

EFL Teachers' Notions of Using Reflective Practice as a Tool for Professional Advancement

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By exploring the male and female colleagues' perceptions of using reflective practice as a tool for professional development at my workplace, some insightful findings have come to surface and very interesting outcomes can be predicted based on some methodological research undertaken that has led to a marked improvement in the instructional deliveries for better learning outcomes

Abstract- Reflection or reflective practice is a process where teaching professionals often revisit their teaching practices as a part of the ongoing introspections and as a means of looking back at analyzing what constitutes bulk of their instructional input or the desirable learning outcomes to the best of the satisfaction of both the teachers and the learners alike.

Keywords: Instructional Input, Introspections, perceptions, Reflective Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers worldwide often tend to realize that reviewing, sharing, deliberating with colleagues to seek advice or feedback, discussing about the accomplishments or failures of the lessons raising practical and theoretical issues concerning the

efficient practices all go a long way in determining the teaching performance and the total learning and teaching experiences.

Skeptics or total deniers:

However, there is no dearth of some teacher fellows who still sound skeptical about the efficacy of effective collaborative reflection cycle through peer observation, books/article reading about effective teaching, participating in workshops/conferences, browsing the latest websites on the recent professional buzz or doing their own search activities to become better aware of learning or teaching processes.

Overenthusiastic professionals exceeding the boundaries:

Some professional enthusiasts often talk to their students to learn about their preferential style of learning, social attributes of being a recluse/sociable/outgoing/friendly/reserved/introvert/extrovert/ambivert and so on to modify and tailor the teaching style or materials best suited to each category of learners to the best of their satisfaction.

Categorizing the Catalysts:

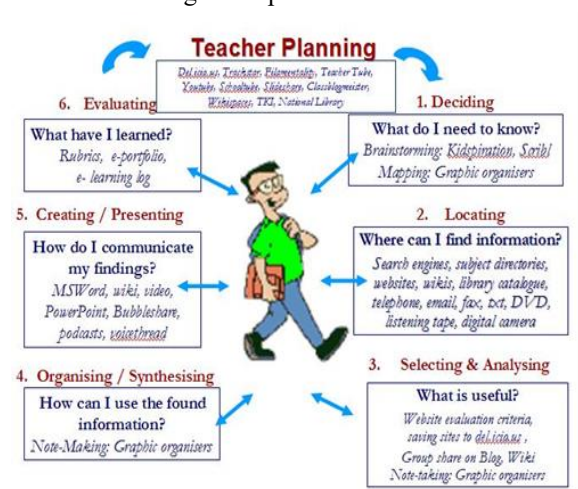
If the teacher professionals need to act as a catalyst to cater to the ever-changing needs of the learners with the twenty first century skills and life lessons, they have got to keep reflecting effecting dynamism in their teaching approaches which can be multi-pronged with far reaching positive and negative consequences in the long run. Sooner the professional practitioners come to the realization of the fact that their relevance entirely depends on their innovative and dynamic professionalism, the better for both the learning communities and the other stakeholders of the educational societies.

Key factors fostering professional growth:

A. The knowledge base for teaching, (b) pedagogical effectiveness in fostering knowledge acquisition and intellectual qualities that support continuing professional development, (c) professional development in the community of practice, and (d) the coherence of professional development work.

B. Understanding the importance of professional identity; reflecting upon the probation years as a basis for future professional development, realization of the pivotal role that practitioner research can play in continuing professional development, identifying ones' professional profile all go a long way in determining the yardstick of how much leverages one gets in their growth graph.

C. Institutional support programs like in-house training, orientations outside the institutions, joint ventures, symposiums, seminars, hands-on training and incentivization through any means whether it is financial. moral, social and cultural all contribute towards the morale boosting and self-awareness towards bettering one's professional attributes.



Having sought the opinion of around fifty male and female colleagues at my workplace through questionnaires about their beliefs and practices regarding what accounted the most and the least in fostering their growth mindset, some of the startling revelations have come to the fore:

The categories in percentages of frequency scale like every day, a few times a week or a month, a few times a year or never reflected this result:

80% believed praising students for their efforts everyday fostered a lot more motivation whereas only a small minority like 20% went for just a few times a week or month.

On the other hand, only 35% suggested that students seek help from other students on their classwork whereas 60% disagreed on that factor.

Even praising and encouraging those students who are already doing well to keep trying to improve worked wonderfully magically and around 60% of my colleagues voted for this, in apposition to only a minuscule minority opined that self-driven learner needed no further incentivization whatsoever.

Many of them drew a lot more satisfaction in encouraging their learners to adopt newer strategies when they were found to be struggling and teachers; own professional growth mind sets underwent a sea change.

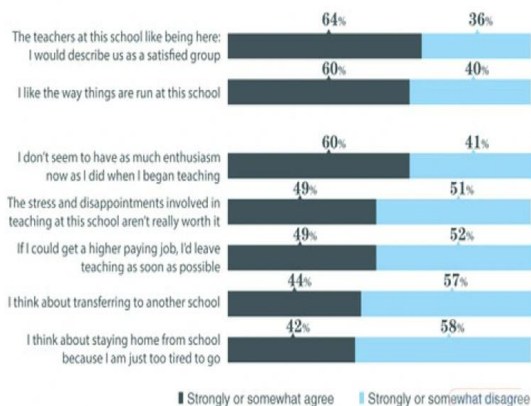
Systemic challenges for teachers:

Those teachers who would like to adapt their instruction to use technology in transformative ways—rather than for routine practices are supposed to circumvent some of the barriers like classroom management challenges, software glitches, restricted number of learning devices, lack of training, state curriculum demands, unreliable or slow internet access, insufficient support from IT staff apart from the paucity of funds.

This survey conducted clearly throws some light upon the detrimental role that teachers' own perceptions of their schools, colleagues and jobs might play in leaving them intrinsically or extrinsically motivated or demotivated towards advancing their job expertise or professional excellence.

A large majority of them would think of quiet quitting if they ever happened to get any chance of switching their jobs and the group of satisfied teachers also strongly felt the urgent necessity of some drastic changes in the working conditions and environment for optimizing their output. Some light upon the detrimental role that teachers' own perceptions of their schools, colleagues and jobs might play in leaving them intrinsically or extrinsically motivated or demotivated towards advancing their job expertise or professional excellence.

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CONCLUSION

The changing teaching environment is so dynamic that teachers' initial preparation is never inadequate to provide them with lifetime knowledge and skill sets needed for teaching regardless of its highest quality. These changes necessitate new approaches to teaching and learning, higher educational standards, which increases teachers' awareness in today's educational set up and, at the same time, challenges their role as facilitators of learning (Kankam, 2013). To stay robust and be able to adapt to these changes, teachers adequate support and opportunities to learn through participation in continuing their professional development (CPD) activities.

Teachers' voluntary participation in CPD assists in filling their knowledge gaps while they continue to develop their expertise in teaching. To Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), CPD participation changes teachers' classroom practices that consequently affect students' achievable learning goals and improved learning outcomes.

A multi-million-dollar question arises: how far does teachers' participation in CPD effect such these desirable changes?

Emerging evidences point to the facts that most CPD programs don't necessarily have their intended impact on teachers' professional development (Meissel et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2010), because the support packages of the programs do not live up to the expectations of the participating teachers' needs (Ríordáin et al., 2017; Shriki & Patkin, 2016).

The dire needs of the dissatisfied community: Teachers now need more than generalised workshops or in-service training activities that provide information and raise awareness on some aspects of

their teaching practice (Boud & Hager, 2012). Instead, teachers want practical ideas that directly relate to their classrooms' day-to-day operation and will refrain from participating in activities that do not address those needs (Guskey, 2003; Khandehroo et al., 2011). There is a far cry for designing such CPD activities that actually address teachers' specific classroom grievances to effect a far reaching positive impact on their professional practices.

Implementing CPD programs, apart from the xenial working environment, that address teachers' specific prerequisites underlies the theory of andragogy and enhances teachers' motivation for participation, and program effectiveness (Shriki & Patkin, 2016; Terehoff, 2002). Since adult learners prefer to be self-directed with some degree of ownership and responsibility for their learning (Knowles et al., 1998) the onerous task of fulfilling their dire needs rests with the teachers in the long run. For these reasons, it is imperative that designing CPD activities should hover around the estimation of the needs of their target audience. Teachers need to be encouraged to identify and express their own developmental needs, and the duties of facilitators and educators remain positive only if they try to tailor CPD programs to these needs commensurate with the ground realities.

Institutional management and educators play a key role in the provision of quality of teaching through continuous improvement. Experts of modern systematic act of supervision are of the opinion that higher levels of performance tend to rely more on the educator taking the lead by being even more responsible for his/her development (McGhee & Stark, M. D., 2021).

However, research shows that many institutions worldwide are faced with challenges of poor quality of teaching because of subjecting teachers to the ill-reputed traditional supervision and evaluation approaches associated with intimidation, fault finding, ill-treatment, criticisms, harshness and strict control (Umalusi report, 2007, p. 8 Biputh, & McKenna, 2010, p. 284) are of the opinion that such type of harsh approaches coupled with the rotten bureaucratic and dictatorial managerial structures inhibit professional advancement and continuous improvement

In the first place, one of the issues among many researchers is whether supervision and evaluation mean the same or not or whether they should be separated or not (Nolan, 2005, p. 26). Sidhu and Fook

(2010) in their study found that in Malaysia, most teachers interviewed, did not know the difference between teacher evaluation and teacher supervision. What they found happening in schools was conventional supervision (inspection) while formative (developmental) supervision was hardly practised (Sidhu & Fook (2010).

Most supervision studies agree that evaluation systems are characterised by judgemental approaches on performance while supervision devotes more attention to promoting teacher development and performance improvement by initiating commitment, inspiration, and motivation (Zepeda, 2017). This view gives a basic background of how this study *pursues* the self-directed supervision process as compared to the IQMS self-valuation process Manual, 2003). Self-evaluation is one of the performance evaluation processes applied during the IQMS implementation process.

Instead of the entire teaching community being subjected to the hackneyed evaluation and assessment system through supervision, there is a greater need for the professional practitioners to keep introspecting through self-reflective practices like keeping a journal, hobnobbing with the esteemed colleagues, taking cues from the senior fellows by attending their in class proceedings, feedback and counselling from the peers ,joining any mentoring program ,attending seminars and symposiums, in-house training programs, the practical demonstration classes through peer observation and many more teacher-friendly exercises to hone their professional skills.

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