

Reflective Teaching: It's Benefits to the Contemporary Teacher

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Abstract

Teaching the recently introduced Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya, requires that teachers equip themselves with knowledge and instructional skills that are fit for the 21st century learner. The 21st century teaching competencies include effective classroom, institutional and professional leadership; mastery of and adherence to policies and practices that positively influence students' learning; establishment of respectful environments for diverse populations of students, mastery of subject content; ability to facilitate learning through instructional planning, demonstration of acumen and versatility, display of awareness of technology to enhance learning and design of assessments (both formative and summative), that are in line with what was taught. (Nessipbayeva, 2012). Last but not least, it is the skill of constant reflection on their practice as teachers. With reflection, teachers analyze student learning by using data to provide ideas about what can be done to improve learning. Reflective practice also helps them to link their professional growth to their professional goals; they adopt and implement recommended activities for professional learning and development. Moreover, reflective practice enables teachers to function effectively in complex and dynamic environments; they do this by constantly engaging in and using a variety of up-to-date research-verified and peer approved approaches to improve teaching and learning. (Nessipbayeva, 2012)

Keywords: Reflective Practice, Personal Learning Network, Competency Based Curriculum

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1. Introduction

Nguyen (2015) defines reflection as the process of engaging the self in attentive, critical, exploratory and iterative interactions with one's thoughts and actions, and their underlying conceptual frame, with a view to changing them and a view on the change itself. Nguyen also sees reflective teaching as having something to do with the deliberate examination of how we teach and learn that fits into the interpretivist view of teaching and learning and a move towards critical thinking of the way we teach and learn. It is a kind of teaching strategy which has to be viewed in terms of what you can do for yourself and your students to ascertain productivity in your teaching and students' learning. In this extent, reflective teaching is a call to let you combine theory and practice to maintain and sustain your teaching profession. (Nguyen, 2015).

1.1 Meaning of Reflective Teaching

A number of works on reflective teaching trace the origin of the concept of reflection to John Dewey (Farrell, 2012; Murphy, 2014). Dewey defines reflective thinking as an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (1933, p. 9). Dewey (1933) makes a distinction between *reflective thinking*, which is rational and reliable, and *regular thinking*, which is spontaneous and driven by whim, routine, or circumstance. He asserts that reflective thinking is the superior and more efficacious way of thinking, as it "converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action" (Dewey, 1933, p. 17).

According to an article published on the British Council website (2022), reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom and giving it a meaning by attaching the why question to what you go through. You also empower your students to ask these why questions to their classroom experiences. You start by recognizing that you and your students are key persons in the learning environment. Your being in the classroom must make sense to you and your students. Your relived/recalled experiences as a teacher and those of your students are explored and evaluated to let you fulfill your mission and vision in the teaching profession (British Council, 2022).

For Richards (1990), reflective teaching is a transcendence from the ordinary to a superior level of understanding of how teaching can take place. This demands that you and your students be involved in a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. Thus, you and your students must gather information on your practice and experiences. This information is organized, analyzed and interpreted to identify what beliefs, assumptions and values are attached to your practices and experiences.

2. How to Become a More Reflective Teacher

There are a number of things that one can do as a reflective practitioner of teaching. Here are a few examples:

2.1 Take a video of yourself teaching

Video footage is a valuable strategy for teacher self-feedback and self-reflection. Video footage can help teachers reflect on their own feedback practices. With the widespread availability of smartphones, one can even casually prop up such a gadget out of sight, setting it to record, and getting on with the lesson. Observing one's teaching practice by means of video recordings can help a teacher notice what is important and further provide a basis for linking theory to practice and reasoning to understand and improve one's classroom practice. Some researchers have noted that video technology "affords the luxury of time" (Sherin, 2004, p. 13) and may help teachers observe their ability to facilitate professional learning discussions by slowing down the fast pace of classroom life, so that clear noticing of specific aspects of practice can be further analysed. Audio recordings can also be used as an improvisation.

2.2. Share the recordings with your Personal Learning Network

Personal Learning Networks (PLN) refers to a group of people that communicates online in order to talk about their courses and issues that are related to their job. The groups may be formed intentionally or informally, as an accumulation of people who can communicate with each other easily. (Liqaa & Abbas, 2020).

Every teacher needs a high-functioning PLN to: find great resources, lesson plans, to share their resources and ideas; follow amazing educators' ideas, get help when needed; make national and international connections; collaborate globally on projects; find round the clock inspiration; learn the latest trends in pedagogy and education in general. In this way, a teacher can never run out of ideas for new things to try out with learners. It is important to hold monthly meetings for teachers to increase their knowledge of the reflective practice, whether traditional or online, in order to raise their awareness towards its crucial role. Teachers also ought to be encouraged to join the social media groups in order to interact with teaching communities so as to learn intentionally and unintentionally from them. (Liqaa & Abbas, 2020).

2.3 Solicit for Observation by Peers

Peer observation of teaching is a formative process where two peers work together and observe each other's teaching. The observer offers feedback to the colleague who is doing the teaching. The aims of peer observation can be: to enhance teaching through critical reflection, enhance the quality of teaching and student learning and to bring benefit to the person doing the observation as well as the person doing the teaching. (The University of Edinburgh, 2017). While both parties benefit, the greatest benefits actually flow to the person who is observing. Some of these benefits include: sharing of good practices and critical reflections, challenging of assumptions about teaching, the positive valuing of teaching and the learning of a range of different approaches to learning and teaching. Peer observation followed up by reflective teaching enables teachers to continuously improve their practice while being informed by their own experiences. (Njiku, J, 2018). It requires peers working together to observe and learn from their own experiences.

We can learn a great deal by watching how other people design and deliver their teaching. Even teachers with a lot of experience can still learn from observing their peers. This is because peer based reflective strategies are based on the assumption that everyone involved in teaching has knowledge and expertise to share (The University of Edinburgh, 2017). For this strategy to work, honest critique from the observer and positive attitude towards correction by the "observee" are required.

2.4 Ask Your Students to Evaluate Your Performance

Feedback is a powerful tool for informing teachers about student learning. Student feedback seeking is a key element of teacher self-appraisal for purposes of further reflection and professional development because it enables teachers to calibrate and refine their own judgements (Yan & Brown 2017; Yan & Carless 2021). In order to improve, individuals need to generate, receive and act upon feedback of different forms. It is necessary to appreciate what has been done well, to become more aware of weaknesses and develop action plans for ongoing improvement. It is one of the most significant levers to enhance student achievement (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Through feedback, students generate invaluable insights when they compare their current knowledge and competence against some reference information (Nicol, 2021).

2.5 Exercise Intellectually Honesty and Humility

Very many potentially great teachers are blind to their inadequacies. While no teacher can claim to be flawless, reflection can help one to identify those hurdles that get in the way of their continual personal professional improvement (TeachThought University, 2022). To do this, a teacher will require to be honest with themselves; a teacher should neither rationalize personal mediocrity, nor outrightly condemn themselves. They ought to instead always reflect, iterate, and improve! Brian Resnick is of the view that Honesty and humility are the key dispositions of a reflective practitioner. Humility is not the denial of your strengths... it is being honest about your weaknesses as a practicing teacher. It helps to realize that it's normal and human to be wrong. Intellectual humility is simply

“the recognition that the things you believe in might in fact be wrong.” (Resnick, 2019).

Surround yourself with enthusiasm; the more potential you see around you, the more you’ll observe, analyze, and design to try to fit some of those ideas into your routine (TeachThought University, 2022). Look for what’s working: don’t become addicted to fixing the broken bits in your teaching; celebrate what you do well. Identify your own strengths, and use them to transform your teaching. If you’re good at tinkering, use that in your teaching no matter the content area. If you thrive through interpersonal connections, use that to drive your work. By looking for what’s working, we can see how that affects everything else, tracing cause and effect patterns to understand how to reflect and grow. (TeachThought University, 2022).

Changing your assessment styles is another method to practice teaching reflectively. Despite the fact that using one's favorite measurement methods may be enticing, it is highly advisable to have a variety of methods for determining how effective what you do is.: discuss with the students. Seek the views of the parent. Invite peers to observe you. Record it and share with your PLN. Use varied assessment types. But just the content aspect of it. One ought to also be cognizant of whether your interactions with colleagues are mutually beneficial. This includes how you speak to them, the volume and calibre of your discourse, your nonverbal cues, and so on. The same is true for how you manage management, call the class to order, grade assignments, handle course materials, and so on. There is no single best method of becoming a more reflective teacher. Only ensure that are aware of what works for you. Teachers frequently ply their trade without evaluating themselves. (TeachThought University, 2022).

3. Importance of Reflective Practice to Teachers

Reflective practice has very many benefits for a teacher. The following is a discussion of some of those benefits. First and foremost, reflective practice facilitates teaching, learning and understanding and plays a central role in teachers’ professional development. When s teachers carry out systematic enquiry into themselves, they understand themselves, their practices and their students. By constantly looking into their own actions and experiences, they professionally grow in their own. For Priya Mathew Prasanth Mathew and Prince, J. Peechattu:

“The complexity of teaching requires teachers to question their practices for their own professional development in order to improve and to increase learner performance. Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on an action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning” (Mathew, Mathew & Peechattu, 2017).

Mathew, Mathew & Peechattu, 2017 further identify the fundamental rationale for reflective practice; that experience alone cannot automatically lead to learning; deliberate reflection on experience is essential. Reflective practice is an important tool in practice-based professional learning settings where people learn from their own professional experiences, rather than from formal learning or knowledge transfer. It is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement. (Mathew, et. Al., 2017). It is also an important way to bring together theory and practice; through reflection a person is able to see and label forms of thought and theory within the context of his or her work. A person who reflects throughout his or her practice is not just looking back on past actions and events, but is taking a conscious look at emotions, experiences, actions, and responses, and using that information to add to his or her existing knowledge base and reach a higher level of understanding. (Mathew, et. al., 2017).

Continuous professional development is also supported by reflective practice. We can only start to have a deeper understanding of our strengths and flaws as teachers when we engage in extensive and intense inner reflection. As a result, we are able to retain our good practices and take action to strengthen our flaws. Teachers who pursue professional development may improve their time management and organization skills. In the end, this increases teacher productivity and gives them more time to focus on the learners rather than the paperwork. K. Poornima Varalakshmi and M. Shanmugathai also hold this view. They opine that professional development is an ongoing process and so it is necessary to update the skills and knowledge of the teachers frequently. To become quality teachers or professional experts, it is mandatory to learn new strategies and techniques according to the current need of the educational sector. (Varalakshmi, & Shanmugathai, 2020).

It is the view of Dana Di Pardo Léon-Henri that Reflective practice fosters innovation in instruction as well. The practice of proactively implementing new teaching methodologies and strategies in the classroom is known as innovative teaching. These innovative teaching techniques are being used to advance equitable learning, enhance academic achievements, and address pressing issues. For instance, if we see that learners are losing interest, we can strengthen our delivery and pique their interest in the teachings by using storytelling, power point or other projections, online platforms, and web resources. (Leon-Henri, 2020)

Another benefit of reflective practice is that it enables the teacher to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with students. According to Sara Rimm-Kaufman, and Lia Sandilos, positive relationships with students, create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional and academic needs. Such relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn; this is assuming that the content material of the class is engaging, age-appropriate and well matched to the student's skills (Kaufmann & Sandilos, 2022).

Kaufman and Sandilos go on to suggest things that a teacher can do nurture positive relationships with their students; spend one-on-one time with each student by allowing them to freely consult you; look for something to comment on; develop an interest in their interests; share your stories; have a sense of humor; attend student events (Kaufmann & Sandilos, 2022). Teachers who relate well with their students treat them with a lot of respect, value the individuality of each student, and are kind and polite. A caring teacher gives honest, but kind feedback, and offers second chances. They help students with schoolwork, manage the classroom well, and, perhaps most importantly, they plan fun activities (Kaufmann & Sandilos, 2022).

Agreeing with Gunn, Cairns, & Ramsay, 2014 we think that the biggest nightmare of any teacher or student for that matter is a dull classroom. Through reflective teaching, we can ensure that our classrooms are lively. In a lively classroom, the teacher creates an environment for frequent dialogue delivering in between the students and the teacher. The teacher creates a concussive learning environment so that every learner will participate and removes their hesitation in participating in the class. We can make our classrooms lively by, incorporating mystery into our lessons; not repeating classroom material; creating classroom games; giving learners your students choices whenever possible; using technology; not taking teaching too seriously; making lessons interactive; relating content to students' lives among others (Gunn, Cairns, & Ramsay, 2014).

Analogous with what Carla Marschall attests to we are convinced that reflection and decision that allows and encourages a democratic environment within your classroom has its benefits. The democratic classroom fosters critical thinking, authentic participation, and social and emotional learning. It's a humanizing space that empowers our students (Marschall, 2015).

In her article, Marschall further asserts that the practice of democracy in a classroom or school in general, will stimulate the sense responsibilities and leadership, in the learners. It would also provide the pupils/ students with the real experience to influence and make decisions in matters which affect their lives inside and outside schools. (Marschall, 2015).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we began by defining Reflective Practice (RP), we then explained what one can do to become more reflective teacher. We concluded by highlighting some of the benefits the derive from reflective practice; these benefits may be summarized as follows:

Reflective practice has very many benefits for a teacher. The following is a discussion of some of those benefits. First and foremost, reflective practice facilitates teaching, learning and understanding and plays a central role in teachers' professional development. This strategy also fosters innovation in instruction as well. It enables the teacher to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with students It also allows and encourages a democratic environment within your classroom has its benefits. The democratic classroom fosters critical thinking, authentic participation, and social and emotional learning. Finally, knowing how to engage in RP can have many benefits to teachers and managers of any education curriculum, including the Competency Based Curriculum.

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