REFLECTIVE PRACTICES AS A MEANS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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Abstract:

This paper mainly focuses on the concept of Reflective practices and its dimensions to show howreflective practices has become one of the means for professional development of teachers. There are many ways for professional development of teachers but a reflective practice is also a major aspect for the professional growth of teachers. It also talks about the importance of professional growth and how researchers have shown that reflective practices has a positive impact on the professional growth of teachers though there are various other modes for professional development.

KEY WORDS:

professional Development of teachers , specialised training, formal education ,

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In education, the term Professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialised training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers and other educators toimprove their professional knowledge, competence, skill and effectiveness. Professional development can be considered to be a primary mechanism that schools can use to help teachers continuously learn and improve their skills over time.Professional development can be viewed in two categories – pre-service and in-service. Pre-service professional development occurs before the individual's first job and in-service professional development occurs after the first job begins. Teachers' professional development begins with pre-service training, where both subject knowledge and pedagogical skills are developed. In-service professional development can take on many different forms. It can include the traditional model of workshops, seminars and courses, as well as mentoring relationships, self-directed study, classroom observations or collegial learning groups. Professional development can be defined as teachers' ongoing learning to improve the way to teach, and it occurs both in formal and informal way. Professional development includes formal experiences (such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline, etc.) (Ganser, 2000). Bailey et al. (2001) divide the opportunities for development into formal and externally organized (e.g. participating in courses, conferences, working on higher certification) and informal, more private (e.g. teaching journals, teacher chat-groups, studying a language).

Professional development is defines as "the growth that occurs as the teacher moves through the professional career cycle' (Glattenhorn, 1995). Professional Development in a broad sense refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. More specifically, "Teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically" (Glattenhorn, 1995). When looking at professional development, one must examine the content of the experiences, the processes by which the professional development will occur,

and the contexts in which it will take place (Ganser, 2000; Fielding and Schalock, 1985).Professional development is defined as "the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students" (Hassel,1999). Professional development is increasingly seen as a systematic process that includes the development of all individuals involved with student achievement from the superintendent to the teaching assignments. Guskey says, "Professional development is a systematic effort to bring about changes in the classroom practices of teachers in their attitudes and beliefs and in the learning outcome of students." TALIS adopted a broad definition of Professional development He says "Professional development is defined as activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge expertise and other characteristics as a teacher". Professional development focuses on knowledge, skills and attitudes required of teachers, administrators and other school employees that are directed towards all students learning at high levels of achievement (Sparks and Richardson)."Professional developmentmust be an on-goingcontinuous activity, and not consists of one-shot workshops or lectures" (U.S Department of Education, 2002). Professional development of a teacher can already start during his/her training period if the teacher training programme is designed to provide "a broader approach in which developmental insights is learned alongside classroom teaching skills" (Head & Taylor, 1997). Gall and Renchler (1985) described professional development more specifically as "efforts to improve teachers' capacity to function as effective professionals by having them learn new knowledge, attitudes and skills."Fullan (1995) defined professional development as "the sum total of formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher in a compelling learning environment under conditions of complexity and dynamic change."

Professional development is also based on some standards and so much attention has been focused on developing standards to guide what should be done (Sparks, 2001). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has adopted the following standards which are widely accepted as guidelines for effective professional development. These standards fall into three categories:

Context - where the learning will be applied and the organizational structure where the improvement is expected
Process - how the learning occurs
Content - what is learned.
Professional Development and Its Components

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Important components of professional development are:
• The linking of professional development to student learning and professional standards for learning
• Providing many varied learning processes and practices within a learning framework,
• Incorporating assessment of both professional growth and attainment of program goals
• Ensuring reflection and forward planning are part of the professional development cycle

2.An integrated design that focuses upon student and teacher learning, linking to the larger system and incorporating a range of possible learning activities within a job-embedded context.
3.There is recognition that evidence-based knowledge and practice should form the content of professional development.
4.Effective professional learning requires time, resources and supportive structures.

Professional Development: Research Trends
Numerous researches have studied the characteristics of and factors related to successful professional development (Darling- Hammond, 1997; Darling- Hammond, 1999; Gersten, Chard, and Baker, 2000; IASA, 1996; Joyce and Showers, 1988; Showers, Joyce and Bennet, 1987; Sparks, 1983; Sparks and Hisch, 1997). The characteristics of Professional development of Teachers are as follows:

1.Constructivism: It is based on constuctivism rather than on a 'transmission- oriented model'. As a consequence, teachers are treated as active learners (Lieberman,1994; McLaughlin and Zarrow, 2001) who are engaged in the concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection (Dadda,2001; Darling- Hammond and Mc Laughlin, 1995; King and Newmann,2000).
2.Long-term process: It is perceived as a long- term process as it acknowledges the fact that teachers can learn over time. As a result, a series of related experiences (rather than one-off presentations is seen to be the most effective as it allows teachers to relate prior knowledge to new experiences (Cohen, 1990; Ganser, 2000; Lieberman, 1994; Dudzinski et al., 2000). Regular follow-up support is regarded as an "indispensable catalyst of the change process" (Schifter, Russell, and Bastable, 1999).

3.Context Specific: It is perceived as a process that takes place within a particular context. Contrary to the traditional teachers development opportunities that did not relate "training" to actual classroom experiences, the most effective form of professional development is that which is based in schools and is related to the daily activities of teachers and learners (Abdal- Haqq, 1996; Ancess, 2001; Baker and Smith, 1999; Darling- Hammond, 1998; Dudzinski et al., 2000; McLaughlin and Zarrow, 2001). The most successful teacher development opportunities are 'on-the-job learning' activities such as study groups, action research and portfolios (Wood and McQuarrie, 1999).

4.Reflective Practitioner: A teacher is conceived of as a reflective practitioner, someone who enters the profession with a certain knowledge base, and who will acquire new knowledge and experience based on that prior knowledge (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 001; Jenlink and Kinnucan- Welsch, 1999; Lieberman, 1994). In doing so, the role of professional development is to aid teachers in building new pedagogical theories and practices (Darling - Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Schifter, Russell, and Bastable, 1999), and to help them develop their expertise in the field (Dadda,2001).

5.Collaborative process: Professional development is conceived of as a collaborative process (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995). Even though there may be some opportunities for isolated work and refletion, most effective professional development occurs when there are meaningful interactions (Clement and Vanderberghe, 2000), not only among teachers themselves, but also between teachers, administrators, parents and other community members (Grace, 1999).

MODES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There are different modes to have successful professional development. They are:

1.Individual reading and research: A teacher can develop professionally by reading extensively in their areas. They can also do research in their areas and can do action research for professional development.

2.Observation: Teachers can develop professionally and can gain competence if they are observed by someone and can be rectified where they are wrong.

3.Coaching and Mentoring: If an expert teacher do coaching to one or more colleagues.Mentoring can also be done by new educators or by more experienced colleagues.

4.Meetings: Team meetings to plan lessons, problem solve, improve performance or learn a new strategy.Faculty, grade-level, or departmental meetings are also helpful for professional development.

5.Online courses: Doing online courses and using blogs and forums also help the teachers for their growth. Online courses have varieties of courses in which the teacher can save time for their other works and help in developing professionally.

6.Reflection or Reflective practices: Reflective practices help a teacher in monitoring their teaching. It also helps in understanding the strengths and weakness so that it will help in better professional development.

7.Workshops/Seminars/Conferences/Symposiums: Workshops helps in deeper understanding of the subjects similarly attending seminars, conferences and workshops helps in better professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS: IMPORTANCE AND ITS DIFFERENT ASPECTS

Teacher's Professional development is important as it has a significant positive impact on teacher's beliefs and practices and students learning to bring a reform in the educational practice. High quality professional development is essential to schools. The days of teacher staff development sessions consisting of 'sit' and 'get' workshops and expert delivered awareness campaign are long gone as society is moving towards more effective and more engaging professional development models. Professional development is important for teachers work both in and out of the classroom. Evidence shows that professional development has an impact on teacher's beliefs and behaviour. It also indicates that the relationship between "teachers; beliefs and their practices is not straightforward or simple; on the contrary, it is dialectic, moving back and forth between change in belief and change in classroom practice" (Cobb, Wood and Yacket, 1990; Frank et al. 1997; Thompson, 1992, in Nelson,1999). Similar results are reported by Kettle and Sellars (1996) in a study of the development of the 'practical theory' of student-teachers in Australia; by Kallestad and Olweus (1998) in a study involving Norwegian teachers, which shows that teachers' professional preparation and development have a large impact on defining teachers' goal for their students, and these goals in turn affects the teachers behaviour in classrooms and schools. Kottkamp (1990) defined reflection as "A cycle of paying deliberate attention to one's own actions in relation to intentions . . . for the purpose of expanding one's opinions and making decisions about improved ways of acting in the

future, or in the midst of the action itself.

Borko and Putnam (1995) offered evidence to support the fact that Professional development plays an important role in changing teachers teaching methods, and that these changes have a positive impact on student's learning. In 1997, Guskeyargued that more research was needed on the specific aspects of teachers' professional development that created a significant effect on teachers' practices, measured by a change in students' learning. With regard to the effect of teacher's professional development on students learning number of studies report that more professional teachers have, the higher levels of student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Fuure, 1996,1997; Falk, 2001; Educational Testing Device, 1998; Grosso de Leon, 2001; Guzman, 1995; McGinn and Borden,1995; Tatto, 1999).

There are various aspects by which a teacher can have their professional development. Teachers can have their professional development by various means. Teachers can have professional development by attending courses/workshops (e.g. on subject matter or methods and/or other education-related topics); education conferences or seminars (at which teachers and/or researchers present their research results and discuss education problems); qualification programme (e.g. a degree programme); observation visits to other schools; participation in a network of teachers formed specifically for the professional development of teachers; individual or collaborative research on a topic of professional interest; and mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching, as part of a formal school arrangement; having reflective practices; extensively reading; attending professional courses; sharing of experiences; attending symposiums; publishing of articles/papers and using blogs and forums for their growth.They can have self-reflection, monitoring to develop professionally.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICES - A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Reflective Practice is the use of self-analysis to understand, evaluate and interpret events and experiences in which we are involved. This extends to being able to form a theoretical view or analysis, as would allow clear explanation to others, if required. Reflective practice is a process associated with professional learning, which includes effective reflection and the development of metacognition, and leads to decisions for action, learning, achievement of goals and changes to immediate and future practice (Hegarty, 2011).The process of Reflective Practice seeks to enable insights and aid learning for new personal understanding, knowledge, and action, to enhance our self-development and our professional performance.Reflective practice can be a beneficial process in teacher professional development, both for pre-service and in-service teachers.Reflective practice is a challenging, demanding, and oftentrying process that is most successful as a collaborative effort. The term reflective practice is interpreted and understood in different ways, within our discussion, 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. In 1987, Donald Schon introduced the concept of reflective practice as a critical process in refining one's artistry or craft in a specific discipline. Schon recommended reflective practice as a way for beginners in a discipline to recognize consonance between their own individual practices and those of successful practitioners. As defined by Schon (1996), reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline.

After the concept of reflective practice was introduced by Schon, many schools, colleges, and departments of education began designing teacher education and professional development programs based on this concept. As the concept grew in popularity, some researchers cautioned that SCDEs that incorporated reflective practice in their teacher education programs were focusing on the process of reflective practice while sacrificing important content in teacher education (Clift et al, 1990). These researchers recommended that reflective teaching combine John Dewey's philosophy on the moral, situational aspects of teaching with Schon's process for a more contextual approach to the concept of reflective practice.In reflective practice, practitioners engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in themselves and in learners (Brookfield, 1995; Thiel, 1999). The goal is not necessarily to address a specific problem or question defined at the outset, as in practitioner research, but to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis (Cunningham, 2001).Reflective practice… is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, reasoning, emotions, values and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individuals and communities being served (Epstein and Hundert, 2002).Reflecting on teaching is frequently cited as a fundamental practice for personal and professional development (Biggs, 2003; Boud et al., 1985; Lyons, 2002).Jenny Moon (2005) suggests "Reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to fulfil 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.Reflection, then, is a 'way of being as a teacher' (Zeichner and Liston, 1996. In Dewey's view, reflection '…enables us to direct our actions with foresight…It enables us to know what we are about when we act'. Donald Schon (1983) developed the notions of reflection in action and reflection on action.Reflection-in-action is the almost unconscious, instantaneous reflection that happensas a more experienced teacher solves a problem or dilemma. Schön described this as drawing on their repertoire of knowledge, skills and understanding of a situation so that he or she can change direction and operate differently in the classroom. In other words, rather than randomly trying any other approach, the teacher is using the accumulated experience and knowledge to seek alternatives in the classroom in response to the needs of the pupils. Reflection-on-action takes place after the event orteaching session and is a more deliberative and conscious process. There is more critical analysis and evaluation of the actions and what might have happened if a different course of action had taken place. Since it involves looking back at an event it is a form of retrospective reflection. It can involve the actual writing down of what happened and why (critical analysis and evaluation) as, for example, on a lesson evaluation form. As Russel & Munby (1991) in Bailey et al. (2001) explain, reflection-on-action is moreconscious and well known compared to reflection-in-action which teachers perform promptlyduring their teaching. The use of reflective practice in teacher professional development is based on the belief that teachers can improve their own teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences (Farrell, 2004, 2007).

There are various forms of reflective practices such as Action learning, Action research, Course and unit reviews, "Clinical supervision", Critical incident analysis, Engaging a critical friend, Drama/role play, Journal keeping, Mentoring,Mind mapping, Peer observation, Program reviews, Reflective teaching practice workshops/seminars, Self-accounting professionals, Storytelling, Teaching portfolios, Teaching/learning networks which helps in the professional development of teachers.

There are nine dimensions of reflective practice described by Paula Zwozdiak-Myers (2012). These are the nine dimensions of reflective practices which help in professional development of teachers. Any one of the dimensions can act as a catalyst for the professional development of the teachers.

Figure 1: Nine Dimensions of Reflective Practices

MODELS ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

There are models on Reflective practices which help in professional development of teachers.

1. Kolb Cycle

In 1984, David A. Kolb published his conception in "Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development,". The Kolb Cycle was originally developed to enable educators to review their own teaching to promote continuous development.Kolb's learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. In this respect, Kolb's model differs from others since it offers both a way to understand individual learning styles, which he named the "Learning Styles Inventory" (LSI), and also an explanation of a cycle of experiential learning that applies to all learners.Depending upon the situation or environment, the persons may enter the learning cycle at any point

and will best learn the new task if they practice all four modes. Kolb's experiential learning style theory is typically represented by a four stage learning cycle in which the educators can touch all the bases.

1. Concrete Experience - This relates to the incident or event prompting the reflection and involves the physical act of being involved in, or having hands-on experience. Although in theory you can enter the model at any stage this tends to be the main point of entry
2. Reflective Observation - After the event comes the initial reflection. This entails stepping back and viewing the event or incident from an objective perspective. This should provide some insight into what you did and why you did it.
3. Abstract Conceptualization - These initial reflections are then explored in greater detail. Conceptualisation involves interpreting events and actions, looking for connections between these, and the process of applying some theoretical premise to make understand events
4. Active Experimentation - Once this deeper understanding has been established the individual translates it into predictions about what is likely to happen next or what actions should be taken to refine the way similar events may be handled in future.
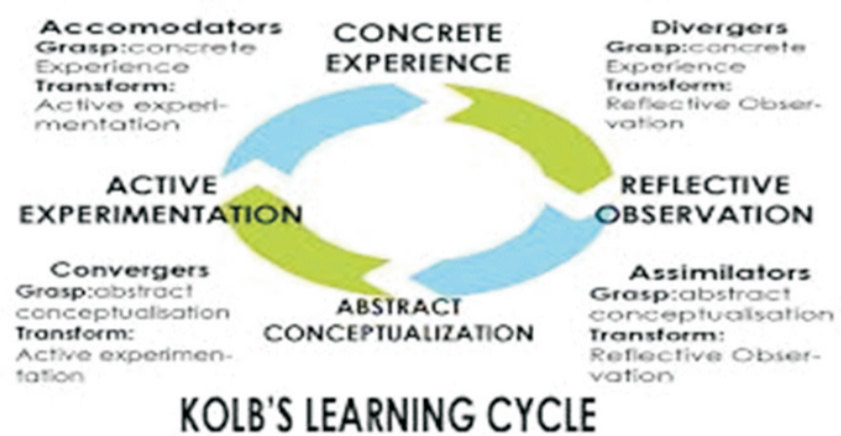

Figure 2: Kolb's Reflective Cycle

2.Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

The Kolb Cycle was published before the Gibbs Cycle. The Gibbs Cycle was published in the article "Learning by Doing: a Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods" in 1988. Gibbs developed his cycle partly based on the Kolb Cycle. Both cycles were developed to be able to be used in any learning situation. As both cycles cover the same basic steps either model can be used in any learning experience.

Figure 3: Gibbs Reflective Cycle

Gibb's reflective cycle is a process involving six steps:

• Description - What happened?
• Feelings – What one thinks and feels about it?
• Evaluation - What were the positives and negatives?
• Analysis - What sense one can make of it?
• Conclusion - What else could one have done?
• Action Plan - What will one do for the next time?

It is a 'cycle' because the action you take in the final stage will feed back into the first stage, beginning the process again.

Research Studies in Relation to Professional Development and Reflective Practices

Dewey (1916) was among the first to promote reflection as a means of professional development in education. He believed that critical reflection is the most important quality a teacher can have and that it has more impact on the quality of schools and instruction than the teaching techniques one uses. Dewey (1933) added that when teachers speculate, reason, and contemplate using open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility, they will act with foresight and planning rather than basing their actions on tradition, authority, or impulse. Reflecting on teaching is frequently cited as a fundamental practice for personal and professional development (Biggs, 2003; Boud et al., 1985; Lyons, 2002). Donald Schon (1987) has suggested that the ability to reflect on one's actions is a defining characteristic of professional practice, and Osterman (1990) found that reflection is an essential part of the learning process because it results in making sense of and extracting meaning from experiences. Similarly, Snowman, McCown, and Biehler (2012) noted that reflection is an essential component of professional development and can put a novice teacher on the path to becoming an expert teacher. Guskey (2002) emphasizes that there is need for professional development to provide teachers with extra time to practice the new skills being acquired, to ensure that teachers will receive feedback on student learning progress, and to provide follow-up and support during the process. Adding to Guskey's points regarding professional development, Ingvarson et al. (2005) points to the need for a content focus, with active learning, and collaborative examination of student work for effective professional learning to happen.Elmore and Burney (1997) states "Reflection focuses on concrete classroom applications of general ideas; it exposes teachers to actual practice rather than to descriptions of practice; it offers opportunities for observation, critique, and reflection; it provides opportunities for group support and collaboration; and it involves deliberate evaluation and feedback by skilled practitioners with expertise about good teaching.It is clear that effective professional development needs to include the characteristics proposed by the above authors: collaboration between teachers, feedback from experts, follow up, and opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own practice to have an impact on teachers' instructional practices." Reflection is reported to "be the key toteacher learning and development" (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Harnett (2012) points out the importance of teachers taking the time to reflect on their own actions to enhance their own professional practice. Contributing to that, Ferraro (2000) states, that for teachers, the primary benefit of reflective practice is an understanding of their own teaching and learning. Harnett (2012) argues, "if professional development is to bring about lasting change it must involve the teachers concerned in analyzing, critiquing, reflecting upon, and improving their own classroom practice". Reflective professional development seems to be an effective opportunity for teachers to implement new instructional practices, reflect about their implementation and change their practice based upon what they have reflected on. Research studies shows that Reflective practices have a positive impact on teacher's professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on effective teaching over the past two decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris 1998). Reflective practice can be a beneficial form of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. By gaining a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom. The act of reflection is a key factor in one's professional growth and development. It helps teachers confront and challenge their current conceptions of teaching, and learning, assess their current practice, identify areas for improvement, and become better educational decision-makers.

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