

Reflection and Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

Nowadays, teacher education programmes focus on the necessity developing teacher's skill beyond the necessary technical skills of instruction and management towards a process where they can feel safe to put their own work into a wider social, cultural and political context. In this consideration, this article attempts to justify reflection and critical pedagogy the most effective means for improvement of a teacher's performance. There is a hope for them to be professional by reflection and critical pedagogy.

Introduction

The classrooms that teachers inherit are most complex place to deal with. The students bring diverse identification regarding religion, caste, mother tongue, financial condition, family education, culture, history, society, region, politics etc. Likewise, the students have individual differences i.e. mental, physical capabilities, emotions, needs, desires, interests, aptitude and attitude. They also differ in prior knowledge and experiences. The teachers are expected to deliver the educational goods demanded by society as well as to develop citizens for humankind. They are often obsessed with the mastery of technical skills for instruction and class management. They often say, "Tell me how to do it." I think there is much more to do.

Teachers need to develop critical ability through which they can analyze their school sites. They need to examine their educational goals and refine their promises. They need to ask themselves what is needed for them to become a good teacher. They should appreciate their own history and cultural experience. If they can appreciate their own background, they can better appreciate the heritage and culture of their own students.

Change for professionalism

First, teachers need to be ready for changes. They are expected to integrate theory and practice, analyze critically, and implement them to bring changes in practice. Therefore, teachers need to have a critical insights into their roles in schools and to examine critically the value of the knowledge they transfer to the students and the role of school in society.

The teachers are mostly on pressure of accomplishing classroom activities but do not have much reflection time. However, they are constantly in need of self-renewal i.e. re-creating themselves over and over. For their professional development, they need much more than mastery of certain behaviours associated with students' achievement, they need

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to involve in critical reflective thinking practice about their work. They need to be reflective, critical and inquiring. These qualities can be developed by i) the analysis of classroom interaction based on observation and interview, ii) the case studies focusing on texture and context, and iii) examining their own practice: reflexive and contextualized knowledge. These processes allow them to be self-understanding and self-determining.

A model teacher aspiring to a professional practice would have accumulated a body of substantive knowledge, have some specific skills and have developed a degree of technique and engage in what is generally termed reflective teaching.

Defining reflective practice

Reflective practice is a mode that integrates or links thought and action with reflection. It involves thinking about and critically analyzing one's actions with the goal of improving professional practice. Engaging in reflective practice requires individuals to assume the perspective of an external observer in order to identify the assumptions and feelings underlying their practice and then to speculate about how these assumptions and feelings affect practice.

According to Schon (1988), the stage is set for reflection when "knowing-in-action"--the sort of knowledge that professionals come to depend on to perform their work spontaneously--produces an unexpected outcome or surprise. This surprise can lead to one of two kinds of reflection: reflection on action, which occurs either following or by interrupting the activity, or reflection in action, which occurs during (without interrupting) the activity by thinking about how to reshape the activity while it is underway.

Reflective teaching is a cyclical process because once we start to implement changes then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins again: What are we doing? Why are we doing it? How effective is it? How are the students responding? How can we do it better? are some of the questions the reflective practitioner tries to answer.

The teachers have to keep learning, keep finding new things because the teachers who still teach the ways they did ten year ago, the students do not listen to them. They are outdated. The truly reflective

teacher is one who makes instructional decisions consciously and tentatively, critically considers a full range of pertinent contextual and pedagogical factors actively seeks evidence about the results and continues to modify these decisions as the situation warrants. The teachers have personal choices about the way they think, feel and behave as teachers and how teachers can become aware of learning atmosphere they create and how the moment by moment choices they make can affect the learning environment of their students. Thus, reflective teaching is enriching, empowering and enduring.

Critical pedagogy for innovations

A critical pedagogy is needed to manage the complex social system of the classroom and diagnose the need of individual students. There is always confusion about teacher's role in the society: transmission or transformation. In many ways the passing on of knowledge - transmission - remains the basic quest of schooling. This really ignores the experiences and potentialities of the students. Their creativity is lost and become more dependent on the teachers. How can we encourage the teachers to build new narratives rather than retell the old stories? Yes, we can put emphasis on building rather than retelling, on producing rather than reproducing. Now the pedagogical paradigm has been shifted towards transformation and teachers can collaborate with the students and other stakeholders, e.g. community people, colleagues, educationists, education administrators etc to transform. The major concern is to capitalize the knowledge of stakeholders for classroom practice. Critical pedagogy calls for collaboration. Teachers are the agents who work in complex social sites and who have the power to help transform. But it is difficult to practice it in existing "teacher is everything" school environment. We need to realize first that knowledge and production of knowledge can be made less external so that transformation is possible though it takes a longer time.

Critical pedagogy encourages teachers to view their practice critically and complexities of the educational process through various lenses. There we find some traditions are established as sacred and treated as immutable and rarely examined. The teachers are

also not encouraged to be analytical and time is rarely given for such a reflective process. The time has come to work on changing this stained reality.

Critical pedagogy encourages teachers to be open to the students for sharing their stories - stories of their experiences, culture, knowledge, language etc so that they will be able to walk into a class with confidence and be known as an interesting, firm but fair teacher. Teacher stories must not simply be devices to instruct or to draw student stories, they must be true stories narrated in a critical fashions. Affirmation and critique go hand in hand.

Ways of developing reflection and critical pedagogy

The recommendations are made as given below so that teachers can develop reflective teaching and critical pedagogy.

Daily journal/teacher's diary: Teachers require maintaining journal in which they record daily experiences, feelings, emotional responses, and analyses of observations and teaching. These journals are interactive in nature. Journal writing provides little time from their busy schedule to make connections or discover discrepancies between practice, theory, personal feelings and values. It is means to explore and articulate their understandings and feelings about the actions, ideas, and environment.

Cross-disciplinary sharing: There could be a seminar or sharing sessions among the teachers of different subjects in the school. This seminar provides a forum for the teachers to communicate through which they share experiences, stories, knowledge, feelings, reactions and ideas. It is an opportunity to examine their own experiences.

Observation: Teachers must invite other teachers to observe their classes and in turn they should observe others' classes. They should follow all the pre-observation, observation and post-observation stages of observation. It must be a professional support, not administrative one. The observer and observee should agree on the area of observation before observation takes place. Observation helps

teachers to build confidence and an empowerment that allows them to experiment with various methodologies, strategies, and techniques and test educational theories in the prevailing situation.

Recording lesson: It is somehow impossible in our area. However, if it is possible, it will be very fruitful to self-analysis and critique of one's lesson. The records of lessons help teachers analyzing various aspects of their own and their students' behaviours and strategies as well.

Student feedback: Students are a good source of reflection and critical pedagogy. The teachers need to develop a set of questionnaire or observation checklist and give different students to respond on them. The instruction should be quite clear so that observation would be more objective. Likewise, informal talks with the students will also provide a lot insight about teacher's performance. Sometimes a formal sitting with the students is necessary.

Authorship

In addition to these recommendations, a teacher must muse on his own performance. Some questions would help teachers make recollections purposeful. For example, 'What did I teach today?' 'What was the question that most of the students couldn't answer?' 'Was the sentence confusing?', 'Could they answer if I told it differently?' Just find five minutes at any time on the day and recollect what you did, what the responses were. Think about the better choices and implement them, evaluate their effects and bring a novel idea every time and become a teacher. *You are the best author of the strategy for you.*

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