



REFLECTIVE TEACHING PEDAGOGY AND CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

In present times, teachers' professional development has become a core issue. The traditional training of young teachers ignored the empirical, experiencing and diversifying nature of teachers' professional development. Teacher educator should apply theory in classroom practice, in order observe and reflects on the results so that the classroom becomes a kind of laboratory where the teacher can relate teaching theory to teaching practice. By adopting reflective teaching pedagogy teacher educator imparts inspiration among teacher trainees, so as to enable them to practice the same in their teaching practice sessions. The paper focuses on the importance of innovative teaching –learning pedagogy that should be practiced in teacher education to sustain interest among teacher trainees. From the perspective of constructivism, this paper elaborates the impacts of teaching reflection on young college teachers and highlights four effective methods and strategies to carry out reflective teaching.

Key Words: Reflective Teaching, Pedagogy, Constructivism, Innovative Teaching

Introduction:

Presently, young teachers account for the majority of college teachers. The quality of young teachers is decisive for the overall quality of the college. Therefore, the demands on professional development of young college teachers are becoming increasingly high. However, the in-service training and the traditional model cannot satisfy the need of young college teachers' professional development.

However, in the teacher education field of our country, it is significant for us to explore an effective way to young college teachers' professional development. The paper, guided by constructive theory, attempts to explore a constructive way for young college teachers to promote their professional development.

Constructivism:

Constructivism is a theory of how people learn, a philosophy that views learning as an active process in which learners construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through action and reflection (Williams & Burden, 2000). Constructivists argue that individuals generate rules and mental models as the result of their experiences with both other human subjects and their environments and in turn use these rules and models to make sense of new experiences (Henson & Ellet, 2005).

Constructivism focuses on learning process, which can be applied in teaching because teaching is learning and the process of teacher professional development is just a process of learning. So, we can see the main underlying assumptions for reflective teaching and teaching professional development. Firstly, teacher professional development becomes possible only when teachers critically reflect upon teaching, for reflective teaching is the process of self-study or self-learning. Teachers are learning while teaching. Secondly, problem—solving provides an important means for reflective teaching. Teachers have to ask themselves questions to find ways to settle different problems met in the dynamic process of teaching because no methods or approaches can tell teachers the way to the most effective teaching. Teachers' feeling of success in problem-solving is a sign of professional development (Bailey et al, 2001).

Reflective Teaching:

Reflective teaching means looking at, what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it works - a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in our classroom, and by analyzing and evaluating this information, we identify and explore our own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in our teaching. Reflective teaching involves recognizing, examining, ruminating over the way an individual teaches. As individuals possess their own background and experience, bring certain beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, attitudes and values to teaching. Presently the young teachers account for the majority of college teachers.

It is also seen that teaching takes place in a social setting that has its own unique characteristics, opportunities and constraints. The practice of Reflective teaching explores the implications of all these complex factors with the intention of understanding and improving teaching –learning practice. Schon (1983) suggested that reflective teaching practice is a continuous process and involves learner thoughtfully considering one's own experience in applying knowledge to practice while being taught by professionals. It helps the individual to develop their own personality. Engaging in reflective practice is associated with the improvement of the quality of care, stimulating personal and professional growth and closing the gap between theory and practice. Bartlett (1990) points out that becoming a reflective teacher involves moving beyond a primary concern with

instructional techniques and “how to” questions and asking “what” and “why” questions that regard instructions and managerial techniques not as ends in themselves, but as part of broader educational purposes. Asking questions “what and why” gives certain power over individuals teaching resulting in the emergence of autonomy and responsibility in the work of teachers. In reflecting on the above kind of Questions, teachers begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming every day classroom life.

The Role of Reflective Teaching in Teacher Education:

Reflective practice is used at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. Sellars (1996) analyzed that the students' reflective writings and interviewed them extensively about their reflective practices. They found that the student teachers by practicing reflective teaching enables them to challenge existing theories and their own preconceived views of teaching resulting in professional development that would be useful throughout their teaching careers. Several research studies have proved that critical reflection upon experience continues to be an effective technique for professional development. The present paper work highlights the importance of practicing reflective teaching pedagogy by teacher trainees during teaching, so that they develop competitive attitude.

Significance of Reflective Teaching on Professional Development:

Reflective teaching is seen as a process that can facilitate teaching, learning and understanding, and that plays a central role in teacher professional development. The significance of reflective teaching is well expounded by many scholars. Dewey was among the first to promote reflection as a means of professional development in teaching. He believes that “critical reflection” is the most important quality a teacher may have and adds 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. Schon (1983) has demonstrated that reflection is an essential component of professional knowledge and practice and has believed that teachers will develop the ability for continued learning throughout the professional career if they are engaged in reflection in action. Richards and Lockhart (1996) argue that critical reflection of one's practices can trigger a deeper understanding of teaching and contribute to teachers' professional development.

Strategies of Reflective Teaching:

Based on the researches of reflective teaching, four main strategies are suggested as follows.

A. Observation:

Observation is the most basic research technique teachers can employ in classrooms. Teachers encounter many issues in classroom settings. Most of the rich data of classroom occurrences is gathered by the investigation, 64% of the teachers occasionally ask their colleagues to observe their teaching and 15% of them can actively ask colleagues to observe their own teaching. It means that college teachers also frequently use observation as a way to do reflection. Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart (1996) suggest observation as a way of gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching. Except for great knowledge of teaching theories, young college teachers are lack of teaching practice. Therefore, observation is a good way for their professional development.

B. Collaborative Learning:

It is often beneficial to gather feedback from academic colleagues. Brookfield (1995) maintains the importance of continual dialogue with peers and colleagues about teaching in the mutually cooperative environment rather than a competitive one. Collaboration with colleagues increases the probability that teachers will be successfully reflective and more confident in their professional development.

C. Teaching Blogs:

With the rapid development of information technology, more and more people choose blogs as the best way to express their feelings. The widest benefits of blogs will accrue to the young college teachers. It is reported that only 14.4% teachers have never reflected upon their teaching by writing teaching blogs. That is, a large number of college teachers use this method to record their teaching or their feeling about their teaching. Teaching blogs are written or recorded accounts of teaching experiences, which will be about teachers' routine and conscious actions in the classroom. These actions include conversations with students, critical incidents in a lesson, teachers' beliefs about teaching, events outside the classroom that will influence teaching, and teachers' views about language teaching and learning. There are two purposes for teaching blogs, one of which is for later reflection and trigger teachers' insights about teaching by writing, and the other of which can involve all their students, their colleagues and other educators in the blogs so as to offer more advice on teaching.

D. Audio and Video Recordings:

Through watching their own or other colleagues' audio and video recordings, young teachers can develop their self-awareness for teaching is an independent and conscious activity of an individual. A classroom video can vividly picture the whole process of teaching. It can trigger teachers' reflective thinking, reflect on their weaknesses and help them get some inspiration and ideas for their teaching improvement. In doing reflective teaching, each strategy has advantages and limitations, and some are more useful for exploring certain

aspects of teaching than others. It is up to initial teachers to decide which strategies are useful and for what purposes.

Conclusion:

Due to the need of new curriculum and high demanding of college teaching, professional development of young collegeteachers in our country is extremely urgent. From the perspective of constructivism, reflective teaching has proved to be an effective way to teachers' professional development theoretically and practically. Reflective teaching has the effects of making teachers more initiative and responsible in pursuing the practical rationality through exploring teaching and learning activities, taking more informed actions and establishing a deeper understanding of teaching, which ultimately contributes to their professional knowledge and competence. So, a process of reflective teaching is a process of teacher professional development. Without systematically reflective teaching, teacher professional development becomes impossible, and at the same time teacher professional development spurs teachers to do reflective thinking in their teaching.

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