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Reflective Thinking and Professional Development of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Teacher's professional development has been an ever evolving process as it is an integral part of his personal and academic life. To be professionally very efficient, teacher has to have reflective thinking as an important tool at his disposal. Hence, teacher's professional development and reflective thinking are the two sides of a coin. Reflective thinking leads to reflective teaching and reflective teaching makes teacher to be very skilled and confident that helps teaching learning to be very effective. Therefore, teacher, may he be teaching offline or online, should inculcate reflection as his daily practice. This very paper deals with how reflective thinking is necessary for teacher's professional development.

Key concepts: teacher's professional development, reflective thinking, reflective teaching.

Introduction:

Education plays major role in the development of the nation. Education brings out major changes in the overall development of the human beings and the nation. If we want to enhance our capabilities in order to develop in any field, we have to think reflectively. Reflective thinking is one of the major important initiatives for professional development. To bring out such changes teachers are the most important change agents as they impart knowledge and skills to the next generation. Therefore, teachers must have this ability of reflective thinking for overall development of the self, students, society and the nation.

Reflection and Reflective thinking:

The word reflection means serious thought, deliberation, meditation, pondering, musing, pensiveness, rumination, cogitation and cerebration. As a term 'Reflective thinking' used in academic and professional contexts, 'reflection' broadly encompasses 'reflective thinking', 'reflective learning', and 'reflective practice'. Reflection is a form of higher mental process like a form of thinking. Reflection is an act of looking back so as to process experiences. Metacognition is a type of reflection. It is a way of thinking about one's thinking in order to develop. Reflection is a specific genre and is not a static form. It can work in various ways. Reflection, in a broad perspective, is nothing but reflective thinking. This reflective thinking is an integral part of professional development of teachers. As far as metacognitive level is considered, Reflective thinking is an important facet of meta-cognitive thinking. In the views of John Dewey, "We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience." Dr. Bobb Darnell describes the learning process as "Input-Process-Output-Reflect."

When we throw light on the term 'reflection', we usually mean to describe an active and careful process of thought. It is an activity with which people recapture experience, introspect our role and evaluate it. It includes following three aspects:

- Focus the experience – it is nothing but recalling or detailing salient features of events.
- Connecting with feelings – it consists of two dimensions: using the positive feelings and removing negative ones.
- Evaluating experience - one has to evaluate experience by re-examining the experience in the light of one's knowledge, understanding, views and objectives. It is followed by integration of this new knowledge into one's conceptual framework which may be called as schema.

There are two types of reflection:

Reflection in action: This type of reflection goes on in the mind of the person simultaneously when the action is actually being taken place. It is attached to the context in which an event occurs. The reflection is often very realistic, substantial and has a tendency to appear as implicit or tacit knowledge.

Reflection on action: This type of reflection takes place after the event has occurred. It is far away from the actual event that requires reflection. It is on an abstract level and a lot of scope is there for generalizations. Most importantly, it is explicit in nature that is possible to express clearly. This type of reflection involves descriptions, analysis and evaluation of occurred events, decisions taken, strategies used etc. Therefore, reflection on action gives the person who reflects an opportunity to broaden his views, develop and improve skills and get wiser.

According to John Dewey, reflective thinking is a systematic rigorous disciplined way of thinking with its roots in scientific inquiry. Reflection, therefore, plays a crucial role in self-development no matter which field you are working in! It is not easy to be aware of all factors affecting an outcome, especially in our own experience as a member of a community or a profession. Reflective thinking gives us a tool to 'dig out' these factors and start controlling how well we can manage professional practices or jobs. While implementing reflective thinking, we look at the whole picture with its network of relationships. It may include the human beings in the natural and informational world, our perspectives, the contents, skills, colleagues and their opinions, contexts, outcomes and our satisfaction level. The steps of reflective thinking include reasoning, problem solving, critical thinking and creative thinking.

Principles for effective reflection:

1. Specific outcomes must be precisely framed. If outcomes are specific it becomes easy to devise proper reflective activities and to develop assessment techniques accordingly.
2. Teachers must select appropriate reflective activities before planning reflection. He should also consider the question: In what way can this reflection be used to enhance a particular outcome?
3. In the final stage, teacher must consider the strategies to assess the outcomes.

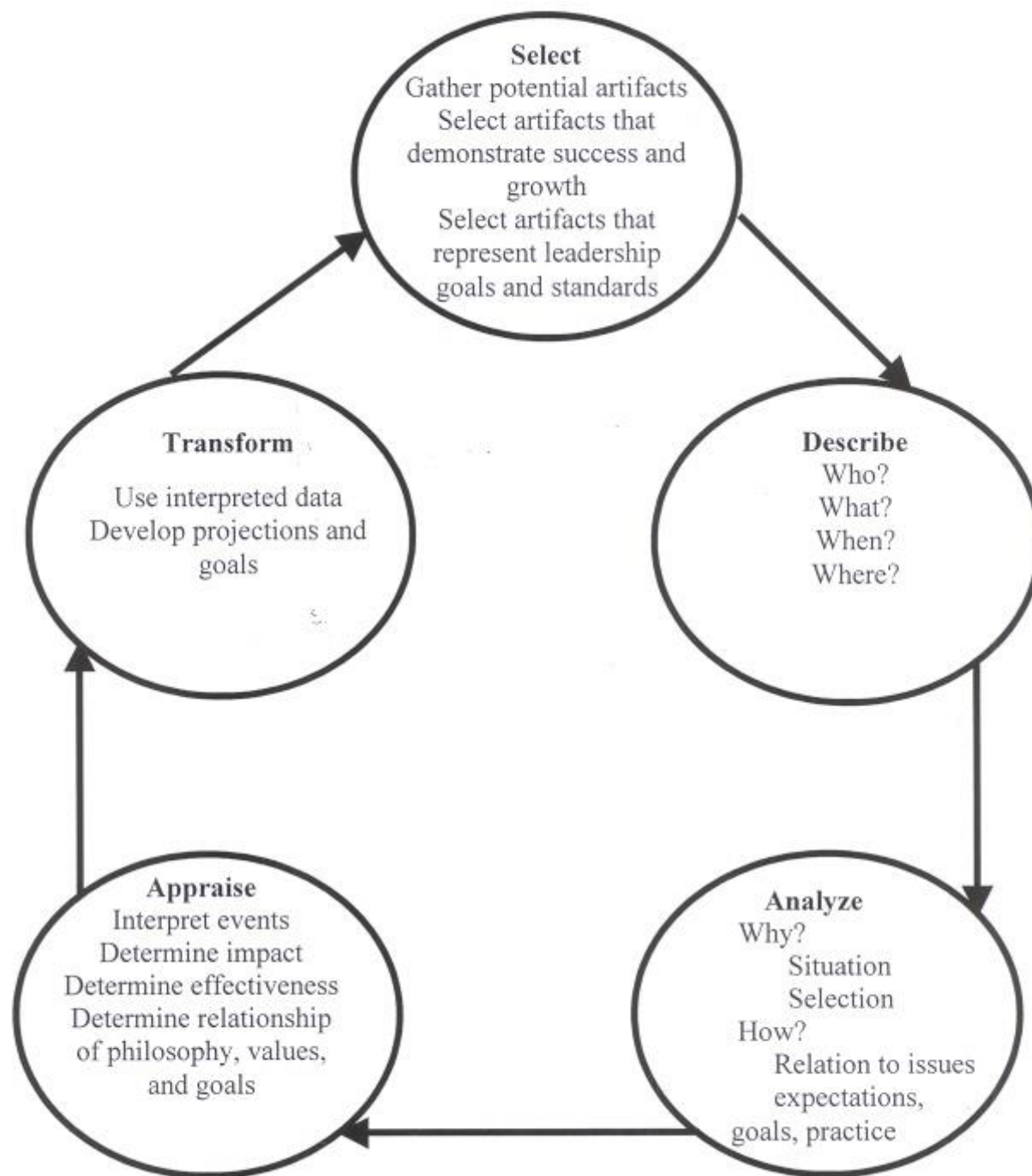
Effective reflection - an art:

Reflection is indeed an art that needs contemplation. As reflection is an integral part of the teaching learning process it has to be the daily practice of teacher's life. It is useful for self-improvisation and also useful in improving academic skills.

Effective teaching needs effective reflection. The art of effective teaching draws attention to the skill of reflective thinking.

For the effective teacher, each instructional activity, interaction with learners and learning experiences serve as a tool for continuous improvement as the teacher recalls, reviews, evaluates, and enriches his/her horizon of knowledge and understanding of the experience that leads to better future performance.

The teacher is a responsible factor for creating a reflective student. Learning from experience is one of the easiest and most effective ways to achieve this purpose. Teachers, while reflecting, should consider the different learning styles of the students, their interests and needs.

Reflective thinking cycle:**Importance of professional development of teachers:**

Teacher plays vital role in the teaching learning process and in overall national development. Teachers are very important for shaping the next generation. If teacher is not professionally developed and updated it could be a lasting damage to the very growth and development of a child. Therefore, teachers' professional development should be acknowledged. In today's modern technological world every teacher must be professionally very well developed.

Concept of professional development:

Professional development is an ongoing process throughout our life. It means supporting people in the work place to understand more about the environment in which they work , the job they are doing and how to do it in a better way. In today's world there are various developments taking place in different fields such as social, political, economic, educational and IT sector. In this 21st century the world around us is rapidly changing and it is progressing like anything. The field of education also has no exception to this. Moreover, the advanced technology has also provided us with different ways of working as far as teacher communities' professional development opportunities are concerned. These ways and means help us to keep pace with the fast changing world and also help to acquire and broaden our knowledge, skills and give better results in the field of education.

Reflective thinking and professional development of teachers:

There are various ways of professional development for the teachers. But Reflective thinking is utmost important way as it forms the basis for their higher mental processes.

Reflective teaching can take place if there is reflective thinking. Quality Education or teaching learning process depends on reflective practices.

Reflective teaching is an outcome of reflective thinking. Reflective teaching is a very skilled activity and a complex cyclic process.

As far as teaching process is concerned, Reflective teaching throws light on teacher's classroom activities, thinking about how and why these activities are done and their effectiveness. In a way, it is a process of introspection and evaluation. After collecting information about the classroom activities conducted, are analyzed and evaluated by reflective thinking. In other words reflective thinking is such a process that identifies and explores practices and underlying believes which leads to the professional development.

Why aspect of reflective teaching:

It is necessary to think about why reflective teaching each to be done. Reflective teaching is very much necessary for teacher community as this is the age of rapid progress, advancement and skill oriented world. Naturally, it becomes necessary for the teachers to deal smartly with smart students. It helps the teachers to check their capacity, ability that support student learning. Reflective teaching is not only important to develop the teachers personally but also very effective to enhance the quality of education provided to the students. Reflective teaching may be called as a thread which makes it possible to have continuity of quality teaching learning process that leads the teachers to provide job satisfaction. This process of reflective teaching makes the teachers to be a guide, philosopher, self-illuminated personality and a lighthouse for the students. Thus, it is a supportive and continuous process that assists enhancement and progress in teachers' work culture and in the society. We need evidences for reflective teaching from the day-to-day teaching learning process. It is an evidence-based process that consists teaching task force like training students at initial stages, newly appointed teachers and also the experienced professionals are supported with satisfied performance standards and competencies.

Following points will make it clear when reflective teaching is necessary.

- i) If daily teaching learning process works well and if teacher finds his performance very good the teacher can describe it, analyze it and comment on his or her own performance and write down the merits of his teaching.
- ii) If teacher finds some flaws in his teaching and also comes to know that students have not understood certain points he needs to take review of his teaching and also think about the possible reasons of why students did not understand.
- iii) If there is a problem of classroom management and discipline teacher has to reflect on this also.
- iv) Reflective thinking steps back and reviews the experiences by making judgements about it, and developing strategies for implementation when you have to face the similar situations in future.

v) In today's pandemic situation, teacher has to reflect on his online teaching strategies and their effectiveness.

Steps of Reflective Teaching:

Here are some steps for reflective teaching on the part of teachers which are the most integral part of professional development:

1. Acceptance - This is the very first step where teacher should first feel that he needs to reflect on his practices and enhance the skill of teaching. It is observed that some teachers are reluctant to think reflectively.
2. Self-observation-
At this stage teacher should evaluate his performance and the learning experiences given in the class. Deliberate efforts on the part of teacher regarding cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are needed to be reflected. Teacher should also think about merits and demerits of his teaching. Oneself is the real observer or a judge of his own performance. Therefore, this stage of introspecting is very important in reflection.
3. Gathering information- following ways are very important for teachers to collect information for reflection:
 - a) Daily diary- it gives us information about teachers on opinions, views and evaluation about his own teaching learning activity. Teacher should write his observations, feelings, reactions about the activities conducted in the class.
 - b) Recordings-
A good amount of information is at our disposal for reflection through audio and video recording of the teacher of his classroom performance that is helpful for the teacher to observe the mistakes unknowingly done by him or the things which are repeated by him or which are not suitable for that particular subject. Audio recordings are useful to check the pronunciation, diction, talking, his way of expression, intonation pattern that he has used, linguistic items, feedback given to the students. If teacher has video recording it can be useful to understand, observe his expressions, gestures, managing the classroom situations, his posture and unwanted movements done by him.
 - c) Observation done by colleagues- observation done by co-teachers may be useful for understanding students' contribution, effect of teaching on students and class control. For this co teachers may take notes and give their opinions. But for this activity a teacher should have open mindedness.
 - d) Feedback from the students- students are the best judge for the teacher's performance with their own perspective.
4. Teachers reflective thinking-
Teacher can listen to the audio recording and observe on video recordings. Teacher should think positively about the feedback received from colleagues and students and should modify his behavioural pattern accordingly while teaching. Also, he has to think about various strategies and techniques which are to be used for teaching. He should also have capacity to solve the problems, think critically and creatively.
5. Peer share and counselling- Observations about teaching performance and his reflections can be shared with supportive colleagues or friends. Through their opinions and remarks, teachers will get proper direction, different ideas and appropriate solutions. Teacher should take guidance from the expert teachers and also have counselling from them regarding specific teaching activities.
6. Reference material- If the teacher understands that he needs to study more he should find out reference material in a particular area of his subject. It may include offline source like reference books, magazines, journals, articles, and online source obviously from various websites, you tube etc.
7. In-service training programmes- These programs are essential for getting new ideas and new trends in teaching particular subject. It also provides proper platform for the teacher to raise their problems and to broaden their horizon of knowledge.

In this way teachers' professional development always needs reflective thinking. The progress and development of next generation has always been depended on what quality of teachers it gets. Therefore, considering all the above factors, teachers should try their best for reflective thinking and professional development.

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