



Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (PCET)

Title: An academic critique of current thinking in relation to the use of reflective practice in teaching and learning.

Module: PROFESSIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE [ECPT 6002 & 7002]

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20/05/2019

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Reflective Practice and Critical Reflection

Abstract

The goal of this essay is to investigate the reflective practices that are most likely to impact upon my professional practice in the future. I will look at the basics of reflective practice in detail and at the research behind reflective practice, discussing the benefits and exploring some practical examples.

Introduction

Teachers play a significant role in shaping the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning practices. Research has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris, 1998). The professional development of teachers takes many forms ranging from activities set by school administration to personal reflective practices about classroom experiences. Schon (1996) defined reflective practice as thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline. For teaching, reflective practice refers to the process of the teacher studying his or her own teaching methods and determining what works best for the students. Thus, teachers' reflective practices are necessary in order to teach 'effectively' and they address an important issue in providing meaningful lessons to students. Elementary teachers as well as teachers of other grades can be supported to be involved in reflective practices on their own experiences.

What is reflective practice?

It could be argued that all educators engage in some form of reflective practice when thinking about planning and assessment. What is not clear is whether teachers are finding time to reflect deeply – to think deliberately and purposefully about the learning they facilitate. With time a precious commodity and new technology an ever-increasingly available tool, teachers are potentially seconds away from a wealth of intelligence that stretches far beyond the walls of the classroom. By highlighting the limitations of traditional theories around reflective practice, it is possible to consider the benefits offered by new technologies. Social media can give educators access to what is perhaps the widest and most responsive support network that teaching has seen to date.

The process of reflection is a cycle which needs to be repeated.

1. Teach
2. Self-assess the effect your teaching has had on learning
3. Consider new ways of teaching which can improve the quality of learning
4. Try these ideas in practice
5. Repeat the process

Reflective practice is 'learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice' (Finlay, 2008).

Reflection is a systematic reviewing process for all teachers which allows them to make links from one experience to the next, making sure the students make maximum progress.

Practice-based training

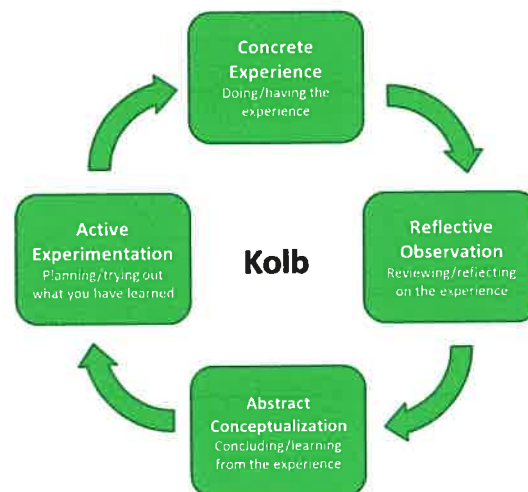
Practice-based training is becoming a popular option for trainee teachers. Schon (1992, p. 125) believed that developing the skill of reflection-in-action is a crucial component of 'the artistry of competent practitioners. It is possible that this method of training best prepares

students, giving them additional practical experiences on which they can draw for reflection. However, the Carter Review (Carter , 2015) acknowledges the importance of supporting teaching as an evidence-based profession, which arguably relies on academic study time. While it has been suggested that social media is not conducive to academic study (Mahrt et al., 2014), others argue that it has the ability to empower individuals through its offering of collective intelligence (Gee , 2004). Mahrt et al. (2014) discuss the tendencies for academics to share open-access research and resources through Twitter and note the speed with which new papers are circulated.

Although trainees may gain extensive practical knowledge (Schon, 1983) through work-based training, they may lack the opportunities afforded to university-based students to collaborate with peers and professionals

Kolb's learning cycle

David Kolb, educational researcher, developed a four-stage reflective model. Kolb's Learning Cycle (1984) highlights reflective practice as a tool to gain conclusions and ideas from an experience. The aim is to take the learning into new experiences, completing the cycle. Kolb's cycle follows four stages.



1. First, practitioners have a concrete experience. This means experiencing something new for the first time in the classroom. The experience should be an active one, used to test out new ideas and teaching methods.

This is followed by...

2. Observation of the concrete experience, then reflecting on the experience. Here practitioners should consider the strengths of the experience and areas of development. Practitioners need to form an understanding of what helped students' learning and what hindered it.

This should lead to...

3. The formation of abstract concepts. The practitioner needs to make sense of what has happened. They should do this through making links between what they have done, what they already know and what they need to learn. The practitioner should draw on ideas from research and textbooks to help support development and understanding. They can also draw on support from other colleagues and from their own previous knowledge. Practitioners should modify their ideas or devise new approaches based on what they have learned from their observations and wider research.

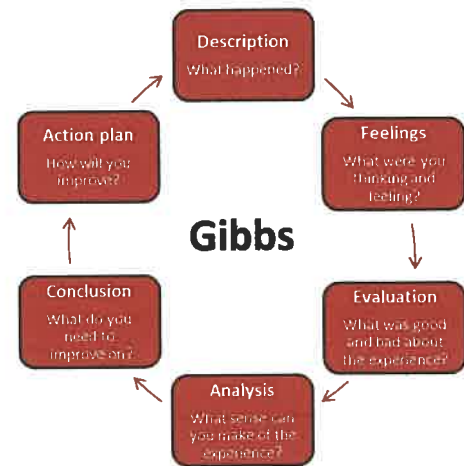
The final stage of this cycle is when...

4. The practitioner considers how they are going to put what they have learned into practice. The practitioner's abstract concepts are made concrete by testing ideas in future situations, resulting in new experiences. The ideas from the observations and conceptualisations are made into active experimentation as they are implemented into future teaching. The cycle is then repeated on this new method.

Kolb's model aims to draw on the importance of using both our own everyday experiences and educational research to help us improve. It is not simply enough to reflect. This reflection must drive a change which is rooted in educational research.

Gibbs' reflective cycle

The theoretical approach of reflection as a cyclical model was further developed by Gibbs (1998). This model is based on a six-stage approach, leading from a description of the experience through to conclusions and considerations for future events. While most of the core principles are similar to Kolb's, Gibbs' model is broken down further to encourage the teacher to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings.



Gibbs' model is an effective tool to help reflection after the experience and is a useful model for those who are new to reflection as it is broken down into clearly defined sections.

1. Description

In this section, the practitioner should clearly outline the experience. This needs to be a factual account of what happened in the classroom. It should not be analytical at this stage.

2. Feelings

This section encourages the practitioner to explore any thoughts or feelings at the time of the event. Here the practitioner should explain feelings and give examples which directly reference the teaching experience. It is important that the practitioner is honest with how they feel, even if these feelings might be negative. Only after the feelings have been identified can the practitioner implement strategies to overcome these barriers.

3. Evaluation

The evaluation section gives the opportunity for the practitioner to discuss what

went well and analyse practice. It is also important to consider areas needed for development and things that did not work out as initially planned. This evaluation should consider both the practitioner's learning and the students' learning.

4. Analysis

In this section the practitioner makes sense of the experience. They consider what might have helped the learning or hindered it. It is in this stage that the practitioner refers to any relevant literature or research to help make sense of the experience. For example, if it was felt that the instructions given to students were not clear, educational research on how to communicate effectively can be accessed.

5. Conclusion

At this stage, the practitioner draws all the ideas together. They should now understand what they need to improve on and have some ideas on how to do this based on their wider research.

6. Action plan

During this final stage, the practitioner sums up all previous elements of this cycle. They create a step-by-step plan for the new learning experience. The practitioner identifies what they will keep, what they will develop and what they will do differently. The action plan might also outline the next steps needed to overcome any barriers, for example enrolling on a course or observing another colleague.

In Gibbs' model the first three sections are concerned with what happened. The final three sections relate to making sense of the experience and how you, as the teacher, can improve on the situation.

Reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'

Another approach to reflection is the work by Schön. Schön (1991) distinguishes between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

Reflection-in-action is reflection during the 'doing' stage (that is, reflecting on the incident

while it can still benefit the learning). This is carried out during the lesson rather than reflecting on how you would do things differently in the future. This is an extremely efficient method of reflection as it allows you to react and change an event at the time it happens. For example, in the classroom you may be teaching a topic which you can see the students are not understanding. Your reflection-in-action allows you to understand why this has happened and how to respond to overcome this situation.

Reflection-in-action allows you to deal with surprising incidents that may happen in a learning environment. It allows you to be responsible and resourceful, drawing on your own knowledge and allowing you to apply it to new experiences. It also allows for personalised learning as, rather than using preconceived ideas about what you should do in a particular situation, you decide what works best at that time for that unique experience and student.

Reflection-on-action on the other hand involves reflecting on how practice can be developed after the lesson has been taught. Schön recognises the importance of reflecting back 'in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome' (Schön, 1983).

Reflection-on-action means reflecting after the event on how knowledge of previous teaching sessions may have directed you to the experience you had.

Reflection in action

- Reflecting as something happens
- Consider the situation
 - Decide how to act
 - Act immediately

Reflection on action

- Reflecting after something happens
- Reconsider the situation
 - Think about what needs changing for the future

Reflection-on-action should encourage ideas on what needs to change for the future.

Reflection-on-action is carried out outside the classroom, when the situation is considered again. This requires deeper thought, for example, why the students did not understand the topic. It encourages you to consider causes and options, which should be informed by a wider network of understanding from research.

By following any of the above models of reflection, you will have a questioning approach to teaching. You will consider why things are as they are, and how they could be. You will consider the strengths and areas of development in your own practice, questioning why learning experiences might be this way and considering how to develop them. As a result, what you do in the classroom will be carefully planned, informed by research and previous experience, and focused with logical reasons. All of these models stress the importance of repeating the cycle to make sure knowledge is secure and progression is continued.

Conclusion

This essay has introduced the idea of critical reflection as a tool to help synthesise the contradictions and complexities of teaching. It has explored the differences between critical analysis, critical thinking and critical reflection before considering how to ensure that reflection leads to effective learning. The learning process depends on how the person is carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation. It has introduced a number of models of reflection to help structure practice and discussed how to evaluate the effectiveness of reflecting (and therefore learning). It is also used in relation to adult learning and development, knowing the team's learning style and allowing more effective growth and development, building skills and experience to meet life goals. Reflection is the process of reflecting on your experience in order to learn from that experience. (Farrell, 2008; Jay & Johnson, 2002). Teachers can engage in these reflective practices in a constructivist manner at any time they need to develop themselves.

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