



**Ministry of Education**  
**General Administration for Private Education**  
**ELT Supervision**

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## **Reflective teaching**

### **An important asset to professional development**

#### **Introduction**

Reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development. Reflective practice' is a term often used in educational pedagogy. It is a continuous process from a personal perspective that considers critical incidents within your life's experiences. Reflective practice is simply a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful. (Schön, 1987)

"The most distinctive of these very good teachers is that their practice is the result of careful reflection. ....They themselves learn lessons each time they teach, evaluating what they do and use these self-critical evaluations to adjust what they do next time". (Why colleges succeed, Ofsted, 2004, Para 19)

Jenny Moon (2005) suggests "Reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to gain a better understanding of relatively complicated or unstructured ideas and is largely based on the reprocessing of knowledge, understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess."

Also the process of reflections helps teachers to monitor their own development from raw beginner to experience professional.

David Berliner (2001) outlines the stages of teacher development as going from the Novice, raw recruit who is learning the basics and is relatively inflexible to the expert, who is very much like the racing driver or the professional footballer who is completely at one with their art, performing effortlessly and naturally. Experience and length of service don't necessarily make an expert. Experience needs reflection if we are to become expert teachers.

## **Importance of reflective teaching**

Roffey-Barentson & Malthouse (2009) introduce useful 10 'benefits of reflective practice' which are summarized below:

**1. Improving your teaching practice:** If you take the time to reflect on your teaching, and reflect on how different parts of what you do work well, where aspects of your teaching can be improved, and how problems which arise could be solved, that is bound to help you to improve your teaching.

**2. Learning from reflective practice :** Purposeful reflection helps 'deep' learning take place, and for you as a teacher, it will help you to make connections between different aspects of your teaching and what goes on around your teaching. Reflective practice will help you gain new learning and use it in your teaching.

**3. Enhancing problem solving skills:** When starting off with reflecting on your teaching you may tend to concentrate on problems which arise. By carefully and honestly considering and analyzing those problems, you will improve your own capacity to find solutions.

**4. Becoming a critical thinker:** Critical thinking is about 'thinking well', and 'taking charge' of your own thinking, and reflective practice will help you recognize and adjust what you think to take account of changes in circumstances, and by doing that help you to be better equipped to find solutions which work.

**5. Making Decisions:** If you regularly reflect on your teaching in depth, you are regularly going to come across the need to make decisions, but the results of your reflective practice will help you to make those decisions in a more informed, thoughtful and objective manner.

**6. Improving your own organizational skills:** If you are thinking carefully about what you are doing, identifying possible actions and choices, trying out solutions, and adjusting what you do to take account of the results, this involves a good deal of organization. By breaking down issues and problems into steps or stages, you will get better at organizing your time and your activity to concentrate on the important, 'solution-focused' actions.

**7. Managing personal change:** Working in education involves managing regular, rapid, pressured and often confusing change, which can be one of the most difficult aspects of being a teacher. If you are using the techniques of reflective practice, which involves, calm, thoughtful, honest, critical and organized thinking and action, this should introduce a calming and less emotional response to that change. As reflective practice is itself focused on seeking positive improvements and solutions, managing change more effectively should take place.

**8. Acknowledging personal values:** There will be things which take place within your professional situation as a teacher which you will wholeheartedly agree with, and others which will worry or alarm you. This is because they may agree or disagree with your own personal values such as what you believe in, and what you think is wrong or right. How these are affected by teaching will vary, but you will almost certainly come across major clashes of values as part of your work. Reflective practice is an excellent way of acknowledging and recognizing that those values exist and have an effect, but which concentrates on helping you to choose approaches and actions which can help you to resolve those clashes without it adversely affecting the professional balance of your work as a teacher.

**9. Taking your own advice:** Teachers are often more critical of their own teaching than anyone else, and it could be possible for this to develop into an attitude about teaching which is negative and destructive. The techniques and approaches of reflective practice will place you in a position where you are an informed, positive agent in your own development and improvement and one where you can 'take your own advice' with a confidence that it is reflective, focused and informed advice.

**10. Recognizing emancipatory benefits:** If you reflect on the nine benefits of reflective practice which have so far been described, you will clearly see that this is a model of practice which represents the teacher as someone with influence over their own teaching and their own destiny as a teacher. This is what is at the heart of reflective practice, and as such it should help considerably to free you from some of the burdens which can weigh teachers down, and refresh your confidence and your teaching.

### **Conceptions of Reflective teaching (Sze, 1999)**

Reflective teaching can be dealt with from different angles. Five views can be demonstrated as follows:

#### **1. Reflective teaching as a thoughtful practice:**

Reflective teaching is a disposition to think about one's own teaching practice, instead of passively following routinized procedures that one has established over years. Reflective teaching only constitutes mindful teaching. Wallace (1996) asserts that "It is normal for teachers from time to time to informally evaluate their professional expertise"

## **2. Reflective teaching as a model of teacher education:**

There are eight principles that guide reflective practice in teacher education.

- a. developmental ( improves by time to make relevant changes)
- b. culture-sensitive ( observes culture of the educational context)
- c. non-prescriptive ( not imposed in any structured way)
- d. emphasis on reflecting on experience and theorizing from it
- e. theoretical input should be processed in light of previous experience
- f. trainee's experience should be valued
- g. trainer and trainees learn from each other
- h. course content should be negotiated with trainees

## **3. Reflective teaching as an organized professional development:**

Continuous lifelong professional development has been asserted by most writers. Organized activities in which teachers work collaboratively can be called "enriched reflection". Ur (1996) proposes four elements of enriched reflection: a) vicarious experience b) other people's observations c) other people's experiments d) input from professional research and theories.

## **4. Reflective teaching as a classroom enquiry:**

Richard and Lockhart (1994) stress that classroom-based inquiry aims to develop a reflective approach to teaching. Teachers collect data about teaching; examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and teaching practices. Some writers place more emphasis on teachers as researchers. One way to bridge the gap between theory and practice is to induct teachers into classroom research.

## **5. Reflective teaching as a means to social justice:**

Bartlett (1990) argues that teachers need to critically reflect on certain fundamental issues of language teaching. Reflective teaching means thinking beyond instructional techniques, addressing the questions: "why issues and how to problems".

## **Characteristics of Reflective teaching**

Pollard and Tann (1993) laid out a set of six characteristics of reflective practice. They argued that the reflective teaching:

1. has an active concern with aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency

2. requires competence in methods of classroom enquiry (gathering data, analysis, evaluation) to support the development of teaching competence
3. requires attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness
4. is based on teacher judgement which is informed partly by self-reflection and partly by insights from educational disciplines
5. is enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues
6. should apply a cyclical or spiral process in which teachers monitor, evaluate and revise their own practice continuously.

### **Implementation of Reflective teaching (Richards, 1990)**

Many different approaches can be employed if one wishes to become a critically reflective teacher, including observation of oneself and others, team teaching, and exploring one's view of teaching through writing. Central to any approach used however is a three-part process which involves:

#### **Stage 1: The event itself**

The starting point is an actual teaching episode, such as a lesson or other instructional event. While the focus of critical reflection is usually the teacher's own teaching, self-reflection can also be stimulated by observation of another person's teaching.

#### **Stage 2: Recollection of the event**

The next stage in reflective examination of an experience is an account of what happened, without explanation or evaluation. Several different procedures are available during the recollection phase, including written descriptions of an event, a video or audio recording of an event, or the use of check lists or coding systems to capture details of the event.

#### **Stage 3: Review and response to the event**

Following a focus on objective description of the event, the participant returns to the event and reviews it. The event is now processed at a deeper level, and questions are asked about the experience.

### **Approaches to critical reflection**

Writers suggest many strategies to implement critical reflection in teaching. Some of them are outlined below.

#### **1. Peer Observation**

Peer observation can provide opportunities for teachers to view each other's teaching in order to expose them to different teaching styles and to provide opportunities for critical reflection on their own teaching. In a peer observation project, the following guidelines may be developed.

1. Each participant would both observe and be observed. Teachers would work in pairs and take turns observing each other's classes.
2. Pre-observation orientation session: Prior to each observation, the two teachers would meet to discuss the nature of the class to be observed, the kind of material being taught, the teachers' approach to teaching, the kinds of students in the class, typical patterns of interaction and class participation, and any problems that might be expected. The teacher being observed would also assign the observer a goal for the observation and a task to accomplish. The task would involve collecting information about some aspect of the lesson, but would not include any evaluation of the lesson. Observation procedures or instruments to be used would be agreed upon during this session and a schedule for the observations arranged.
3. The observation: The observer would then visit his or her partner's class and complete the observation using the procedures that both partners had agreed on.
4. Post-observation: The two teachers would meet as soon as possible after the lesson. The observer would report on the information that had been collected and discuss it with the teacher (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). The teachers identified a variety of different aspects of their lessons for their partners to observe and collect information on. These included organization of the lesson, teacher's time management, students' performance on tasks, time-on-task, teacher questions and student responses, student performance during pair work, classroom interaction, class performance during a new teaching activity, and students' use of the first language or English during group work.

## **2. Self-evaluation**

"Self-evaluation is one of the most overlooked forms of explicit evaluation. Ideally and logically, this should precede all other forms of the evaluation of teaching effectiveness. Self-evaluation can assist teachers to improve the educational experiences they provide for your students and identify the professional education they need to further develop their capacity to teach well. It also assesses teachers' readiness to apply for promotion and tenure.

## **Methods of self-Evaluation**

### **1-Self-Reports**

Self-reporting involves completing an inventory or check list in which the teacher indicates which teaching practices were used within a lesson or within a specified time period and how often they were employed (Pak, 1985). The inventory may be completed individually or in group sessions. The accuracy of self-reports is found to increase when teachers focus on the teaching of specific skills in a particular classroom context and when the self-report instrument is carefully constructed to reflect a wide range of potential teaching practices and behaviours (Richards, 1990).

### **2-Autobiographies**

Abbs (1974, cited in Powell 1985) discusses the use of autobiographies in teacher preparation. These consist of small groups of around 12 student teachers who meet for an hour each week for at least 10 weeks. During this period of time each student works at creating a written account of his or her educational experience and the weekly meetings are used to enable each person to read a passage from his or her autobiography so that it can be supported, commented upon by peers and the teacher.

### **3-Journal Writing**

A procedure which is becoming more widely acknowledged as a valuable tool for developing critical reflection is the journal or diary. The goal of journal writing is:

- a. To provide a record of the significant learning experiences that have taken place
- b. To help the participant come into touch and keep in touch with the self-development
- c. To provide the participants with an opportunity to express, in a personal and dynamic way, their self-development
- d. To foster a creative interaction:
  - between the participant and the self-development process that is taking place
  - between the participant and other participants who are also in the process of self-development
  - between the participant and the facilitator whose role it is to foster such development (Powell, 1985).

## **4-Recording Lessons**

For many aspects of teaching, audio or video recording of lessons can also provide a basis for reflection. While there are many useful insights to be gained from diaries and self-reports, they cannot capture the moment to moment processes of teaching. Many things happen simultaneously in a classroom, and some aspects of a lesson cannot be recalled.

## **Conclusion**

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 teaching suggests that experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but that experience coupled with reflection can be a powerful impetus for teacher development.

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