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**Role of Reflective Teaching in the Evolution of an Effective Teacher by S.Usha Menon and
C.Alamelu**

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Abstract

Classroom teaching is a complex and demanding activity where the teacher plays an ever-important role in intellectual development and social enrichment of students. The journey undertaken by teachers is not bereft of problems. They encounter innumerable barriers from all possible angles and it has been observed that many a time it is the teachers themselves who contribute the maximum to derail the teaching –learning process. It is in this context that Reflective Teaching (RT) assumes significance as a dynamic catalyst for teacher development. This paper explains the importance of RT in order to improvise upon the existing practices by presenting the result of an action research pertaining to two teachers involved in teaching Technical English at the tertiary level of Engineering education. The problems faced by the teachers and its repercussions on students and colleagues were delved into. Further, a few strategies were adopted which enabled these teachers to introspect and change their attitudes, modify their teaching styles and improve their evaluation patterns. Thus the use of RT helped in realizing the dramatic possibilities of a total transformation in their teaching and approach to students and colleagues.

Introduction

Classroom teaching is a complex and demanding activity where the teacher plays an ever-important role in shaping the career prospects of the students. The real persona of the teacher is so ingrained in the teaching –learning process that it is implicit that an excellent and competent teacher will make learning enjoyable and rewarding. An effective teacher needs to be scholarly, innovative, reciprocative and compassionate and also possess integrity and ethics. This multifarious and diverse role of a teacher results in intellectual development and social



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enrichment of students. Thus, a teacher is the corner stone playing a very vital role in the unique metamorphosis of a student into an active, responsible and participatory citizen.

The journey undertaken by teachers is not bereft of problems. They encounter innumerable barriers from all possible angles, also from self, which an adroit teacher surmounts with astounding brilliance to emerge as a successful and acclaimed teacher. It has been observed that many a time it is the teachers themselves who contribute the maximum to derail the teaching-learning process. This could be due to various factors: the hostile attitude, insufficient knowledge, lack of commitment, sheer indifference, faulty methodology, improper classroom management and so on. It is in this context that Reflective Teaching (RT) assumes significance. RT is one of the many tools that a teacher can employ to overcome even formidable barriers by critically studying and molding his teaching style to become an effective teacher.

Reflective practice can offer teachers an opportunity to explore attitudes, develop management skills, and reflect on the ethical implications of practice in classrooms and there by encourages teachers to step back and critically reflect not only on how they teach, but also on why they teach in a particular way. In short, it helps in the evolution of good teaching practices.

Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching is "paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively" (Bolton, 2010). In other words it means a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. This helps the teacher to understand one's own actions and the reactions in the process of teaching. Reflective teaching is therefore a means of professional development which begins with the teacher and extends to classrooms. The same view is echoed by Schon (1983) and he opined that reflection is aimed at the assessment of assumptions and beliefs and how to solve problems. Reflection is a valuable skill or tool that teachers can judiciously employ to rethink and re-evaluate their teaching practices in order to achieve greater professional success.



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Importance of Reflective Teaching

The importance of reflection to ESL teachers is captured by Richards and Lockhart (1994), “Critical reflection can trigger a deeper understanding of teaching. Teachers who are better informed as to the nature of their teaching are able to evaluate their stage of professional growth and what aspects of their teaching they need to change. In addition, when critical reflection is seen as an ongoing process and a routine part of teaching, it enables teachers to feel more confident in trying different options and assessing their effects on teaching.”

When teachers reflect and draw conclusions about their teaching, they develop new insights that they can apply to future planning and teaching. Reflective teaching therefore implies a more systematic process of collecting, recording and analyzing thoughts and observations of teachers, as well as those of students, in order to improvise upon the existing practices.

Pre requisites for Reflection

A responsible and sincere teacher will definitely be interested in ascertaining the work and make necessary changes to the teaching style to optimize learning. For this certain pre requisites are essential for the teacher. Dewey cited in Pollard and Tann (1993) states that reflection requires the development of requisite attitudes which include:

- a. introspection that is, engaging in thoughtful reconsideration of all that happens in a classroom with an eye toward improvement
- b. open-mindedness, that is, willing to consider new knowledge and willing to admit the possibility of difficulty
- c. willingness to accept responsibility for decisions and actions



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Case study

The present paper is the result of an action research pertaining to two teachers involved in teaching Technical English at the tertiary level of Engineering education. They are not novice teachers but hold at least a year of teaching experience.

Statement of Problem

The teachers in question exhibited the following problems:

1. **Attitudinal-** The teachers had severe attitude problems relating to self, students and colleagues. At the personal level they were under the wrong presumption that everything they do is right. For students this is a deterrent factor -they do not find classes handled by these teachers comfortable, they switch off their minds even as the teacher enters the class, and they try to make noise and deliberately do not listen to the lessons just to irritate the teacher leading to indiscipline. Colleagues in the department also found it increasingly difficult to interact due to the haughty attitude and non cooperation of the said faculty. Thus, on all three levels, things were turning out to be highly problematic.
2. **Language and Knowledge-** The teachers were of the opinion that they were perfect as far as knowledge in the subject was concerned. Any attempt made by colleagues was looked down upon as an insult. Many complaints were received from students too about the faulty use of language in class.
3. **Class control-** This was another area that suffered due to the wrong methods and attitude of these teachers. When a teacher is not strong in the subject the students become indifferent in class. In this era of knowledge explosion and information accessibility, many a time the student seems to know more than a teacher does. This should keep the teacher on the toes and keep abreast on the ramifications of any topic taught. The teachers cited were not ready to accept their



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wrong usage of language and had limited subject knowledge. This contributed to unruly behavior of students and there was no class control.

4. Evaluation

Another segment worth mentioning here is that the teachers marked students wrongly in their answer scripts. Most often they were found to award high marks undeservingly. This was a tactic used to keep the students happy.

It was all of the above problems and many more that instigated the researchers to embark on this action research to see what changes could be achieved in these teachers as a good teacher is in a position to motivate any kind of students and bring them into the fold of learning. On the contrary, bad teachers can mar the career of all students who come into contact with them.

Strategies for Reflective Teaching

Convincing these teachers that all is not well with their teaching took a great deal of time and effort. Nevertheless, though with considerable difficulty, these teachers were made to understand and realize that drastic changes were needed in their teaching and approach to students and colleagues. Once this was realized the following strategies were employed:

Self/Peer observation - These teachers were motivated to self assess in order to identify the problems themselves. Then peers and sometimes superiors also sat in their classes but only with the prior knowledge of these teachers. The observations and reflections of all three categories of teachers were pooled in and remedies were given with regard to language use, knowledge enhancement and class control.

Teacher Diary - After each lesson, the teachers recorded in a notebook all the happenings in a class. They were made to describe their own actions and reactions during the class as well as those they observed on the part of the students. This helped them to identify how certain lessons



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were very successful and certain others were not and also when, where and why student behavior was good or bad.

Brain storming and Group Discussion - This leg of the research took place in the staff room where all faculty brain stormed and had group discussions on problems faced by each teacher with regard to the syllabus, students' response, attitude and errant behavior, and tips to motivate and enhance student interaction in class.

Student feedback - Feedback provided by students also formed a basis for the senior teachers to counsel and advice these teachers. The opinions and perceptions of students added a different and valuable perspective to realize what students expect from language teachers.

The above strategies immensely contributed to creating awareness in the two teachers as to their present standing in teaching /learning process and on the areas to concentrate in order to become an effective teacher.

Benefits

This endeavour on teacher reflection resulted in a worthwhile and fruitful experience enabling these teachers to introspect by suitably analyzing, discussing, evaluating and changing their own practice and thereby to adopt an analytical approach towards teaching. Hence, the true benefits of RT as has been envisaged through this study are:

- Heighten teachers' consciousness of their ability to seek solutions to solve an existing problem
- Helping teachers to overcome their weaknesses and exploit their strengths
- Enhancing teachers' insight and promote their metacognitive awareness leading to modified classroom practices.
- Creating a planned, structured collaborative environment to trigger reflection which led to some informal joint teaching, or sharing of lessons and teaching ideas. Similar sentiments are revealed by Dewey cited in Pollard (1997), "reflective teaching,



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professional learning and personal fulfillment are enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues”

- Learning to consciously make connections with prior and existing knowledge and plan the appropriate strategy to deal with the teaching process and thereby become an effective teacher
- Empowering teachers so that decision making is enhanced to pave the way for evolving good teaching practices.
- Ultimately making teaching –learning enjoyable for both teacher and learner

Conclusion

Reflective teaching suggests that experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but experience blended with reflection can be a dynamic catalyst for teacher development. Thus reflection has been proved to assist teachers to modify their instructional repertoire, rekindle the ethical issues pertaining to classroom practices, ascertain the impact of their teaching and help them emerge as competent teachers. In other words it assisted in understanding and developing a principled basis for one’s own classroom work. Another corollary of using RT is making teachers adept at troubleshooting problems that could arise in the classrooms. It also encouraged the teachers to redefine their attitudes towards teaching and learning and helped them regenerate new feelings and new insights for self-improvement. In fact, a multi-pronged attack helped in releasing the hidden potential of these two teachers.

The present action research helped to drive home the point that the journey towards becoming a great teacher can be indubitably accomplished if teachers are encouraged to go beyond the surface realities of the classroom, reflect on their teaching as RT is a cyclical process. Once a beginning is made to implement changes, then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins again and ultimately culminates in professional development. Thus, they would not only become better teachers, but also, it would set in motion the process of thinking about



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teaching which would enable continuous professional development to take place (Brumfit, 1979).

RT turned out to be a more permanent and pervasive cure to treat the malady of a difficult teacher which, if left untreated, may have become infectious resulting in a greater catastrophe. None the less, RT helped in realizing the dramatic possibilities of a total transformation of a problematic teacher to a good teacher in the institution.

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