

Using Reflective Practice to Enhance Teaching

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While teachers often have no time to think about how to change and improve their teaching, there are increasing expectations being placed upon them to do just that. Reflective practice (RP), guided by a framework, is one way to transform classroom reflection into understanding and action. The presenter demonstrated through his own journal entries how systematic writing of observations can lead to a thought-provoking exploration of the complex array of factors involved in teaching in today's classrooms. The key is using a framework to organize and guide reflective thinking and writing through a process of description, analysis, and new action. What started as a demonstration of the presenter's approach to RP evolved into a collaborative effort with the participants to create variations of the model to address their particular concerns. As a result of this interaction, additional insights into how to use RP to enhance teaching were gained.

授業改革、改善の期待が高まる一方で、教師は往々にしてその方法を考える暇が無い。ガイドラインに従って行うリフレクティブ プラクティスとは授業を反芻することで状況理解を深め次への実践に繋げていく一つの方法である。発表者は個人の実践記録を通して、系統的に観察記録することで、昨今授業上で生じる複雑に入り組んだ要因小路の探索へと進展していくことを実証する。ガイドラインを手掛かりに、描写・分析・実践の過程をとりながら反芻思考し、記録へと系統立てていく。RPアプローチのデモンストラーションは、参加者との協同作業に発展し、参加者がそれぞれの関心を発表し、実践例からその多様な使用方法

が生まれた。この相互作用から、授業効果を上げるために RPをどう使ったら良いかへの更なる考察が得られる結果となった。

One way to think about the concept of reflective teaching is to think about making more conscious some of this tacit knowledge that we do not often express. By surfacing these tacit understandings, we can criticize, examine, and improve them.

(Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 15)

The constant question that I asked myself while preparing and giving this demonstration was: How can I encourage the engagement of teachers in their own professional development? Over the years, there has been much talk of “reflecting” on our teaching. While this sounds like good advice, how do we actually go about doing it? Systematic journaling (i.e., writing observations in a journal for later analysis) guided by a framework is one way to transform our reflections into greater understanding of our teaching. Reflective practice (RP) takes us beyond those fleeting moments of recollection which come and go throughout our busy lives as teachers.

Overview of the demonstration

First, I introduced RP through the ideas of two of

its most influential advocates. Dewey (1975) made a distinction between “routine action” and “reflective action” which engages us to look closer at our daily teaching while Schon (1983) pointed out that teachers’ knowledge is built through an ongoing process of analyzing our practice. Second, I argued for the need to become more systematic and disciplined in how we reflect. The occasional reflective thought does not give us much to examine or develop. Third, I demonstrated through my own journal entries how journaling with a framework as a guide provides us with useful, systematic descriptions of classroom events or experiences for analysis and planning new action. Fourth and finally, variations of the demonstrated model suggested by the participants were recognized as possible new directions in the movement to make RP more accessible to teachers.

The impetus for this presentation

Teachers are commonly advised to analyze journals and other forms of qualitative data by “looking for emerging patterns or reoccurring tendencies.” More explicit and thus accessible procedures for analysis are needed to encourage more teachers to see RP not as extra work piled on top of their present responsibilities, but as an integral part of their regular classroom preparation, practice, and reflection. There is also a need to provide guidance to those who are already doing some form

of journaling and RP, but do not know how to take it further.

Procedures for reflective practice

The demonstration revolved around my idea of how to use a basic framework for reflective journaling on a classroom experience. The journal was organized around frameworks used in cross-cultural and teacher training. The Bennett & Bennett model (1993), “Description-Interpretation-Evaluation (D.I.E.)” takes us through the following procedure to heighten perception of intercultural incidents:

1. *describe* the event or experience as objectively as possible
2. *interpret* it through multiple perspectives
3. *evaluate* what happened.

The common urge to immediately (and often prematurely) jump to conclusions is minimized by proceeding step-by-step in this order. Dewey defined reflective thinking in similar terms as “judgment suspended during further inquiry” (1975, p. 13). Stanley’s basic model (2000), “Description-Analysis-Taking Intelligent Action” moves teachers in a similar direction, but goes one step further by asking us to propose a new action based on what we learned through description and analysis. The following example

illustrates through practical application how to use such a framework in a journal.

Description:

I gave students a survey. I decided to ask them to write two additional sentences on the top of the paper. I explained this in English, on the board, physically holding up the paper and pointing, and finally in Japanese. However, I noticed that two students in the back did not write the sentences, but instead had gone on to answer the questions printed on the paper. I asked them if they had understood my instructions. They replied, “We don’t understand English.”

Analysis (or Interpretation):

I can see three possible explanations: (1) These two students were simply not paying attention when I was explaining. (2) I gave them too many alternative explanations and it confused them. (3) They already decided what to do and were simply doing it.

Taking Intelligent Action (or Evaluation):

Next time, I will try one visual example, a single language explanation repeated twice, and then give them time to think what I would like them to do. Maybe I can get my message across more

effectively by simplifying what I do and say and thus increasing chances of them taking initiative to either to do the task now or give some kind of indication that they do not understand.

(Personal journal, April 21, 2000)

The focus in this part of the demonstration was on the process of using a framework for reflection. By demonstrating one approach to RP, I was asking the participants to consider whether RP in general and systematic journaling in particular would be something they would want to do. In my case, if I had not controlled the first impulse to label the students in the entry above as inattentive, I would have not considered that there could be at least two alternative views of what actually happened. As it turned out, as the semester progressed, these students proved to be among the more serious students in the class. My own experience seemed to strike a familiar chord, as some participants agreed that there is a need in their own reflections to be more systematic.

The next part of the demonstration dealt with possible ways to expand on the initial three-step framework. A more explicit procedure for analysis beyond the general suggestions to look for patterns or think of multiple interpretations is one area of need. Stanley (2000) helps by attaching “five lenses” to the process of analysis. These lenses identify five important

factors to consider in any classroom event or experience:

1. Teacher-students
2. Individual students
3. Group dynamics
4. Materials
5. Context.

Without using these subcategories or similar ones to guide analysis, I have tended to limit myself to only two elements of a lesson: what I did as the teacher and what students did. By looking systematically at various, specific factors, teachers can begin to see the classroom in both broader and more complex terms.

Ensuing reflections on the demonstration

The participants envisioned what they would do with a framework in their own situations. Variations included having students use a framework to reflect on their class (and teacher), letting the new action be the start of a new cycle of inquiry, and verbalizing introspectively/ retrospectively with a colleague instead of reflecting alone in a journal. By using my demonstration as a jumping off point for exchanging ideas, this session became a demonstration within a demonstration. The participants contributed valuable ideas for doing RP systematically with their situations in mind. I started out sharing my ideas with the audience, but the session was transformed into a group share through their participation.

Conclusion

What will ultimately determine the value of this session for those who attended is how they understand, and use a framework to begin, sustain, and increase their own involvement in using RP to enhance teaching. This account represents one answer to the opening question of how to engage teachers in professional development.

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