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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

Research on effective teaching over the past two decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris 1998). Reflective practice can be a beneficial form of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. By gaining a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

KEYWORDS

Reflective practice, professional development of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education programmes are the programmes for the professional preparation of teachers. They are not of general, academic study. Accordingly, they provide for a comprehensive coverage of professional knowledge, understanding, attitudes, interests, values and skills along with functional orientation.

The challenges before the teacher education are to be responsible to academic and social demands of society. Therefore, the steps are to be taken to make the process of teacher education more meaningful and effective. The quality concerns are tangible. Quality is not a destination is a process therefore; teacher education programmes are to be developed to ascertain its quality, in terms of its customer delight i.e., learners' satisfaction.

Professional success of every profession depends on the up-to-date professional knowledge, devotion and dedication along with efficiency and effectiveness. Advancement in technology and communication has brought about a lot of changes in the field of Education. Teaching occupies an important role in the society; therefore, there should be a sound programme of Professional Education of teachers in the country.

TEACHING OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS

Content and teaching strategies are closely inter - connected with each other. Even the best content will remain ineffective, unless, it is translated by suitable teaching strategy. A curricular programme is brought into action only through appropriate method of instruction. The use of an appropriate or particular instructional strategy may increase the effectiveness of teaching.

Learning is a process through which knowledge, skills, concepts and attitudes are to be acquired and achieved, applied and executed by the students. Hence, the teachers must possess the competent skills and also must have effective performance skills in the teaching of school subjects, where there is a mismatch in between teaching style and learning style, the learning may become adversely affected (Entwistle,1981). Hence, every teacher or teacher trainee must reflect upon their own teaching, and take up remedial steps for the betterment of teaching then only the teaching performance would improve.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflection is widely accepted as a tool for learning in the field of education. It is considered essential to professional practice. Reflection gives meaning to experience and promotes a deep approach to learning because it encourages to frame problems, question on their own assumptions and look at situations from multiple perspectives as they analyze their live experiences. Reflective process is particularly important in the field of education. It enables the student teachers to recognize their own assumptions basing on the analysis and how those assumptions and plans might influence for the enhancement of professional development. Reflection also helps the trainees to improve their skills needed to update their knowledge.

DEFINITION OF REFLECTION

Reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline (Schon, 1996). Reflective practice has also been defined in terms of action research. Action research, in turn, is defined as a tool of curriculum development, consisting of continuous feedback that targets specific problems in a particular school setting (Hopkins&Antes,1990). The teacher educator as a researcher and role model encourages students to put theories they have learned into practice in their class rooms. The students bring reports of their field experiences to class and analyse their teaching strategies with their mentors and colleagues. This collaborative model of reflective practice enriches students personal reflection on their work and provide students with suggestions from peers on how to refine their teaching practices (Syrjala,1996).Kolb defined reflection as an element of the learning cycle.

LEVELS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice is used at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. Coaching and peer involvement are two aspects of reflective practice seen most often at the pre-service level. In a 1993 study of how student teachers develop the skills necessary for reflective teaching during their field experiences, Ojanen explores the role of the teacher educator as coach. Teacher educators can most effectively coach student teachers in reflective practice by using students' personal histories, dialogue journals, and small and large-group discussions about their experiences to help students reflect upon and improve their practices.

Kettle and Sellars (1996) studied the development of third- year teaching students. They analyzed the students' reflective writings and interviewed them extensively about their reflective practices. They found that the use of peer reflective groups encouraged student teachers to challenge existing theories and their own preconceived views of teaching while modeling for them a collaborative style of professional development that would be useful throughout their teaching careers.

Serving as a coach or mentor to peers is another form of reflective practice for in-service teachers. Uzat (1998) presents coaching as a realistic and systematic approach to ongoing teacher improvement through focused reflection on teaching methods. Uzat also relates the concept of coaching to self-efficacy: Teachers' beliefs that they affect students' lives as well as the school motivate them intrinsically to grow.

INCORPORATING REFLECTION INTO PRACTICE

There are many successful techniques for investing teaching practice with reflection. Some of these have been mentioned above, including action research. Action research conducted in teacher education programs can be designed to engage the reflective participation of both pre-service and in-service teachers. Rearick (1997) describes the benefits of this activity for both groups, as well as for the teacher educator, as used in a professional development project at the University of Hartford. In this project, experienced teachers identified knowledge, thinking, and problem-solving techniques and decision-making processes they used in designing instruction for language arts curricula. Based on these discussions, a pre-service course agenda for teaching reading and writing was

developed. Students taking the course developed portfolios, conducting their own action research in the process. These students also formed a critical learning community, developed modes of inquiry, and shared their diverse ways of valuing, knowing, and experiencing.

A review of current research indicates that portfolio development has become a favorite tool used in pre-service teacher education (Antonek, et al, 1997; Hurst et al, 1998). Portfolios encourage beginning teachers to gather in one place significant artifacts representing their professional development. They assemble materials that document their competencies. Portfolios include a reflective component, for when the teacher decides which materials to include, he or she must reflect on which teaching practices worked well and why (Hurst et al, 1998). The portfolios are modified at points throughout a teacher's career, as the teacher continues to apply learning to practice.

Participation in some professional development institutes can also be a way to incorporate reflection into practice. Professional development programs need not always focus on specific teaching methods and strategies; they can also focus on teacher attitudes that affect practice. Wilhelm et al (1996) describe the curriculum of a professional development institute that offers teacher interns an opportunity to explore attitudes, develop management skills, and reflect on the ethical implications of practice in classrooms with cultural compositions vastly different from their previous experiences. By its nature, this kind of professional development institute causes teachers to step back and critically reflect not only on how they teach, but also on why they teach in a particular way.

Reflection is particularly important in the field of education. Self analysis enables the trainees to recognize the limits of their own knowledge, which facilitates additional exploration. It is this ongoing critique that leads to continuous improvement in practice and encourages a quest for life long learning. By engaging in the reflective process the student trainees may achieve many of the competencies.

Suryanarayana and Sarma (2011) conducted a study on the "Effect of Reflective process in Enhancing Instructional competency of Student teachers at Elementary Teacher Education Level". They undertook this research study basing on the Kemmis action research cyclical moments to improve the performance of the student trainees or teachers. The action research distinct moments are – Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect. The study was conducted on the Student teachers of DIET, Bheemunipatnam, Visakhapatnam. This study exclusively aimed on the planning, and execution of the lesson. The researcher collected data on the reflective process and discussed with student trainees on the observations and also collected data on the perceptions of student teachers towards instructional competencies at primary level were also analyzed and presented.

This study is crucial and important for the practitioner to understand his/her own effectiveness in the teaching dimensions. The researcher guided the trainees to record their reflections after completion of the lesson.

The student teachers were recorded their points on the days teaching, the researcher discussed and guided them for next practicing lessons. Initially the trainee teachers could not complete the task, and could not have the pace of teaching as desired. After maintaining the reflective journal and recording of points and the discussions on the issues the student teachers were recorded that -- **the planning competency, the classroom management skill, skill in communicating the items, competency in pace of teaching, participatory level of the students in the learning process, competency in improving the classroom situations, skill in observing the whole situation, and skill in observing the effectiveness in teaching-** were improved.

This process of data collections encouraged the teacher trainees to step beyond their own teaching and observed the way how children received their lessons. Through this reflective practice a unique support system emerged in between the teacher educator and the teacher trainee. The respondents revealed that this reflective process is very effective and helpful in developing their professional skills.

With regard to satisfactory level of the respondents on the reflective process 92 per cent of the trainees having high perception. The average score for this was **HIGH.

** With regard to Usefulness of reflective process at pre-service level ,92 per cent of the trainees having high perception. The average score for this was **HIGH**.

With regard to Reflective process helps the trainee in enhancing the Skill in analyzing content aspects and process aspects, 76 per cent of the trainees having high perception. The average score for this was **MODERATE.

With regard to Adoption of reflective process enhances the professional development of teacher trainees, 84 per cent of the trainees having high perception. The average score for this was **HIGH.

It was noticed that, the student teachers perceived **High** on the following in practicing the reflective process --

motivational aspects, skill in achieving the objectives, skill in developing the lesson, skill in the presentation of subject matter with activities, skill in the use of teaching learning material, giving more explanations comparatively than that of previous experiences, ability in maintaining interest in teaching, skill in observing the student participatory level in group activities and other activities, observing the timings while teaching, skill in observing more appropriate and relevant evaluative Techniques when dealing the class, skill in identifying the students who are passive and Backward in participation in activities, skill in classroom management, Maintenance of reflective journal in identifying the strengths and Weaknesses in the teaching and learning process/when dealing the class, skill in improving teaching efficiency.

- It was noticed that, the student teachers perceived **Moderate** on the following in practicing the reflective process---

usage of Language, competency in the preparation of lesson plans with appropriate proposed activities, skill in the execution of activities, skill in the execution of activities, skill in the formation of groups, skill in observance of interaction among groups, maintenance of student Teacher rapport, skill in acquiring knowledge, skill in applying the proposed and suitable activities, skill in questioning.

It was noticed that, the student teachers perceived **Average** on the following in practicing the reflective process- maintenance of student Teacher rapport

The perceptual values of student teachers towards reflective practice in instructional aspects:

1. Planning	16.6	High
2. Execution	43.3	Average
3. Observation	24.3	High
4. Skill in achieving the targets	4.3	High
5. Skill in using the previous experiences	4.3	High
6. Skill in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in maintaining the Journal	4.0	High
7. Skill in teaching efficiency	4.7	High

The above data revealed that all the areas in this scale are very useful. All the above areas fallen in the category of HIGH as per the perceptions of the student teachers, except the area execution of activities. It shows that the reflective practice helps a lot to the trainees in acquiring the instructional competencies. The trainees must be Informed about the importance of reflective practice and also in conduct of action researches on the analysis.

BENEFITS OF REFLECTION IN PRACTICE

The primary benefit of reflective practice for teachers is a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher. One of significant qualities of reflective practice puts the teacher trainees in the position of accepting more responsible for the improvement of their professional growth.

Although experience is at the core of learning in teacher education, reflection is integral to deeper learning from experience. Reflection is not mere stopping and thinking on the issue it is to view situations from many of the perspectives. The skill of the reflections not innate, it is learned over time with practice. Incorporating the reflection practice may enable the teacher trainee to more effectively attain the requisite competencies in teaching. However, reflection is an analytic skill that must be mastered as well. The teaching faculty must understand the issues which are relevant for reflection, and teach these issues effectively in making the trainees competent.

A major educational implication is that, conduct of action researches using this reflective process both at pre-service and in-service levels would enhance the competency of the teachers. Action research could be incorporated in the schools exclusively for the professional development of the staff. The teachers, HMs and other administrators must involve in the action research or reflective process when analyzing. Incorporating action research at both pre-service and in-

service levels will reinforce the valued quality of life long reflection and change in the teaching professional. The better the role of the teacher with all his/ her competencies in the class room the better will be the effectiveness of the climate of the school.

CONCLUSION

Research on effective teaching over the past two decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris 1998). Reflective practice can be a beneficial form of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. By gaining a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

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