

PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the perception of English teachers on reflective practice and the role of reflection in revealing the reality. The study followed a qualitative research method. 5 English teachers were purposively selected from Tarkeshwor Municipality, Kathmandu. The data was analyzed inductively generating the themes. The findings of the study were that reflective practice is a meditative and thoughtful process, focuses on planning and preparation, recalling and self-assessing process, professional and creative process, process of sharing and strengthening the strength, and motivating, encouraging, enriching and enabling process. It enhances teaching skills and brings changes in teaching learning practices. Teachers have to think, act and reflect tenaciously. As a result teaching learning process is activated and aggrandized. It further presents that every incident has enormous insights to learn through this practice. Eventually, it enhances the professional development of English language teachers.

Key Words: Meditation, Thinking, Self-reflection, Reflective practice

Introduction

The term 'reflective practice' carries multiple meanings that range from the idea of professionals engaging in solitary introspection to that of engaging in critical dialogue with others. Practitioners may embrace it occasionally in formal, explicit ways or use it more fluidly in ongoing, tacit ways (Finlay, 2008). For some, reflective practice simply refers to adopting a

thinking approach to practice. Others see it as self-indulgent navel gazing. For others still, it involves carefully structured and crafted approaches towards being reflective about one's experiences in practice.

Reflective practices are methods and techniques that help English teachers and students reflect on their experiences and actions to engage in a process of continuous learning (Pandey, 2012). My main question in this research article is 'how do teachers perceive reflective practice?' To explore an answer of this question, I have tried to analyze and interpret the perceptions of the five English language teachers on reflective practices.

While pondering on reflective teaching, I would like to remember the philosophical idea of Dewey (1933) who called for teachers to take reflective action that entails "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads" (p. 9).

In this fast changing global scenario, no other processes except for reflective practice, could serve the ever growing needs of the English language learners and teachers by integrating both theory and practice (Bartlett, 1990).

Randall and Thornton (2001) say that a fully professional teacher is one who is able to reflect critically on his or her own practice" (p.2). Thus, the reflective teachers are creative and critical professionals. They critically raise questions to their own practices. They construct meaning from their experiences.

Objective of a Study

The main objective of this study is to uncover the perceptions of teachers on reflective practice. It also explores how teachers have practiced reflective practice in their personal, professional and pedagogical life.

Method of a study

This article follows a qualitative research method. The research site was Tarkeshwor Municipality, Kathmandu. The participants were English teachers who were selected purposively. Qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation,

noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). I have deployed both primary and secondary data. I have reviewed the available literature and I have taken an interview to generate first hand data. To answer the research question, I have received information from five English language teachers teaching in Kathmandu district. Qualitative method has been adopted to derive the answer to the research question. The data analysis process is inductive in nature. Purposive sampling is chosen to get an in-depth information (Creswell, 2015). The study has tried to reveal the perceptions and practices of teachers. It has been conducted in a small scale of sample. Therefore, the result cannot be generalized to a larger extent. Pertaining to the perceptions on reflective practice of teachers, I have presented the themes on the basis of the information I have collected, analyzed and interpreted from the respondents. Moreover, the researcher has presented his own personal and professional knowledge and experiences to explore perceptions on reflective practice.

Analysis and Interpretation

To analyze the data which were gathered from in-depth interview, I have developed the following themes on the basis of the perceptions from the teachers' knowledge and their professional experiences.

Meditative and Thoughtful Process

I understand that reflective practice is a very good meditative approach in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, it is through thinking a language teacher can come up with innovative ideas. To illustrate this, Teacher A says:

Reflective approach is essential to be a good teacher. Whether his lesson is targeting to the objective or not, whether she or he is successful or not in teaching is decided by what approach she or he has adopted in teaching. It ultimately leads to teachers' professional development. Teachers meditate in the process of reflection which gives birth to better planning for teaching. Reflection occurs mainly in three phases; pre-reflection, during reflection and post reflection. It is just like planning, acting and reflecting.

Language learning is a thoughtful process. According to Chomsky (1965) the role of mind is dominant to create indefinite sentences with finite set of structures. In that case a language teacher has to think very curiously and sensitively about the subject matter he or she is going to teach. For this, he or she has the habit of reflecting the lessons so as to be the professional

teacher. In the same vein, Teacher B who is an M.A. in English, has been teaching for five years, says:

Reflective practice is quite integral part of teaching. Unless a teacher is thoughtful and tricky, she or he cannot prepare her or his lesson plan properly. She or he should know that during teaching, the subject matter she or he has been teaching is useful or not. The gesture and posture of students will decide whether she or he has made progress or not. The teacher acquires the level of confidence. It is through feedback teachers can practise reflective teaching.

In this regard, Chaudhary (2008) says that reflection is a means through which teacher development takes place. It is very useful tool for meditation. It can also be called flash back method. Reflection in teacher development can be the best way to explore teachers' hidden identity. It is helpful to discover our unconscious potential. It helps us to modify our ritual knowledge. It involves a major shift in emphasis in our thinking and acting. The relationship between teacher development and reflection is just like a nail and flesh.

Focus on Planning and Preparation

The main focus of reflective practice is on planning and preparation. To my understanding the result of planning and preparation is effective. Here in this connection Teacher C who is an M.Ed. in English, has been teaching for five years, says:

Reflective teaching helps us to teach in a better way. Students are powerful in the class. Sometimes they come with confusing questions. They are as important as teachers. As a language teacher we have to give time to think for the students. Curriculum states that language teachers should not depend on only course-book. Preparation and planning are always important to the reflective teachers.

After analyzing the above response, I can say that planning and preparation are prerequisite to the effective teaching and learning process. Professional development is possible if an English language teacher enters the class well-prepared. If a teacher plans about the subject matter to be taught on the part of students, she or he can attain the targeted goal. Now, I believe that a good language teacher is always a learner. In that case the teacher has to prepare as to what to teach, when to teach, whom to teach, how to teach and why to teach.

Recalling and Self-assessing Process

Reflective practice is a recalling process of a teaching and learning event. It is also a self-

assessing process. Pertaining to this, Teacher B says:

Reflection is essential in language teaching. Even after finishing the class, one should go back to the class and ask questions to oneself. For instance whether students understood my class or not, whether the methods went well or not, whether the materials are abundant or not, and whether the objectives are successfully achieved or not. In my case, when I am not satisfied with my teaching, I change methods, and use materials. As a language teacher, I have experienced failure many times. Reflective teaching gives me opportunity to improve my weaknesses to become a reflective and professional teacher.

I understand that it is through recalling and self-assessing process, teachers can develop professionalism. The language teacher has to ask questions to her or himself. With this habit she or he can assess his or her weaknesses and strengths.

Each moment is momentous in teaching and learning process. Being a language teacher if one remembers the memorable moments that become a good source of learning to further the horizon of knowledge. I feel that we cannot remember the days but we can remember the moments. Therefore, the language teacher has to create such situation in the classroom at the time of teaching. In the similar line, Teacher D says,

Reflective practice makes the students understand the lesson. It helps teachers to improve himself or herself by asking questions to himself or herself. In my case, I always ask questions like what do you think about today's class? Am I right or wrong? It is not true that a language teacher always thinks accurately. Analyzing the situation and deriving the meaning is really important.

Furthermore, he or she presents the case which is related to the reflection before in his or her class:

One day, when I was teaching gerund, the class was quite dull and passive. I thought the monotony might be because of the hot afternoon. I went on explaining rules for using gerund giving examples to each condition. My students were busily noting down my lesson in their notebooks. When I started asking them to give the sentences of their own, no one could do it correctly. Then I realized that the forty minutes class was worthless and futile.

The case of before reflection and after reflection is indispensable in the process of learning the language. What becomes right before reflection may not be right in the case of after reflection. Let's see what actually happens after reflection in his class:

After going back to my room, I thought for a while in a dismal and sad mood. Later, I went to the library, collected newspapers of a few days, and got some funny anecdotes from the newspapers photocopied. The next day, I entered the class with confidence, distributed the articles, and asked them to underline the gerund in the sentences. Students became immediately busy doing the exercise while enjoying the anecdotes. Thus, I could make the class interesting. Later, when I asked them to give sentences, using gerund on their own, it was easy for them. After this, I became so happy and delighted.

What I realize is that ‘failure is the pillar of success.’ Attempts should be made even after meeting fiasco while teaching. The knowledge which we get from our own weakness is really powerful. What I believe is that weakness contains strength. In that sense reflective practice helps to pinpoint weakness and fosters strength.

Professional and Creative Process

A continuous reflective practice makes an English teacher professional. A reflective teacher is creative. Let's see the remarks of Teacher E to further explain this:

Reflective practice gives opportunity to the teachers to assess their activities. It gives the sense of change in language teaching and learning process. A reflective teacher is professional to address the need and desire of the students. Modality and mood of the teachers matter a lot for better reflective practice.

Chomsky (1965) asserts that language learning is a creative process. Teachers create novel, new and creative sentences which we have not heard so far. It shows that our mind is really creative. I think reflective practice is both the professional and creative process. The teachers can be creative by following this sort of practice in the teaching and learning process. They can develop their professionalism. It is really a matter of wonder to me when I come to know that the case of before reflection and after reflection. The real learning takes place after reflection. Let's see the case of before reflection in this respect:

In one of my classes, I found a boy doing mischief and disturbing neighboring friends. As I am getting disturbed, I asked the boy to sit in a separate bench. Though he was silent, I found him doing something seriously. When I checked his notebook, it was a badly written poem with a remark on me.

How change occurs in the life of teacher and students in the case of after reflection. The teacher critically questions to himself or herself to make improvement in the teaching and learning process. Now, let us examine how creativity is praised in the following case of after reflection:

Though I felt bad about it, it made me think for a while and thought of using this to correct that boy. Therefore, I took that notebook to the teacher's table and read the poem written aloud to the class, appreciating his creativity. From then onwards he was never mischievous and attended his English class with utmost interest and with great zeal and jest.

What I find here is that even in evil there is good. What may be bad for one may not be bad to others. One can create a wonderful idea out of the evil work. Realization matters a lot in this case. Realizing the weakness adds more fuel to learn further.

I feel that teacher development is the process of becoming the best teacher as far as possible. To equip teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills, they require performing their tasks effectively in the school and classroom. Teachers want the best for their students. Teacher development involves personal, professional and social development.

Professional development covers the area of bringing the quality outcomes on the part of students. It may help in the area of reflective practices like conducting meeting, organizing workshops, seminars and conferences for the professional development of teachers. A professional teacher can assist in the area of planning, policy making and decision making level.

Process of Sharing and Strengthening the Strength

Reflective practice strengthens the strengths and quality of English language teachers. The involvement, engagement, sharing, encouragement and presentation in the group develop the capacity of English language teachers. In this regard, Teacher C says:

I follow question and answer method. I video- record my class to find my strengths and weaknesses. I respect comments from my colleagues and superiors. I also maintain diary which makes me feel refreshed.

The strength is strengthened when a language teacher starts cooperating and collaborating each other. The language learning is maximized after reflecting the lessons. In the same vein Teacher A says:

So as to be a reflective teacher, he or she should have versatile subject matter with practical knowledge so that his or her style of teaching becomes reflective and interesting. Sometimes, he or she should tell extra subject matter which the writer failed to express. As a language teacher, reflective practice is an important tool to further the knowledge. It helps me question to myself. I can assess my weakness and strengths and I can plan for better teaching.”

I understand that teachers make the decisions on the basis of classroom experience and general knowledge.

Motivating, Encouraging, Enriching and Enabling Process

Teaching and learning without motivation is worthless. It is the driving and inspiring force to venture the delight of learning. It is through motivation, students and teachers get excited and they enjoy learning and teaching process immensely. At this juncture, Teacher E says:

I give examples, talk about the importance of English, recall the past events, highlight the value-based education and speak polite, formal and standard English to motivate students.

Motivation is a driving force in the process of teaching and learning. It really maximizes the learning. In the process of reflective practice when teachers are highly encouraged they become able and capable of sharing a lot in the language. I think that a good teacher should build up trust in the class. She or he should be trustworthy and praiseworthy in order to motivate the students. A class contains both trustable and untrustable students. It is easy to motivate the trustable ones but it is very difficult to motivate the untrustable ones.

However, a good teacher should try to motivate the untrustable ones. How much we teach and reflect depends on whether we are motivated or not towards our profession. Assessing oneself is really important to improve the weaknesses. For this reflective practice helps a lot. In the same way, Teacher B says:

We are second language learners. I don't think we are completely competent. Sometimes I face difficulties in pronunciation. I try to recall the past events for better teaching. I assess myself in the case of teaching. I feel reflective practice is really good on the part of learners and teachers. Teachers have places for reflection.

In my opinion, variety and change are the spices of life. A motivated teacher should create varieties in the classroom in the process of teaching and learning. The success of teachers'

teaching depends on how successfully, effectively and differently she or he uses motivational techniques while teaching in the classroom. In my opinion, if there is a good teacher in the class, students really get excited. The students get highly emotional and motivated to learn more and more. Again if the students find a good environment in the class, they get better motivated. As we know that helping is better than winning. Therefore, a good teacher should extend helping hands to solve the problems of students. Through cooperation and collaboration, teaching and learning activities can be made more effective.

Miller (1990) says that learning becomes a major process in teaching when the teacher becomes reflective, focused and conscious in teaching, when she starts inquiring to understand the processes going on around her and when she takes herself into account as the object of inquiry (p.45).

Bhandari (2009) in her article “reflective practice for teacher professional development” says that teachers who examine their own teaching through reflection develop positive attitudes and awareness which can benefit their professional growth as teachers, and improve their support for students’ learning. She says that becoming a reflective teacher requires active engagement or consciousness in the experience.

Conclusion

We should not forget the fact that in order to motivate the students the teacher himself or herself should be motivated in the process of teaching and learning. As I believe on ‘life is not life without delight.’ The happiness, merriment, entertainment and betterment come after we teach our students motivationally and effectively. Every one has a certain dream to become a good person in a society. A teacher is one who has to transform students’ dreams and desires into the real destination. After all, we are always in the process of change. Before we change other we have to learn how to change ourselves. To do this what we need is reflection. I fully believe that where there is no reflection, there is no perfection. Perfection comes through environment, education, experiences and exposure. Education can be given through the process of motivation using lots of methods in the classroom.

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