teacher learn about himself as a teacher and as a human being. A teacher may reflect on past experiences or may reflect on the contents of the journal he or she writes. Doing so will create teachers who are thinking of improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Constraints of Reflective Teaching

Teachers who want to reflect seriously on teaching, especially with other teachers, often face many obstacles. Here are the summarize of the problems that are a hindrance to Reflective Teaching.

- (a) Time lag or lack of reflection time allocation. This means that there is no effective communication between teachers that enables them to reflect on Teaching and Learning practices.
- (b) The culture of a school is another major obstacle to promote Reflective Teaching. In this case, administrators with different views, especially on the cooperation among the teachers to promote Reflective Teaching, might hurt Reflective Teaching. The pessimistic attitude of teachers can also hinder the practice of reflection.
- (c) Assessment problems are also a barrier to Reflective Teaching. Accordingly, the question is the validity and reliability of Reflective Teaching. Although some views on such evaluation have been submitted by Sparks, et al. (1990), but the assessment is still difficult in Reflective Teaching due to the constraints that exist.

Conclusion

"Life in classrooms is dynamic and uncertain" (Valli, L. 1991). So what happens in the classroom and what to do with those problems is the teacher's responsibility. The Reflective Teaching slogan discussed above can be an antidote to some of the problems that often haunt the teachers in the classroom. A strong spirit and a commitment from all parties are important factors to the success of Reflective Teaching in this noble educational world.

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