

# Reflective Practitioner: Connotation, Procedures and Methods

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## Abstract

At present, reflective teacher education has become an international trend in the development of teacher education, as well as a need and direction for the reform of teacher education in China. Becoming a reflective practitioner has gradually become a consensus orientation for the role of teachers. Reflection is an important mechanism for teachers' self-development, and it is also vital for teachers to improve their professionalism. This paper analyzes the connotation of reflective practitioner and ways to develop reflective skills, demonstrates the principles that teachers should follow in reflection, the five procedures of reflective teaching and the reflective methods in teaching through journal, questionnaire, observation, video and audio. This essay made an effort to draw a conclusion that reflective teachers need to actively participate in a series of teaching activities related to students' growth, and strive to reflect the dual role of teachers, which contributes to reflective practitioners' self-development.

## Keywords

Reflective teacher, Reflective practitioner, Teachers' self-development.

## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, reflective teaching was introduced into China from the West as a modern educational and pedagogical trend, which aroused the attention and research interest of the majority of educators in China [1]. In recent years, the voice of the education sector on the professional development of teachers is getting higher and higher, coupled with the influence of cognitive psychology and post-modernist philosophy on education, the research on reflective teachers in countries around the world is gaining more and more attention, which indicates that reflection can play a great role in promoting and facilitating the professional development and professionalization of teachers. How to become a "reflective practitioner" is increasingly becoming a top priority in the process of teachers' professional development. From the perspective of teacher professional development, reflection is both an important part of the professional quality structure of teachers and an important way to promote their professional development.

With the continuous development of society, the internal and external environments of educational activities have undergone significant changes, and the development of the teaching profession is facing many challenges, so that the "general competence" of traditional teachers cannot adapt to the changing environment of modern teaching. Only through reflection can the value of teachers' teaching experience be enhanced. Therefore, a series of questions about the professional development of teachers, such as how to become a reflective teacher, have increasingly become the focus of attention in all sectors of society.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Reflective Practice

The first scholar to propose the concept of reflective practice was Schön, who pointed out that the so-called reflection is when people have doubts, questions or interest in a certain action, they will ask questions, and then think about them and solve them during or after the action, so as to be able to understand the action more deeply. He advocated replacing the old “technical practice” based on “rational use of science and technology” with “reflective practice” based on the principle of “introspection of the process of activity”. [2]

### 2.2. Reflective Teacher

Reflective teacher, also known as “critical reflective teacher”, refers to an educational leader who has profound knowledge and thinking on educational thought and theory, comprehensive understanding and judgement on the system of radical education and educational practice, unique vision and aesthetic value on educational goals, educational means and educational content, who is able to construct new educational theories and ideas with his own systematic concepts, and who is able to improve and courageously reform the goals of education, educational content and educational means.

### 2.3. Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development generally refers to all activities aimed at developing the professional knowledge, skills and other professional qualities that teachers need. In terms of time, it takes place throughout a teacher's career, including the stages of pre-service cultivation, inductive education and in-service training; in terms of content, it includes formal programme and individual learning and reflection. In other words, the professional development of a teacher is a process of continuous learning and research throughout the pre-service teacher training stage, the in-service teacher stage, and up to the point of retirement from teaching, in which the teacher must continue to develop his or her professional connotations and gradually move towards the realm of professional maturity.

### 2.4. Previous Studies on Reflective Practitioner Aboard

The Reflective Teacher Education (RTE) movement, which emerged on the North American continent in the 1980s, has grown rapidly and had a far-reaching impact, gaining acceptance in most countries around the world and rapidly becoming an international trend. In the field of teacher education worldwide, slogans such as “reflection”, “reflective teaching”, “reflective practice”, “reflective teacher”, etc. are all over the world. Therefore, it can be said that “reflection” has become a breakthrough in the reform of teacher education. Tracing back to the origin, the early research on reflection is the British J. Locke and B. Spinoza, both of whom have had a detailed exposition of reflection (J. Locke & B. Spinoza, 1690). But most of the experts and scholars engaged in the study of the reflective teacher are likely to push Dewey as its originator, believing that he is the first person to make a systematic discussion of the problem of reflection. Dewey was the first to regard teachers as reflective practitioners, as professionals who can play an active role in curriculum development and educational reform. In his works such as *How We Think*, Dewey elaborated more systematically on theories about reflective thinking and its relationship to schooling and teacher development (J. Dewey, 1933).

Foreign researches on teacher reflection were relatively early and had a high starting point. American scholar Schön proposed to break through the traditional model of technical rationality, and he reconstructed teacher education, and for the first time put forward and discussed the concept of “teacher's personal practice theory” in the field of teacher education (Schön, 1983); Norwegian teacher research experts Handal and Lauvas put forward the system of teacher practice theory (Handal & Lauvas, 1987); American scholars Brookfield

raised the concept of teacher reflection from his own experience and students' teaching practice as the basis of his research. And he put forward four ways of training reflective teachers from teachers' own experience, students' perspectives, co-operation with colleagues and learning of educational theories (Brookfield,1980).

## 2.5. Previous Studies on Reflective Practitioner at Home

Most of authoritative domestic research works on reflective practitioner were translated from abroad. Xiong Chuanwu(1999) elaborated in detail the three interrelated aspects of the rationality of reflective teaching: the subject of teaching, the purpose of teaching, and the tools of teaching, and described the complete process of teachers engaging in reflective teaching; Ma Ying(2003) believed that reflective teaching is a process in which the subject of the teacher reflects on a certain object through a certain reflective practice to achieve the process of promoting the development of the teaching practice and realizing the purpose of education. And a reflective teacher is a teacher who frequently and continuously reflects on himself, thinks deeply about all aspects of teaching and learning, promotes independent professional development, and constantly improves his professional level. Shen Jiliang (2006) clarified the importance of reflection from the perspective of teachers' in-service training. He believed that teachers' post-service education should be centred on cultivating teachers' reflective skills and encouraging them to carry out action research, and discussed in detail the relationship between teaching reflection and action research, arguing that teachers' mastery of the process and practice of action research is tantamount to finding a key to success for teachers' self-determined development; so that reflection is a kind of in-service education, and not only that, it also runs through the lifelong education of teachers as a profession (Wu Jihong, 2003).

In summary, the shortcomings of foreign research on the theory of reflective practitioner education are often the strengths of domestic research; and vice versa. Around the proposition of reflective teacher education, there exists a huge space for interaction and complementary between Chinese and foreign teacher education theories, and it is entirely possible that in the future there will be a reciprocal movement based on equal dialogue.

## 3. Reflective Procedures in Teaching

Bartlett, who considered 'reflective teaching' as a means of improving classroom practice, depicted reflective teaching as a cyclical process involving five procedures: mapping, informing, contesting, appraisal and acting [3].

### 3.1. Mapping

Mapping involves observing teaching practices and collecting footage of teaching for recall. The best way to observe is to record each step of the practice, which can be achieved by coming to audio and video recordings, but also through journals and classroom reports. In the process of keeping a journal, we not only begin to observe, but also to reflect on our practice, and this reflective phase focuses on description (Bartlett,1990). It is also important to be as detailed as possible in the description of a lesson. It is at this stage that we can gain first-hand information that can be used to interpret classroom events.

### 3.2. Informing

After mapping of teaching, the meaning behind the teaching journals needs to be explored. This stage emphasizes the principles of teaching and finding the reasons why this can be used as a theoretical basis for teaching. By referring to extensive notes, audio or video recordings, the teacher can find information about the events taking place in the classroom. The teacher's task is to differentiate between everyday teaching and conscious teaching behaviour. Teachers should ask themselves "what" and "why" questions during the reflection process in order to

reveal the principles behind the actions and to analyse them. This step can be done by the teacher alone or with the help of an observing teacher. Since this stage is done consciously, teachers should reflect as much as possible.

### 3.3. Contesting

Contesting involves searching for inconsistencies and contradictions in what we do and how we think. By reflecting on and contesting ideas that are uncertain, or even “unquestionable”, teachers explore the reasons for inconsistencies and contradictions between pedagogical assumptions and actual behaviors. At this stage, teachers need to investigate solutions to the inconsistencies. New understandings or beliefs may emerge from the debate that can be used to address teachers’ concerns about teaching and learning. Teachers can dispel doubts by sharing their understanding of teaching in a particular way with colleagues.

### 3.4. Appraisal

Contesting teaching practices will lead to a process of finding alternative courses of action. Appraisal is the process of evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher's teaching and the extent to which it has achieved its objectives through systematic testing and evaluation of the teacher's teaching and learning on the basis of certain teaching objectives and normative standards, and making value judgments with a view to improvement. The appraisal stage links the reflective dimension of thinking to the search for ways of teaching that are consistent with new understandings, that is, teachers look for changes and better ways of teaching that are consistent with their new beliefs.

### 3.5. Acting

Acting means that the teacher tries out the new ideas generated in the previous stage in the subsequent teaching practice, which means that the ideas shall be put into practice. In this stage, the main concern is what and how the teacher teaches in the classroom, focusing on content and pedagogy.

In the Reflective Teaching Cycle, chronologically, acting is located in the last stage of the reflective teaching process, but it is not really the last stage, as it can be the basis for the next mapping, and there is an ongoing dialectical relationship between these five procedures.

## 4. Reflective Methods in Teaching

Every event in the classroom can be the basis for critical reflection, such as a certain teaching activity, gestures, classroom instructions, students’ replies and expressions, etc. All these classroom events can be the materials for teachers’ self-reflection. However, sometimes teachers are unable to utilize these classroom events appropriately, resulting in the inability to reflect on teaching and learning successfully. Therefore, teachers can adopt some common classroom techniques to facilitate more efficient reflection on teaching and learning, such as reflective journals, questionnaires, observations, videos, audios, and so on, according to their needs. These classroom techniques have both strengths and limitations, and the choice of classroom technique depends on the specific teaching situation and the teacher's purpose.

### 4.1. Journal

For effective experience and reflection, teachers can reflect on their teaching by keeping a reflective journal, a reflective strategy advocated by numerous scholars. And in order to keep a good reflective journal, it is important to first identify what should be recorded. A journal can record your thoughts about the lesson of the day, reflecting on parts of interest (e.g. What went well? What could I do to make this lesson different? How could I revise my presentation of the language in the future? Were there any problems and did I deal with them effectively? It is possible to note down both successes or shortcomings, inspirations and flash points in teaching;

as well as students' feelings and insights in teaching. For example, in the lesson of unit 4 A night the earth didn't sleep, after completing the reading lesson, the teacher can record the students' expressions and reactions in her journal after watching the videos and pictures related to the earthquake and their opinions about the earthquake. These instructional videos were used as an introduction to the reading to stimulate students' prior knowledge of other natural disasters, such as earthquakes, and to learn about evacuation. For some of the questions presented in the reading, teachers can write down students' responses in their journals. If students are unable to answer or answer incorrectly, they should reflect on whether the questions were asked in the wrong way resulting in a lack of understanding or if the students did not read the text carefully. The diary should be written down to reflect on the many problems and the corresponding solution strategies to promote the professional development of teachers.

#### **4.2. Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is a tool used in social research to collect information, a series of questions designed to gather information about people's attitudes, values, opinions or beliefs about a particular issue. Teachers can download authoritative questionnaires designed by experts from the Internet and make necessary adjustments to suit the situation. For example, the questionnaire for pupils in Grade 6 should take into account the literacy level of the students and should not be chosen in full English, as well as the questionnaire should follow the principle of favoring more objective questions and fewer subjective questions, so as to obtain effective questionnaire information from the lower grades. Teachers can use different questionnaires to reflect on students' attitudes towards English learning, the difficulties they encounter in learning, their favourite teachers and their opinions about them, and the strategies they adopt when reading in English. Through the questionnaires, teachers can quickly obtain relevant information about students, reflect on themselves, think about what causes a certain teaching phenomenon, and promote better teaching and learning.

#### **4.3. Observation**

Classroom observation is nowadays one of the most common ways for teachers on their way to professional development to enhance the effectiveness of post-lesson reflection through feedback from others. Classroom observation refers to inviting other teachers to observe your lesson. These teachers can be senior and outstanding teachers or colleagues of similar age to you. The invited teachers can observe the overall teaching effectiveness of a lesson, or some designated teaching parts, such as body posture, gesture, questioning style, classroom management, and so on. Through the observation of other teachers, and then communicate with them after the class, novice teachers can find out a lot of trivial problems in teaching, which they usually overlooked. After learning about these problems, it is important to accept the mistakes with an open mind and pay attention to them in the subsequent classroom to avoid making mistakes again.

#### **4.4. Video/Audio**

While a reflective journal can provide valuable insights, it cannot capture the moment-by-moment process of teaching and learning. Many things may be happening simultaneously in the classroom that cannot be accurately recalled. Video recordings of lessons can be analyzed in depth. The same video can be used for multiple purposes and to assess various aspects of instruction. For example, it is used to collect gestures used or overused by the teacher, the teacher's classroom language, the facial expressions of the teacher and students, and the state of the students in the classroom.

Similar to video, audio recorded in the classroom can provide a detailed record of every moment of instruction and can be reused to focus on different aspects. Since audio recording does not provide a visual picture, it can focus on assessing elements of the teacher's voice. For



example, the voice, speed of speech, intonation, and time spent on a particular point of instruction while teaching.

When teachers reflect on their teaching, they can play back the audio and video repeatedly to find out the weaknesses in the classroom and correct them. However, it is important to note that whether it is audio or video, students' consent should be sought before recording.

Take the author's personal micro-gram teaching training as an example: on 30 June 2022, the author conducted a reading lesson in response to the course requirements, the class type was a reading lesson, selected from the PEP version of the English Compulsory 3 Unit 5 A Trip on the True North, and the video was 10 minutes in length, including the three parts of the reading lesson, namely, pre-reading, during the reading, and post-reading. After recording the lesson, I watched and reflected on the teaching video repeatedly and found the following problems:

Firstly, pronunciation. Because the author's English pronunciation was not very good, and the lesson required teacher to speak in English all the time. However, I encountered some English expressions that can't be understood in the middle of the lesson, which led to a pause in teaching for several seconds, and it was only after the reminding of a student so that the expression was correctly stated; and the speed of speech was sometimes fast and sometimes slow, which made it difficult to control the pace.

Second, the style of clothes. The dress was casual in the lesson, but next time it would be better to wear a formal clothes. Because it was the first time to record the lesson, I was nervous, and my expression and movement were not too natural.

Third, writing. The whole class was based on oral presentation, and lacked the necessary content of the blackboard, which led to students' doubt on some sentences in this passage.

Fourth, questioning. This reading class has prepared too many questions, leaving less time for students to think, which was not conducive to the development of students' thinking quality.

Fifth, the design of slide, there were too many pictures and too little text in the slide. The lack of necessary explanations was not conducive to students' understanding.

After discovering the above problems, the author actively conducted self-reflection, exchanged ideas with classmates and teachers, and made corrections in the next lesson on 1 July, which gained the encouragement and praise from teachers and classmates.

#### **4.5. Action Research**

Action research is a self-reflective form of enquiry. In teaching, teachers find the root of problems by systematically observing, analyzing and reflecting on the problems they find in teaching or the problems they urgently want to solve; and then they design and implement action plans to solve problems, improve practice, reconstruct their understanding of their own teaching and promote professional development. Wang Qiang(2002) pointed out through her research that the four core concepts of action research are inquiry, reflection, action and reconstruction[4]. English teachers can invite professional teachers in the school or even famous teachers in society to participate in action research with cooperation in order to promote teaching practice and push teaching to a new level.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Reflective teaching refers to teachers' recognition and rethinking of their teaching practice, and as a way to summarize experiences and further improve their teaching. Reflective teaching strongly promotes the improvement of teachers' quality and their self-development. Therefore, the purpose of teacher education is to cultivate teachers' conscious teaching awareness and improve their comprehensive quality. Reflective teaching is regarded as a mark of excellence in teaching, and reflective practitioners are regarded as ideal teachers, and many teachers take it as a fashion and a lifelong goal to become reflective practitioners.

Through reflection, teachers can analyse, regulate, reorganize and improve all aspects of teaching and learning. Once teachers develop a consistent and conscious habit of reflection, they become masters of their own professional development. In a word, reflective teachers need to actively participate in a series of teaching activities related to students' growth, and strive to reflect the dual role of teachers. Teachers should take the initiative and often take themselves as the main subject of reflection, and reflect on their own teaching beliefs, teaching behaviors and teaching effects based on students' behavioral performance and learning effects, so as to refresh themselves and gradually form their own independent thinking on teaching phenomena and problems. It is important to reflect on your own teaching beliefs, teaching behaviour and teaching results based on students' learning behaviour and learning results, so that they can be constantly updated, gradually form your own independent thinking and creative insights on teaching phenomena and teaching problems, and improve the autonomy and purposefulness of teaching. As a result, teachers' existing teaching experience can be constantly refined and perfected, ultimately contributing to the growth of students and teachers.

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