Reflective Practitioner: Fostering Motivation, Thinking Skills and Self-Regulation to Enhance the Quality of Teaching

Trixy Elizabeth John* & Benny Thomas**
*Research Scholar, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, India
**Professor, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, India

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ABSTRACT

Quality in teacher education is one of the significant challenges of 21st century even in the age of technological advances and digitalisation. Being reflective, that is learning from one’s teaching, allow one to be driven by a spirit of inquiry which facilitates thinking and motivation. Facilitating the development of self-regulation through constructive, innovative and reflective practices will help achieve the goals. The teaching-learning process should not be limited to the application of knowledge already acquired but also should look at things anew. In view of the social cognitive theory which emphasises self-regulation, the following suggestions are given: forward planning, combining artistic and scientific features, introspective orientation, being an action researcher, formative assessment, and development of a portfolio along with a reflective journal. The article aims to discuss the features that help a teacher for reflection which in turn can foster thinking, motivation, and self-regulation, thereby enhancing quality.

Keywords: Reflective Practitioner, Thinking Skills, Motivation, Self-regulation, Technology.

Introduction

The National Council for Teacher Education has defined teacher education as a programme of education, research, and training of persons to teach from pre-primary to higher education level. Teacher education encompasses teaching skills, sound pedagogical theory, and professional skills. The quality of pedagogical inputs in teacher education programmes and their efficient utilisation are essential for the professional and personal development of prospective teachers. Teacher education programs and contents should have a strong philosophical, psychological, and sociological foundation. In spite of all the educational reforms, there is a need to look at the quality of teacher education in the present scenario.

Quality Enhancement

Quality refers to the degree of excellence. According to Jan D. Timmer “quality is a state of mind, the relentless pursuit of excellence, of never being satisfied with what you do, how you do it and how quickly you do it. There is always room for improvement. Everything can always be done better” (Sharma, 2016). Quality is contextual. Quality refers to the basic and essential character, the distinguishing element or characteristic of a product, service, organisation or entity. Quality has become a defining element of education in the 21st century in the context of new social realities. Quality in teaching can be associated with different perspectives such as a teacher’s cognitive resources, performance, and effect (Wang, Lin, Spalding, Kleczka & Odell, 2011). From the standpoint of cognitive resources, quality is related to the knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, and attitudes teachers bring into the profession. The myriad of experience a teacher has in and out of classroom contributes to the quality. Quality should also be seen in the light of teaching outcomes. Since teachers are considered as nation builders, quality should be assured in every aspect of the prospective teachers.

Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching is a process that helps one grow from novice to expert (Snowman & McCown, 2011). An effective teacher learns from teaching. The best way to learn from teaching is to be a reflective teacher. A reflective teacher never stops learning.

Innovation and technology are two important terms that are widely used in this present scenario. Innovation is to think of a new idea, communicate, and lead that idea. Technology can be a tool to help teachers to instill curiosity, set context and make connections between theory and practice. The digital tools can be of great help for a teacher in every phase of his teaching career which include classroom instruction, classroom management, reflection processes etc.

According to social cognitive theory by Bandura (1999) behaviour is the result of interactions among personal characteristics, behavioural patterns and environmental factors (Snowman & McCown, 2011). As far as teachers are concerned, none of the three factors can be ignored. Each activity of the teacher’s social interactions and personal development requires these three elements. One of the most important skills a teacher should have is the self-regulation. It helps the teacher to set their performance standards, evaluate the quality and reinforce themselves. Moreover, the characteristic that is strongly
related to self-regulation is self-efficacy which is most needed for a teacher. The teachers think about what to do and why to do in the process of reflection, and they need to be in thoughtful observation and analysis of their actions before and after instructions. Thinking in multiple dimensions, the use of innovative ideas and technological tools can help one in the reflective process which in turn can enhance the motivation if the performance reaches the desired standard. A reflective process helps the teacher to adapt and accommodate the behaviour and such a continuous process can make one to be self-regulated. Given the above facts, following suggestions will help in reflection.

**Forethought Phase or Forward Planning**

In addition to analysing those actions after instruction, it is very much needed to think about what to do and how to do prior to instruction. A reflective teacher needs to think about the knowledge and skills to be acquired, classroom environment, teaching strategies, evaluation processes before interactions with the students. Long-term as well as short-term goals and preplanning of the strategies that need to be used for delivering the instruction should be set in this phase. Classroom climate may not be stable always. Several distractions can occur in the learning process. Planning is a necessary self-regulatory skill which will help the teacher in the changing circumstances.

**Be an Artistic Scholar**

Reflective teachers should blend the art and science of teaching. Teachers must discover the qualities of artistic teaching which involves beliefs, emotions, values, and flexibility within themselves. The effective teachers can communicate enthusiasm, take into account the diverse needs and interests of students, cope with any stressful situations and can make necessary adaptations or improvisations when needed. Learning from one's experience is the vital source of knowledge that a teacher can have. As far as teachers are concerned, nothing is more important than constructing a significant knowledge base in a healthy positive environment. A reflective teacher along with the knowledge bases should also inculcate the values.

**Introspective Orientation**

Teachers should have some critical attitudes and abilities to be reflective. One of the most important attitudes needed is to be open-minded. Apart from being open-minded, teachers should be able to evaluate themselves critically and should have a questioning attitude about existing practices. Self-assessment or self-judgment helps in reflecting on and analysing the thought processes and actions through which one can ascribe a cause to a particular behaviour. This process promotes thinking and can also enhance motivation when one can attribute success to ability and effort and failures to the insufficient effort. Collaboration with colleagues can also help one to get the feedback. Adaptive inferences can be made from this which will be fostering self-regulation. Classroom checklists and self-recorded lessons in addition to student's feedback can help a teacher in self-reflection.

**Be an Action Researcher**

Teachers must be able to solve an immediate problem that encounters in the teaching-learning process. It may not be possible to create ideal situations in the classroom always. In case of interruptions or loss of interest, the teacher should be able to make on-the-spot decisions which can handle boredom and recapture attention. This needs mental manipulations, thinking in multiple perspectives, spontaneous analysis, and flexibility in solving the problem. The article on action research and reflective practice: towards a holistic view by Leitch and Day (2006) suggests that more attention needs to be given to both the nature of reflection in the action research process and its relationship to the purposes, processes and outcomes.

**Development of a Reflective Journal along with a Portfolio**

Developing a reflective journal can help a teacher to record the observations and experiences. The reflections on teaching will help the teacher for improvement and changes. Teachers need to constantly prepare, observe, and reflect on the instructional practices and should relate theory with practice (Heath, 2002). Development of the journal will help the teacher to be well prepared. Keeping a personal portfolio for professional development helps the teacher to analyse and improve the quality. Technology can help in making digital portfolios.

**Discussion**

Several research studies have reported the benefits of reflection on the quality of teaching. An investigation into the impact of reflective teaching on EFL learner's autonomy and intrinsic motivation by Abdolrezapour and Fallah (2015) indicated that reflective teaching leads to learner’s autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Cultivating teacher thinking: Ideas and Practice, a literature analysis by Li Huang (2015) reported that teacher education curricula should develop necessary thinking skills desired.
Reflective thinking and teaching practices, a study conducted by Chee Choy and San Oo (2012) attempted to show a link between reflective thinking and how it stimulates critical thinking. A study by Cruickshank, Kennedy, Williams, Holton and Fay (1981) on the evaluation of reflective teaching outcomes reported that reflection enhances the ability to express more analytically on matters concerning teaching.

The studies reveal the importance of reflection in teaching. It can foster thinking, motivation and self-regulation in learners. Even though the concept of reflection has been the matter of research, the inclusion of it in the teacher education curriculum with emphasis on connecting theory with practice is to be given more attention. There needs to be a continuous connection between pre-service and professional development. Reflective practice needs to be given due importance as it adds to the understanding of the teachers about themselves and the teaching-learning process as a whole.

Conclusion

Teacher education demands constant reforms and faces new challenges. Though curriculum reconstructions, and development of skills have been long discussed and various reforms have been put forth for the improvement, the quality of education is still lacking. As Alvin Toffler rightly quotes, “the illiterate of the 21st century is not those who can’t read or write but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn” (P’Rayan, 2018). If controlled by one’s pre-conceived and misconceived notions, governed by myths, false assumptions, one will not be open to new ideas and will be unwilling to undergo a paradigm shift. Exploration of what is already stored, and to be willing to undergo a shift or change is crucial. The role of technology has given more opportunities in the field of education. But the evolution of new technology and the development of instructional practice based on it should not be just a fad or just a scientific outgrowth of knowledge. Thinking out of the box approach secures a better future. It is not only technology but ways of thinking that needs to be the focus of innovation. The inner drive is necessary for garnering knowledge. The motivation can come from any external or internal stimuli, but the inner drive helps one to pursue the goals. Also, to wipe away the rigidity often felt in the teaching-learning process, certain internal factors like motivation, interests, perseverance, etc. as well as the external stimuli like materials, infrastructure, teacher quality should be given due importance. One has to overcome the inconsistencies and contradictions experienced to achieve equilibration to be motivated (Snowman & McCown, 2011). To observe and analyse what one does or thinks can produce a positive result. The reflective person thinks about teaching activities, make new plans, and ultimately can come up with a new idea that is useful in pedagogical problem solving and in meeting the educational needs. As Lao Tau says “To attain knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom, remove things every day” (P’Rayan, 2018), which is very relevant in the present-day context.

References