

Reflective Practice for Professional Development

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Abstract

This article presents reflective practice for the professional development of teachers. It is an indispensable vehicle for the professional development of English teachers. Reflection, therefore, is the ability to convert the abstract into the practical and the idea into action. Thinking back and moving ahead with action is reflection. It leads to invention. It is a mulling process.

Introduction

Reflective Practice is the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning, and is one of the defining characteristics of professional practice. It involves paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively. This leads to developmental insight.

Purpose

The prime purpose of this study is to explore the efficacy of reflective practice for the professional development of teachers.

Research Question

Why is reflective practice significant to the professional development of teachers?' To answer this question, I applied reflective practice for the professional development of English language teachers. Here, I have analyzed and interpreted the data of the five English teachers through themes.

Reflective Theory

Regarding the reflective theory, I would like to present Schon's and Kolb's reflective theories. Donald Schön introduces concepts such as 'reflection on action' and 'reflection in-action' where professionals meet the challenges of their work with a kind of improvisation learned in practice. Reflective Practice has now been widely accepted and used as developmental practices for organizations, networks, and individuals.

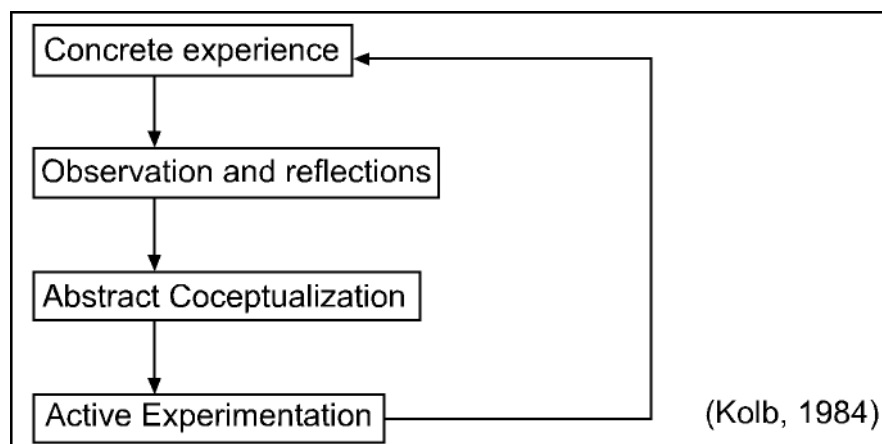
Schön (1983) himself introduced some years later the concept of Reflection-in-action and Reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action can be described as the ability of a practitioner to 'think on their feet', otherwise known as 'felt-knowing'. It revolves around the idea that within any given moment, when faced with a professional issue, a practitioner usually connects with their feelings, emotions and prior experiences to attend to the situation directly. Reflection-on-action on the other hand is the idea that after the experience a practitioner analyses their reaction to the situation and explores the reasons around, and the consequences of, their actions. This is usually conducted through a documented reflection of the situation.

Kolb (1984) was highly influenced by the research conducted by Dewey and Piaget in the 1970s. Kolb's reflective model highlights the concept of experimental learning and is centered around the transformation of information into knowledge. This takes place after the situation has occurred and entails a practitioner reflecting on the experience, gaining a

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general understanding of the concepts encountered during the experience and then testing these general understandings on a new situation. In this way the knowledge that is gained from a situation is continuously applied and reapplied building on a practitioner's prior experiences and knowledge.



Reflection

To my understanding, reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning. It can be seen and has been recognized in many teaching and learning scenarios, and the emergence in more recent years of blogging has been seen as another form of reflection on experience in a technological age. The concept of Reflective Practice centers around the idea of life-long learning where a practitioner analyses experiences in order to learn from them. Reflective Practice is used to promote independent professionals who are continuously engaged in the reflection of situations they encounter in their professional worlds.

Reflective practice seeks to offer a dynamic, reliable, and viable means by which the teacher can develop his or her professionalism, because it is teacher-initiated and teacher-directed: it involves teachers observing themselves, collecting data about their own classrooms and their roles within them, and using the data as a basis for self-evaluation and change and their professional growth (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Therefore, reflective practice is a ruminating and meditative process that cultivates ideas with the help of experiences, expertise and insights of the learners. When ideas are shared, presented and communicated everyone can learn special things from them.

Method

My ontology in this study is that there are multiple realities pertaining to reflective practice from the perspective of teachers. The epistemology of this study is that knowledge regarding reflective practice is subjective. The research methodology I have chosen is qualitative. The site and sample I have selected purposively are Kathmandu district and English teachers from the higher secondary schools from the same district respectively. During the study, I have not disclosed the participant's real name following the research ethics. Through interview, I have generated the

data. I asked open ended questions to explore what reflective practice is, what it does and how it contributes for the professional development of teachers. I have analyzed the data and deduced meaning inductively.

Analysis and Interpretation of reflective practice

I have analyzed and interpreted the data in the following themes. These themes are grounded on informant's information.

Makes Teaching Interesting and Lively

Teachers agree that reflective practice helps teachers to make their teaching interesting and lively. In the same line teacher B says:

I believe that where there is reflection there is perfection. It really makes teaching and learning process lively and interesting. Better learning is possible through reflection. I did learn the techniques that can be used in the teaching, which will make it interesting and effective.

It makes me remember as to how to be a good teacher, a good way to teach and control class. Why? Because as a teacher, we sometimes forget that our students are not of the same levels in a classroom. The reflections given would serve as a guideline in future presentations or in carrying out activities in the classroom. Through reflective practices even the shy teachers and students get tremendous advantages to reflect the subject matter.

Minimizes the Weakness and Maximizes the Strengths

In reflective practice, the language teacher can correct his or her weakness and strengthen the quality of teaching and learning process. It is through reflection English language teachers can perform better. It gives a chance to the teachers to realize their own weaknesses. Then, they can correct their shortcomings for their improvement (Pandey, 2012).

Most of the teachers agree that it is through reflective practice that a language teacher can minimize the weaknesses and maximize the strengths. Strengthening the strength should be the motto of a language teacher. In the same vein, Teacher A says:

Reflective practices help English language teachers to find out their strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. They help them to improve their language teaching accordingly. They help them to plan successfully for the future. They help teachers to become much more critical, creative and analytic in language teaching and they help them to develop a good vision in language teaching.

I think that reflective practice helps English language teachers to plan better for the subject matter to be taught. Actually, planning provides ideas to foster the teaching and learning process. Reflective practice heals the teaching and learning process. It assists both language teachers and students to become confident in the process of teaching and learning process.

Improves Presentation and Creative Writing Skills

Reflective practice improves the presentation style of teachers. A good presentation leads teaching towards success. In this case, Teacher C says:

Reflective practice develops professionalism. It makes the teachers both creative and critical. It also helps them to be more attentive, meditative, communicative and effective in the process of teaching and learning. It even makes the teacher realize his or her weaknesses and strengths in teaching.

The targeted goal is possible to achieve when there is productivity and creativity in the teaching and learning process. Majority of the teachers say that creative people are really effective and efficient in their dealings.

Develops Professionalism

Teacher professional development is a life-long and continuous process in which they are expected to upgrade their knowledge, master new skills and change their practices since advancement in their teaching career is finally for their students and education reform.

Obviously, only skillful and knowledgeable teachers can form a foundation of good schools with high quality students. Therefore, enhancing teachers' teaching career is considered the most important and strategic investments of time, money and efforts that human resource managers make in education (Holland, 2005).

A language teacher is both a mentor and facilitator. Through reflective practice a language teacher can assess and evaluate his or her own teaching (Pandey, 2012). In this regard, Teacher A says:

Reflective practice helps me to observe my own teaching and learning process while performing roles as a teacher, mentor or student. I turn back to see my practices in connection with classroom teaching and learning. I try to remember things I did, good or bad, and then promise myself to improve them in future actions. Reflection on my own teaching relieves me from mental tension as I lay down my worries in texts or images. I feel to be creative when I write something that I did, thought or planned to do. I not only reflect upon past and present, I try to seek my future during reflections. That helps me to see future and make a new vision for further career and professional development. Reflective practice is important for my professional development because in my opinion it helps me to view my past, present and shows brighter future.

Pandey (2012) believes that where there is good competence, there is better performance. All teachers agree that a competent English language teacher can teach confidently. In this case, reflective practice enhances effectiveness in teaching and learning process.

Professional development refers to the progression in the teachers' performance, knowledge and skills throughout the professional life which has sometimes been termed teacher development which focuses on the process of reflection, examination and change to encourage the teachers to develop themselves professionally (Underhill, 1986, 1991).

A Problem Solver, a Good Communicator and a Decision Maker

I think that, the language teacher is a problem poser and a problem solver. This is possible in reflective practice. It also helps language teachers to become a good communicator and a decision maker. Most of the teachers agree that the practice of speaking and delivery in the groups certainly develops a language teacher into a good communicator and a decision maker.

Reflective practice provides them with a useful opportunity to give expression to their frustrations and self-doubts. Over time, there is evidence to suggest that reflective teachers are not only able to identify problems and dilemmas that they face, but also 'work through own solutions to these dilemmas (Farrell, 1998, p.5).

Language teachers live on hope. They try to envision the better future with the sense of

ray of hope. As we know that practice is the best teacher which provides better power to become a reflective teacher. Teacher D in this regard, says:

I think it is significant to me as this practice gives me new hopes and helps me to overcome my anxieties. When I review my past I find many right and wrong practices and then I plan to keep the right practices in advanced form eliminating the wrong practices. I reflect on my poor performance and decide to perform better next time. I reflect upon my slow progress and decide to move ahead faster. This way I analyze my past and present and then plan for future through reflective practice.

In this regard, Mezirow(1991) says that reflection is about the past, the present and the future; it is about problem posing as well as problem solving and it is essential to building and maintaining the capacity and passionate commitment of all professionals whose work focuses upon the care and development of children, young people and adults. To engage in reflection is to create opportunities for choices that relate to values as well as purposes, practices, contexts and change.

Gives the Teachers the Sense of Satisfaction and Self-esteem

While doing interaction with the teachers they say that reflective practice gives satisfaction to them. I feel that when teachers are satisfied they are better motivated. Teacher E in this case says:

Where there is motivation there is attention and meditation. In attention there is no tension. When there is no tension there is better learning. Self-esteem increases along with the matter of satisfaction.

All teachers are aware of the fact that when a value is added on the part of teachers, their position, personality and prestige in the society increase. When language teachers release their problems before the colleagues and friends, they feel a sense of satisfaction in that case. When they get solution of a problem, they become satisfied. Then, they realize that they have also power, value, sense of respect and self-esteem. Teachers are valued by other people in the society. Their esteem grows when they establish a good personality and a clear image before other people.

Makes Competent, Confident and Committed

All teachers agree that a competent teacher is confident in reflecting the subject matter of a particular language. For this, she or he should be committed to undergo challenges in teaching and learning processes. In this connection, Teacher C says:

Reflective practice makes English language teachers really professional. Creativity, analytic power and originality develop on the part of teachers and students. As soon as the problem arises, he or she can easily manage it. It makes teachers competent, confident and committed in the process of language teaching. It also develops the interactive power of the teachers and students. It helps teachers in generating new approaches, methods, techniques, ideas and philosophy.

Knowledge is power. The language teacher should be curious, serious and sensitive at the time of teaching. Through questioning the talent of the learner magnifies. All agree that with reflective practice, one can develop professionalism. Questioning and better performing attitude develop in the process of teaching and learning (Pandey, 2012).

Generates New Approaches, Methods, Techniques, Ideas and Philosophy

It is true that once we sit for interaction, we can gain diverse knowledge. It is knowledge that helps us in bringing new ideas, techniques, methods, approaches and philosophy as well. To further explain this, teacher D says:

Reflective practice is important both for students and teachers. It helps me to receive feedback from the students. I can change the methodology to improve my weaknesses. It helps me to achieve the teaching objectives. Students become interactive and teachers become productive, selective, analytical, critical and creative.

Makes the Teachers Curious, Critical, and Truthful

Most of the teachers are of the opinion that they love questioning. This is the heart to move ahead and to become a critical person in examining the thing. For this, a language teacher needs to be curious to learn more. The wonderful thing is that language teacher reveals the reality and becomes truthful in this process. To further elaborate this, Teacher B says:

Reflective practice helps teachers to get knowledge and skills. It makes them perfect in teaching. It even facilitates the teaching and learning process. It increases the memory power of teachers and students as well. It makes teachers imaginative, thoughtful, creative, critical and truthful.

I believe this statement 'ability is nothing without opportunity'. In that case, reflective practice provides opportunity to diminish the blemishes. A reflective approach to teaching involves changes in the way we usually perceive teaching and our role in the process of teaching. Teachers who explore their own teaching through critical reflection develop changes in attitudes and awareness which they believe can benefit their professional growth as teachers, as well as improve the kind of support they provide their students. Reflective practice helps language teacher to reveal the reality. As it is commonly said that to die is better than to lie, in that case if a teacher speaks lies he or she is producing the liars.

Makes Teachers Accountable to Think and to Reflect

Once we start thinking, we bring novelty in the process of reflection. We become answerable to solve problems that come across in the case of language teaching. Reflective practice makes teachers accountable to correct their shortcomings. To prove this further, Teacher B says:

Reflective practice makes us professional. I believe that no reflection means no any chances of correction. It is the sign of accountability. It makes teachers accountable to think and to reflect.

Reflective teaching is an inquiry approach that emphasizes an ethic of caring, a constructivist approach to teaching, and creative problem solving. An ethic of caring respects the wonderful range of multiple talents and capacities of all individuals regardless of cultural, intellectual, or gender differences.

In this regard a constructivist approach seeks to connect theory to practice and views the student as thinker, creator, and constructor. Integral to a constructivist theory of learning is creative problem solving.

In this connection, Palmer (1998) says:

Teaching like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. Teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in the mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject not at the deepest levels of embodied personal meaning (p.2).

It is true that until and unless I know myself, it is very difficult to understand others. All teachers agreed that they should assess their activities before assessing others' performance.

Makes Teachers Mobile, up to Date, and a Good Linker

Reflective practices changes the thinking perspective of a language teacher. He or she has to aware of day to day current happenings. She or he has power to link up the situation and manage problem. To further explain this, Teacher D says:

Reflective practice helps the teachers to search the new way out to solve the problem. The quality of innovativeness on the part of teachers never gets killed with reflective practice. It makes teachers mobile, up to date, and a good linker and a communicator.

All teachers agree that it is through reflective practice the language teachers can bring tremendous change in teaching and learning. For this, they have to update their knowledge.

Develops Sharing Culture and Addresses the Emotion and Motion

Most of the teachers agree that reflective teachers are quite popular in the crowd of people. The philosophy of daring, caring and sharing is equally crucial to manage the situation of emotion and motion in reflective practice. In this line teacher C says:

Reflective teachers are truthful. When they reveal the reality through sharing culture they develop their capacity to taste the delight and joy of learning. It captures the motion and emotion of the teachers.

All teachers are aware of the fact that the joy that comes after sharing is always tremendous, enabling and encouraging too. The job of teaching can be compared with the principle of emotion and motion. If language teachers are able to merge emotion and motion in their teaching and learning process, they can succeed in their professionalism.

Evokes Talents

At this juncture, teacher A says:

Reflective practice makes teachers curious, serious and sensitive to evoke the inner talents. When a language teacher evokes emotion with motion, then he or she artistically presents the language materials easily with comfort.

All teachers say that the individual talent is unearthed while doing the reflective practice. It contributes a lot for the professional development of teachers. In this case, Teacher E says:

Reflective practice helps to become confident language teachers. Problems are solved after sharing. The position and identity are established in the group. It evokes inner talents.

All teachers agreed that confidence comes through competence and better performance. Actually, reflective practice helps language teachers to cultivate and evoke their talents and capability. In the process of planning, thinking, meditating and questioning, language teachers are indulged to evoke their inner capacity.

Conclusion

Reflection, therefore, is the ability to convert the abstract into the practical and the idea into action. Thinking back and moving ahead with action is reflection. It leads to invention. It is a mulling process. It generates new ideas to learn better. It is also a heutagogical practice of directing one's learning and practice. Even inaction may happen in it. Reflective practice has become a key driving force and an increasingly influential referent in the professional development of teachers. It seeks to offer a dynamic, reliable, vivacious, invigorating, veritable and viable means by which the teacher can develop his or her professionalism because it is teacher initiated and teacher directed. Reflective practice and professional development should go together if a teacher wants to be an effectively delivering one.

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