THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING SELF-REFLECTION IN THE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE OF TEACHERS

ESTUDIANTE

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Abstract

Teaching is not an easy task because teachers have many and different roles in the class. Part of these roles is to self-reflect about their teaching practice to improve as a teacher and with this to help students to succeed. Some aspects may improve the process of self-reflection. This is crucial for personal growth since teachers can recognize their strengths and weaknesses by the observations and analysis of themselves. The different models of self-reflection will allow the teachers to be guided during the process of reflection. Moreover, these processes have almost the same stages: awareness of the need for self-reflection, the feelings, evaluation of the experiences, analysis of situations, conclusions, and action plans. The diverse strategies that may help to self-reflect on your own teaching practice are going to be explained in order to demonstrate that there are different ways to self-reflect and teachers need to select the one better fits for them. Therefore, self-reflection makes people more conscious about what needs to be changed or modified when teaching.

Keywords: models of self-reflection, teaching improvement, teaching praxis, self-reflection.

modelos de autorreflexión, perfeccionamiento docente, praxis didáctica, autorreflexión.

Introduction

Teaching students is really challenging. Moreover, when you teach, you need to realize that there are aspects that can be improved in the process and others that require changes at all. By teaching, teachers can guide learners, find their purpose, and inspire them to succeed. However, sometimes educators face some difficulties and challenges or gaps that can discourage them. Instead of feeling bad or dismayed, they should find a way to bridge those gaps. Therefore, teachers demand self-reflection because that allows them to teach themselves

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since they may learn from experience; this involves their personal growth. For doing this, it is crucial for them to question themselves whether what they are doing is working or not and what they can do to improve after the process of reflection. Moreover, self-reflecting instructors are effective since they are in constant improvement to move their careers forward to achieve their personal goals.

On the other hand, it is relevant to explore the term *reflection*. Bengtsson (1995) talked about the origin of the word *reflection* which in Latin means to *bend* or *turn*. The term is used to describe the reflection of light against a mirror. This concept in the human context is used literally with the meaning of physical self-mirroring. He also mentioned that a person is able to examine his mental activities and to inspect the existential aspects of his life (Bengtsson, 1995). Consequently, to reflect for teachers means to think of, analyze, and contemplate their performance and then to identify their strengths and to recognize their weaknesses to improve them.

Further, Matherson and Windle (2017) pointed out four desires of teachers in relation to their personal development. The first one is associated with learning opportunities which can be actively engaged in the practice of skills, strategies, and techniques. The second one is to learn the opportunities that can show them a more practical way to deliver content to students meaningfully. Third, they want some learning opportunities that are teacher-driven which can offer professional development sessions, which will allow them to improve their practices and change classroom environments. Finally, the fourth one is to learn opportunities that are sustained over time which will make them better for a long time.

Even so, reflecting is not an easy task. Some people may think that it is not necessary to reflect because they do not consider that some aspects need to be changed; it means that they do not admit their mistakes or that just those ones are not important enough. Moreover, it is quite difficult for people to see their own mistakes. For this reason, it is crucial for people to

have the ability to analyze themselves and try to look beyond to be aware of their weaknesses. Thus, they have to contemplate their beliefs, thoughts, expectations, and their goals. Besides, self-reflection requires objectivity. This implies that people need to separate their feelings and thoughts from their real goals; staying focused is the main purpose.

Evidently, self-reflection is the competence to be aware of ourselves, our own thoughts, emotions, decisions, and behaviors. Whether something goes wrong, it is essential to look for the reasons that make that challenging and, from that, to look for the actions that can be done to change those situations, and finally, to seek personal development. Some aspects such as the importance of self-reflection to improve as a teacher, the different models of self- reflection, and the diverse strategies that may help to self-reflect on your own teaching practice are crucial when a teacher wants to go through self reflection.

The Importance of Self Reflection

The first aspect is related to the importance of self-reflection not only for the teacher but also for students. To decide what is going well and what is not, sometimes is not an easy task because it requires analyzing and evaluating your own actions, thoughts, and behaviors. Sometimes, some teachers do not stop to reflect on their praxis because they may think that they do not have time or it is not necessary. In other words, they continue doing the same, and they do not pay attention to details. However, self-reflecting is not just thinking about mistakes, errors, or gaps, but it is also about virtues and strengths. Therefore, self-reflecting is crucial for everybody but especially for teachers for self-improvement.

Olaya (2018) stated that "teachers need reflection not only to change their everyday routines within a classroom but also to realize what problems are arising should become a current belief for language teachers" (p. 152). It means that some teachers tend to implement routinized teaching methods that they may think work, but maybe they do not for everybody or

all topics. Consequently, it is relevant for teachers to not get into routines and try to change and look for different alternatives when teaching. Additionally, Olaya (2018) also retorted that

> Reflection should involve more than a simple reflective session or training. It is suggested that teachers should be able to accept and consider other current teaching ideas which can be found by reading recent research reports or by participating in any professional development program. (p. 152)

Based on this, it can be declared that self-reflection is elemental for teachers since they need to constantly state and achieve class goals. For doing this, teachers need to adapt their teaching techniques, methods, or activities to students. Therefore, teachers need to observe, analyze, and evaluate whether or not what they are doing is working. Evidently, these actions can lead to effective teacher professional development which is a key component that teachers need to become excellent at.

For this purpose, it is pertinent for teachers to stay competitive with the new generations, and they need to try to accommodate their own skills to students' needs. In this path, Novozhenina and Lopez (2018) suggested that "Professional development thus becomes the bridge that will connect the point where they are now to the point where they need to be" (p. 144). Additionally, they mentioned that professional development has two crucial aspects, "first, the need of learning through experience rather than from mere memorization of literature, and second, the importance of reflecting about one's own performance" (Novozhenina & Lopez, 2018, p. 116). Indeed, reflection can be the key to evaluate their professional practice, and this leads to professional growth which is the same to take ownership of the professional development to improve.

As well, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated, "The quality of an education system is only as good as the quality of its teachers. It is not enough just to want to teach. People should enter the profession having received a good

education themselves" (2015, p. 4). As a result, teachers are required to keep updated and innovate their techniques for finding the best way for teaching. As a consequence, reflecting on this empowers teachers to appraise new ideas to be successful and help students to succeed. Certainly, Matherson and Windle (2017) pointed out that professional development considers active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection. Moreover, they mentioned that by taking into account these elements, teachers will increase their pedagogical skills to cause a profound effect on students´ learning.

Overall, self-reflection lets teachers be more engaged in the process of teaching and learning since they will analyze and learn from their own experiences to improve what they consider is needed. In other words, reflective teaching allows teachers to contemplate their teaching practices, examine how something is being taught, determine how the practice can be improved, and apply the changes to get better learning outcomes.

As was mentioned before, reflecting on their own praxis is beneficial for teachers. Nevertheless, it is not easy for them to stop and reflect on it. First of all, self-reflection takes time; teachers need to question themselves about their values, their thoughts, their feelings, their weaknesses, their strengths, etc. All of this will help them to become more autonomous, and they will feel more confident when teaching. Additionally, teachers can go deeper into themselves to more easily identify their values and strengths that maybe are there, but they do not know they have them. This can help them to see their potential and focus on the actions that work to continue doing them and to change the ones that do not work. Of course, teachers need to be aware of the circumstances and contexts students are involved in and their needs. Another benefit is that reflection helps teachers to be more aware of themselves; this means that they can think more openly, be more creative, be neutral at feelings or emotions, build self-confidence, feel less worried, change some behaviors that do not help them, and feel engaged in the process of teaching.

On the contrary, teachers may face some challenges that make them feel discouraged to self reflect. In this case, Fook and Askeland (2007) mentioned that confronting situations constitute one of the major challenges of critical reflection. This can be a challenge since it can be interpreted as a 'double-edged sword': "it can be a very potent way of confronting 'sticking points' or previously unresolvable dilemmas; but its effectiveness may be limited because of the misunderstanding, resistance and anxiety which can result when deepseated assumptions are questioned" (p. 2). Indeed, it is difficult to change something that is not clearly identified as a need for adjustment and that it can be challenging for teachers because they are full of work, so they concentrate just on teaching without stopping and thinking whether their methods or techniques are adequate for students. That is to say, time is a crucial element to reflect; many teachers may say that they do not have time to do it.

Models of Self Reflection

The second aspect is about the different models or cycles of self-reflection. The models of reflection are a guide to help the teachers through the process of reflection since each one contributes different alternatives per each person. Models can be combined or adapted, Kolb et al. (2014) introduced the cycle of experiential learning which is the base of different models for reflective practice. He affirmed that when a person wants to learn from something that has happened, this individual has to recall the observations that she/he made from the event and then reflect on it. This process has four stages, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. For that reason, it requires to describe and analyze the experience for coming to a deeper understanding of what happened and frame some actions, as a result, to learn from that experience to take future actions from it (Jasper, 2003). It means that a person who is in the reflection process needs to start with an experience;

then, to reflect; after, to develop ideas about why that might be; and finally, to apply the changes to different situations to see whether it works and try not to repeat that action in the future.

Further, Jasper (2013) also remarked on the ERA cycle; this one has three main stages which are experience, reflection, and action. This cycle is based on positive and negative experiences. This is very similar to Kolb's cycle since Jasper (2013) asserted that people start with an experience and think through that to check whether it is acceptable or not,and then, analyze if the experience will be different.

Additionally, Driscoll and Teh (2001) proposed the model "The what". This model is based on three main questions, "1. WHAT? A description of the event. 2. SO WHAT? An analysis of the event. 3. NOW WHAT? Proposed actions following the event" (p. 99). These questions assist individuals to analyze experiences, good and bad ones, and learn from them. The last question, now what? will allow people to see if the aspect needs to be changed, if they can try something new, or if they can keep it as it is.

Further, another model is the Gibbs´ reflective cycle; this one is more complex than the others. This cycle contains six stages: to describe what happened, to see what you are thinking and feeling about it, to evaluate what was good or bad, to analyze the facts, to make conclusions about what could have been done, and the action plan for the future (Gibbs et al., 2005). Similar to the preview models, this one contains experience, analysis, and plan for the future; however, this model includes the person's point of view to focus on the feelings about the experience. Regarding the process of self reflection to examine practice in detail, Anderson et al. (2004) confirmed,

> such examination may lead to feelings of discomfort or vulnerability, but if reflective practitioners are committed to improving practice, then challenging thoughts and emotions should ultimately enable them to learn from their experiences and understand the context of their practice (p. 192).

To summarize, there are different models with diverse stages that allow the person who wants to reflect to choose the one that better suits his/her necessities. These models can be a guide; nevertheless, the process can be really different for everyone. Additionally, the models offer stages to lead the individual; all of them have a starting point to aid the person to know where to start, and the cycle of each model can be repeated until the individual is sure that the process is ended.

Besides, it is important to take into account that there are two ways of reflecting. Cirkovic-Miladinovic and Dimitrijevic (2020) reported that they are reflection in action and reflection on action. Moreover, they stated, "Throughout reflection in action, the teacher reflects on an activity that is in progress and makes on the spot decision to modify or maintain the activity" (p. 48). For this reason, in-action reflection is based on some problems or situations immediately occurring; thus, teachers have to think about their actions while they are developing the activity. It permits them to redesign what they are doing while it is being done. Additionally, they also mentioned that "Reflection on action takes place out of the activity of practice. It is considered of more conscious and reasoned process" (Cirkovic-Miladinovic & Dimitrijevic, 2020, p. 48). In this case, reflection occurs after completing a task. Here, teachers collect information and analyze it in order to solve the problem that is presented. In such a way, the information is converted into knowledge by learning from experience.

Strategies to Self Reflect

The last aspect to take into account is the strategies that may help teachers to self-reflect on their own teaching practice. This reflection can be achieved by different strategies which release the teacher to collect the information, such as journals, recordings, observations, portfolios, lesson reports, questionnaires, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, and generated questions (Mathew et al., 2017; Olaya, 2018). The first strategy is the journals; they

allow the teacher to get their feelings, emotions, and thoughts by writing experiences in a diary. The most important aspect is to be honest with yourself and get out of your comfort zone to evaluate, analyze, and assess what and how you are doing your job. In Mathew et al.'s view (2017), a journal " is purely personal. Student teachers encounter many issues in classroom settings. After each activity/ practice lesson, the student-teacher has to write in a notebook about what happened" (p. 129). Moreover, the journal can include good and bad experiences which support teachers to learn from their own experiences. For this reason, it is relevant for teachers to be honest to themselves for a better understanding of the real reasons for an action to happen.

Another strategy is the use of recordings, video or audio. These recordings would allow the teacher to watch or listen to themselves when teaching. Furthermore, " teachers can connect their teaching planning to their real teaching experiences" (Olaya, 2018, p. 157). For instance, teachers can look back at their lessons and question themselves whether any aspect could be changed or improved. As well, Mathew et al. (2017) remarked that " 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" (p. 129). Therefore, this strategy will help teachers to have an unbiased point of view of their teaching practice.

The following strategy has to do with observations; they can be done by a colleague or by the students. Inviting a peer to observe the class can be an excellent option to have a distinct perspective of your instruction by someone else who knows the realities of a teacher. Therefore, receiving feedback from another person would provide some insights about the aspects that you really need to change or improve."Peer observation is the process of colleagues observing others in their teaching, with the overall aim of improving teaching practice" (Hendry & Oliver, 2012, p. 1). Peer observation benefits teachers by improving the quality of teaching because they are receiving feedback from a prepared person in the same field using some instruments

which leads to an open discussion about the insights of teaching practice. Moreover, both teachers can share experiences that provide the opportunity to improve in their pedagogical praxis. However, being observed can be a bit frightening because some people are not used to being criticized even when these critics are positive and can help us to be better teachers. Concerning the students' observations, they are the ones who are directly affected by teachers' performance. For this reason, they can give valuable feedback. For doing this, teachers can implement some questionnaires or ask students for a report or ask for some recommendations to improve the class.

Conclusions

To conclude, reflective practice is a cycle. The most important aspects are to identify a need, to analyze the situation, and to make some conclusions to see what can be done after that. Teachers are faced with various challenges and problems when teaching that sometimes are difficult to identify or they just do not know how to manage it. Self reflection can be the key for handling those situations. Besides, reflecting is a complicated task that does not have the value that it should have. When teachers give the relevance it deserves, reflection is a significant tool when teaching.

Moreover, reflection allows teachers to determine the weaknesses that require to be changed or modified and to recognize their strengths to enhance them in class. Self-reflection has some challenges and benefits. Some of the challenges are lack of time, ignorance about the topic, or disinterest in it. On the other hand, the benefits are an improvement of practice, an increase of self-awareness, professional development, and more engagement in the process of teaching.

Additionally, there are different kinds of self-reflection and diverse strategies to carry it out. The main purpose of all of them is to improve the teaching practice. Therefore, teachers need to look for the one that better suits them and that gives the best insights about it. Of

course, all this process has the impact it should have whether the teachers take action after completing the process. Some authors such as Kolb et al. (2014), Jasper (2013), Driscoll and Teh (2001), and Gibbs (2005)   have illustrated the different cycles of self reflection. All of them offered an opportunity to assess and improve the teachers' personal development. The different models will contribute to the personal process of reflection since all of them have a different aspect that better suits some circumstances.

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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Stephanie Viquez Fernández, cédula de identidad 3-0443-0585, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de la responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado **"The Importance of Promoting Self-Reflection in the Pedagogical Practice of Teachers"**, para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Enseñanza del Inglés.

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Firma

Heredia, a los 3 días del mes de setiembre del año 2021.

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante Stephanie Víquez Fernández, cédula 3 0443 0585, que lleva como título **The Importance of Promoting Self-Reflection in the Pedagogical Practice of Teachers**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

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