



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract: The practice of reflection has become a key pedagogical ideology of modern teacher education, which is reacting to the problem of increasing the necessity of adaptive, reflective and professionally independent teachers. This theoretical treatise looks at the concept of reflective practice as a methodological procedure rather than as a pedagogical orientation that forms teacher learning and growth. Based on the existing theoretical frameworks, the paper integrates philosophical premises, fundamental reflective paradigms, pedagogical practices, and the most important challenges with regard to reflective practice in teacher education. It emphasizes the ways in which reflective pedagogy helps in integrating theory and practice, also in how it helps in the development of pedagogical reasoning and fostering the professional identity, ethical consciousness and lifelong learning of the teachers. In the paper, implications about curriculum and policy in teacher education are also discussed and, in this case, reflective engagement should be structured and sustained. This review provides that consistent idea in a coherent conceptual way that empowers reflective pedagogy as a foundation of good teacher education by bringing together various threads of reflective scholarship.

Index Terms- Reflective practice, teacher education, pedagogical development, professional learning, reflective pedagogy

Introduction

Advancements in the contemporary setting of education today are experienced through teacher education, which is increasingly informed by pedagogical realities in classrooms, along with the irreducible diversity of learner needs, and the augmented demands of teacher professionalism. In addition to good subject content, teachers are expected to have the pedagogical ability to modify the instructional delivery and make informed decisions as well as appointee reaction to changing teaching-learning contexts. Consequently, educator preparation subsidies all over the world have started to focus on teacher growth as a focal point, no longer restricting themselves to the conventional designs that trained teachers as content carriers and technical skills acquirers (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

This change has attracted the interest of researchers into the constraints of transmission-oriented pedagogy in which a teacher can be an inert recipient of knowledge instead of an active creator of professional knowledge. According to contemporary scholarship, effective teaching necessitates reflective judgment, critical inquiry, and unceasing learning, which cannot be trained using prescriptive training only (Coachran-

Smith & Lytle, 2009). Therefore, the pedagogy of teacher education is more and more understood as a transformative process which includes the theory, practice and professional reflection.

As this changes with time, the phenomena of reflective practice have come out to be a fundamental pedagogical principle within teacher education. Reflection is viewed as an active, persistent, and thoughtful thinking process on the experience (Dewey, 1933). According to Schon (1983) who introduced the ideas of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, reflective practice is generally considered a key to shaping thoughtful and adaptive teachers. It helps beginner and experienced teachers to carefully reflect on their beliefs, teaching choices and classroom experiences, thus, promoting professional development.

Most reflective practice is still conducted in teacher education as a separate method, e.g. journal writing or portfolio building, as opposed to a consistent pedagogical focus. The literature has an apparent concept about reflective practice as pedagogy, its theoretical models, aims and objectives of reflection on teacher learning (Zeichner & Liston, 2014). It is based on this background that the present paper intends to offer conceptual review of reflective practice as a pedagogical measure in teacher education on a systematic basis. It creates a synthesis of important theoretical views, models and criticisms in clarifying its pedagogical value. The article has been divided into parts that look at the conceptual underpinnings of reflective practice, how it can be applied in pedagogy, the challenges that surround the practice, as well as its effects on teacher education curriculum and policy.

Conceptual Foundations of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice has strong philosophical roots, which perceive learning as being experience-centered, an active, and a meaning-making process. Reflective practice is anchored on pragmatism and experiential learning as its two intellectual tenets, which underpin experiential, inquisitive, and problem-solving as the primary constituents of professional learning. Learning in this tradition is not seen as the passive accumulation of knowledge but as a constant process of interpretation and reconstructions of experience which is achieved by reflectively engaging in thought (Kolb, 1984).

The most influential and first description of reflection in education was given in the seminal work by John Dewey. The concept of reflection presented by Dewey (1933) was a process of focused, thoughtful and diligent consideration of beliefs or practices with regards to the premises it is supported by and the implications to which it would give way. This critical thinking that results in informed action is purposeful thinking that, according to Dewey, emerges as a result of doubt or uncertainty. This perspective places the teachers within the position of intellectual actors, who critically analyze their experiences and not just apply some prescribed procedures. The conception of Dewey places emphasis on the idea of reflection as a guided way of inquiry that connects experience, theory and action in ways that are significant.

Schon (1983, 1987) built upon the principles proposed by Dewey by applying the concept of reflective practice to the professional setting that is complex and unpredictable, i.e. teaching. He came up with the notion of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. However, reflection-in-action describes the self-reflective skills of the practitioner where they are interested in questioning and modifying what they are doing during a practice and reflection-on-action is considered to be the retrospective of the activity by the practitioner after an event has taken place. These concepts bring out the idea of reflection as a dynamic and continuous process that is a constituent in professional practice and not a strictly retrospective or academic activity.

Modern academic work also develops the concept of reflective practice to include cognitive, metacognitive and ethical aspects. Reflectively, it helps teachers to cognitively understand how they teach and learn, metacognitively to define what they believe and assume as well as the decision-making processes that they employ, and ethically it helps teachers to consider values, equity, and responsibility in teaching (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 2014). This interdisciplinary perspective highlights the transformational power of reflection in the development of professional judgment and moral agency.

In teacher professional learning, reflective practice consequently occupies a central place in the process whereby teachers build professional knowledge, formulate pedagogical logic, and perpetuate improvement. Instead of being viewed as an auxiliary action, reflective practice is taken as a fundamental pedagogical orientation supporting the lifelong learning and professional development in teaching.

Reflective Practice as Pedagogy in Teacher Education

Reflective practice in teacher education literature is commonly brought out in the form of particular activities like reflective journals, portfolios or post-lesson discussions. Although these approaches are important, by restricting reflective practice to individual techniques, one can easily turn it into a procedural necessity instead of making it a pedagogical orientation. The idea that reflective practice is pedagogy means that reflection influences the organization of learning, the ways learning is packaged, the ways knowledge is formed, and how teachers are disposed to think, act and develop professionally (Zeichner & Liston, 2014). Reflection as pedagogy is an internal construct that helps to inform teacher learning as opposed to being an extraneous aspect of current teaching practices.

In pre-service teacher preparation, reflective pedagogy is essential in making potential teachers interpret the early teaching experiences. Student teachers are also constrained with conflicts between the perceived theoretical learning learnt during course works and classroom experiences. Reflective practice allows them to challenge such experiences, challenge any form of prior notion about teaching and learning, and slowly cultivate knowledgeable reasoning in pedagogy (Loughran, 2002). Pre-service teachers are able to examine the instructional decisions, learning responses, and situational aspects through systematic reflections which will result in a greater amount of professional knowledge.

In the case of the in-service teacher, reflective pedagogy makes a contribution towards the effective and ongoing professional development process of such teachers, which fosters systematic investigations into what occurs in the day-to-day practice. Teaching is complex and situational and reflective practice enables teacher to be adaptive in response to classroom changes. Studies indicate that a reflective practice based on long-term reflective interaction will result in improved instructional decision-making, professional autonomy and improvement of pedagogical content knowledge with time (Avalos, 2011). Reflective pedagogy, in that respect, is the basis of professional renewal and lifelong learning.

One of the most important pedagogical roles of reflective practice is the possibility to mediate theory and practice. Considering theory as the abstract knowledge to be implemented in a purely mechanical manner, reflective pedagogy considers theory as the prism by which the practice can be analyzed and rebuilt. Educators are proactive in the ways that they construct their interpretations of theoretical concepts based on their experiences and vice versa (Coachran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This kind of a dialogic relationship enhances professional judgment and situational decision-making.

Pedagogy of reflective practice is closely related to constructivist and sociocultural learning theories. Constructivist schools of thought put an emphasis on learning as a process through which meanings are constructed whereas the sociocultural schools of thought underscore the social, cultural and contextual aspects of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Reflective pedagogy has these principles through promotion of collaborative discussion, self-regulation, and learning in context. In this way, it contributes to the cultivation of not only competent practitioners but also reflective professionals who can conduct an educational activity with advocacy and moral education and practice.

Models and Approaches to Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

Teacher education reflective practice has been conceptualized and defined as being possible by a variety of models and approaches which bring structure and meaning to the reflexive action of teachers. Some of the most popular are the cyclical models of reflection, viewing reflection with a recursive process between experience and analysis on the one hand, and action on the other. Examples of this method are the experiential learning cycle of Kolb (1984) and reflective cycle of Gibbs (1988), in which the systematic progression through concrete experience into reflective observation, conceptual and informed action is stressed. This type of model is especially important in teacher education, since they provide a scaffold to thought of novice teachers, and ensure that reflection is not either vague or purely descriptive.

Besides cyclical models, other models of reflection of note are; dialogic and critical models of reflection. Such methods focus on reflection as a social mediated and critically oriented process and not an individual mental process. According to Zeichner & Liston (2014), dialogic reflection, based on the discussion with colleagues and mentors, can help a teacher to bring up implicit beliefs and explore socio-cultural and moral aspects of teaching. The critical reflection, especially, has the effect of asking teachers to question the matters

of power, equity and inclusion, thus continuing the same reflection practice to other educational needs outside the classroom setting (Brookfield, 1995).

On the personal level, reflective journals, portfolios, and self-assessments activities remain some of the primary tools in teacher education programs. The process of reflective journals facilitates constant sense-making because they enable the teacher to look at the experiences, emotions, and dilemmas in pedagogy in written form. Portfolios, physical portfolios or online portfolios can assist teachers towards starting to make a record of professional development with time and linking reflections to evidence of practice (Loughran, 2002). These strategies have the potential to increase metacognitive awareness and more profound pedagogical reasoning when properly scaffolded.

Reflective pedagogy is also reinforced through collaborative reflective practices in that reflection is located in relationships between professionals. Peer reflection, mentoring dialogue and professional learning communities are the spaces of collective inquiry and a collective meaning-making. The findings argue that collaborative reflection promotes the ability of teachers to question assumptions, learn through hearing different voices and build up a common professional language (Avalos, 2011). These have proven especially useful in enriching individual reflections with organizational learning.

Technology-enhanced reflective practices have, more recently, broadened the prospective reflective engagement. E-portfolios, blogs and digital stories enable teachers to combine multimedia evidence, participate in an asynchronous conversation and revisit reflections over time. These strategies do not only espouse reflection, but also follow modern digital pedagogies and professional documentation (Kocoglu, 2008).

Taken together, these models and approaches suggest reflective practice as pedagogy through encouraging structured and guided enquiry, professional discussion, and learning over time.

Role of Reflective Practice in Teacher Professional Development

Reflective practice is in the middle stage of teacher professional development as it aids in the continuous building of professional identity of teachers. Teaching identity is not consistent at the certification stage; instead, it is an ever-changing mode of exposure and constant involvement with classroom experiences, institutional settings and individual ideals. Reflective practice helps teachers to understand how their value, assumption, and past experiences influence their decisions about teaching and therefore develop a coherent and self-aware professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). Systematic reflection helps teachers to go beyond role compliance to seat in a level of professional purpose and commitment.

Reflective practice has one of the greatest contributions in the form of the growth of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and instructional flexibility. Reflection enables teachers to understand learning content in terms of how knowledge on a subject matter will be taught and the response of learners to various instructional techniques. Through critical analysis of classroom life, myths, and student achievement, educators can correct their thinking about the way they teach and can change the teaching methods to best meet the needs of different learners (Shulman, 1987; Loughran et al., 2012). Through this, reflective practice endorses the teaching based on the situation and not the fixed procedures suggested.

Reflective practice is also crucial to the development of critical thinking and professional independence as well as life-long learning. Reflection can help teachers challenge existing practice, analyse evidence gathered in their own classrooms, and make informed decisions about pedagogical practice. This practice enhances the independent judgment ability of teachers and places them as active learners in their entire career (Day & Sachs, 2004). The emergent nature of the educational contexts necessitates reflective practitioners to be in a better position of addressing new requirements of the curriculum, policy changes, and student diversity.

In addition to enhancing instruction in a positive way, reflective practice is a valuable instrument of ethical and inclusive teaching. The reflection fosters reflection of teachers on their moral and social practice, such as regards equity, inclusion, and well-being of learners. Specifically, critical reflection allows teachers to be more aware of their biases, dispute the deficit attitudes, and embrace more socially fair methods of pedagogy (Brookfield, 1995; Zeichner, 2010). This reflective practice aids the growth of an ethical professionalism based on care, responsibility and justice.

Together, these dimensions indicate why reflective practice is important in enhancing teacher agency and professionalism. Through long-term reflection, teachers feel like active participants in their own professional growth as opposed to passive receivers of reforms forced on them by the outside world. Reflective practice

therefore forms the basis of a vision of professional teacher practice that is associated with informed decision-making, ethical conduct and constant improvement.

Challenges and Critiques of Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

Although it is acknowledged to be the important task, reflective practice of teacher education also faces considerable challenges and criticisms. The tendency to product cursory reflection or ritual is one of the worries of reflection that has persisted. Reflective tasks, like journal writing or portfolio entries, in most programs are dealt with as musts, prompting student teachers to come up with descriptive narrations of what occurred, rather than critically examine some of the assumptions underlying their instructional choices or the results of their practices (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Loughran, 2002). Reflective practice has the potential to be transformative but the fact that a reflection of the surface is so shallow inhibits this potential.

On the same note, the inability to have systematic direction and effective evaluation models of reflection is a problem. Poorly scaffolded reflective tasks have been known to leave beginning teachers in a dilemma over what is meant by meaningful reflection. Lack of clear criteria may lead to ambiguity, lack of consistency and low academic rigor, and reflection may be seen as a subjective or lessen performance as an actual form of professional learning (Ryan & Ryan, 2013).

The effective application of reflective pedagogy is complicated by institutional and contextual constraints even more. Curse of time, coursework, and accountable expectations often limit the scope of time and opportunity to engage in sustained and repetitive reflections. There is also a tendency of the tension between the open-ended, inquiry-based in nature reflective practice and standardized teacher education curriculum that emphasize competencies which can be measured and adherence to external regulations (Zeichner & Liston, 2014).

There is also a call to implement pedagogical scaffolding as a means of deep reflection, which is also promoted by critics. Reflective practice can easily strengthen existing beliefs without deliberate mentoring, dialogic learning and depth of increasing complexity (Brookfield, 1995). To meet these challenges, curricular design, teacher knowledge, and institutional devotion to reflective pedagogy as an essential professional action, not a process, is needed.

Implications for Teacher Education Curriculum and Policy

The establishment of reflective practice as a pedagogical orientation does have significant implications regarding teacher education curriculum design. To implement reflective pedagogy, one would have to go beyond single acts of reflection to a sustained curricular framework where reflection is integrated into course work, field courses, and evaluation activities. Reflections through systematic correlation with subject pedagogy, practicum experiences and professional study aids the formation of coherent professional knowledge instead of disjointed learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Loughran, 2006).

Teacher educators have a central role in this procedure that they as teachers cannot do, but rather as reflective mentors that demonstrate reflective thinking and inquiry. The studies also highlight that the future educators can better participate in reflective practice in case teacher educators can show reflective dialogue, critical inquiry, and willingness to review their own practice (Korthagen, 2017). The approach provided in the form of mentorship makes teacher educators facilitators of professional learning and not bearers of knowledge.

Reflective pedagogy also has an important implication on the assessment practices in teacher education. Traditional summative tests may not be effective in reflective learning. Other forms or judgments like reflective portfolios; inquiry and formative feedback would be more effective in measuring the growth of the professionals, pedagogical rationale and ethical consciousness (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). These kinds of assessments are more in line with the developmental aspect of teacher learning.

Reflective pedagogy finds a familiar reaction in policy at the national and international teacher education reforms, which focus on teacher professionalism, teacher autonomy, and teacher lifelong learning. Reflection capacity is becoming a key professional competence identified in frameworks including competency-based and outcome-oriented teacher education (European Commission, 2013). Incorporation of reflective practice

into the curriculum and policy therefore aids in provision of adaptive, ethical and professionally responsible teachers.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This theoretical review has discussed reflective practice as a paradigm pedagogy tool in teacher education with a focus on its philosophical background, pedagogical roles, models, professional modes, and related issues. Pulling on the reliable literature research, the paper reflects on how reflection is more than a technique but rather a pedagogical orientation that informs teachers about how they learn, experience and have an understanding of how to build professional knowledge. Reflective practice facilitates teachers to combine theory and practice, make pedagogical judgment, and revert responsively to the intricate and transforming demands of instruction (Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 2014).

The review restates reflection practice as core to the professionalism of the teacher, which is beneficial to helping them build professional identity, pedagogical content knowledge, ethical awareness, and lifelong learning dispositions. Reflective pedagogy helps make the teaching professions more autonomous, flexible, and critique-filled (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Regarding the contribution to knowledge, this paper summarizes various theoretical insights and elucidates the pedagogical importance of reflective practice in teacher education providing a consistent conceptual framework based on curriculum design and policy implications. Future studies can build on this study by focusing on comparative conceptual analysis, systematic review, or even empirical analysis on how reflective pedagogy is implemented in various teacher education settings. Institutional implications of enhancing reflective practice in teacher education will be the long term, consistent institutional dedication, considerate pedagogical planning and collective vision of teaching as reflective practice.

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