

Reflection and teachers' attitudes towards peer observation practice

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to determine the attitudes of practitioner teachers towards one of the methods of reflective approach- peer observation. In addition, the article determines how mentored educator benefits from the collaborative work. It is qualitative research paper. An action research was involved in the study. The interview with open-ended questions and the experiment were conducted in order to gain the information which can be interesting for the experienced and novice teachers who look for the professional growth. The results reveal the interesting facts related to the personality Georgians.

Key words: Georgia, reflection, observation, collaborative work, interview, reflection-in action, reflection-on-action, practitioner teacher

1. Introduction

There are several apposite assumptions about the use of reflective practice. Among these theories are those which are asserted by Dewey, Schon, etc. The determination often related to a teacher is that of a reflective practitioner. Reflective thinking is an idea initially proposed by Dewey at the beginning of the XX century and it was advanced later on by Schon who expanded the purview of Dewey's thoughts by bringing up a topic of reflective practice. Dewey was the pioneer who formulated the model describing reflection (he thought that its main function was to ensure the improvement of a person and a society where he/she exists). According to him reflection imitated the scientific approach by the different aspects:

- a) examination of an experience and explanation of it;
- b) framing the questions detected in a particular experience and credible answers;
- c) composing and checking of theories.

The promptness to move through these phases relies on maturity (it is obvious that an experienced teacher will be faster at testing hypotheses than an amateur). For detection if a way of thinking is relevant it has to be shared among a society. Dewey considered that working in groups could bring the truth to individual hypotheses and the sense of broad view (this is an essential circumstance of personal growth because it is vivid that without responses from other people how someone can be sure if what it is understood in a particular way, may have various points? Response is a basic component of our society and a person may enhance considerably from them if he is willing to listen to other people's opinions.) When a problem is specified in the correct way it is manageable to state out different solutions. In order to justify and improve the hypotheses it needs to be tested. Some years later other writers started proposing about reflection and developing Dewey's ideas. Schon, for example, stated that learning from experience could be divided in two parts:

1. reflection-in-action
2. reflection-on-action.

Reflection-on-action involves a continuous investigation of professional activity or performance after a task is done. On the contrary, reflection that is planned, organized, and systematic in nature, reflection-in-action occurs during the activity and often results in the immediate reframing of a classroom situation or action. Reframing is the product of an unexpected flash of knowledge or understanding that enables a teacher to think and act differently and more productively.

"Being able to reflect on your practice is crucial as it is the only way to improve your practice and to adapt to the diverse nature of your students." (Petty, 2004, p.480)

"If a teacher never questions the goals and values that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then it is our belief that this individual is not engaged in reflective teaching." (Zeichner and Liston, 1996, p.1)

With help of reflection both amateur and mature teachers can examine what happened in the classroom as well as why it happened. It's increasing teacher's professionalism and maturity. I think individuals need to be open to advices from more experienced peers. Collaborative work enables colleagues to share the experience, solve the existed problems, etc. Workshops, peer mentoring, classroom observation all this methods are involved in reflective practice.

As it was written above I'd like to discuss the issues about the classroom observation and giving feedback. My research topic is reflective teaching, where I discuss various models of reflective teaching approach. Nowadays I have taken over the focus group. But the details are going to be revealed in the next part of the article.

So, what is a classroom observation? According to Bailey a classroom observation is deliberate investigation of teaching and/or learning experience through the regular procedure of data collection and analysis. Classroom observation was also assigned as a process by which the spectator attends one or more lessons, puts down the educator's teaching performance and learners' behavior, and later contacts with the teacher to exchange the views about the observations. Consequently, it is a collaborative process. Both, the educator being under the observation and the observer have important roles before, during, and after the observation procedure. Cooperation at each stage of the procedure can assist both participators enhance from the experience. The major intent behind the classroom observation is to admit a teacher to receive a response from an impartial, knowledgeable observer and to include in particular-situation conversation about teaching with an instructor.

2. Methods

It is qualitative and action research paper. I'm interested in collaborative peer work which involves the observation experience. In order to present the valuable information I have tried to answer two important research questions:

1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards the observation process?
2. Do the teachers who are engaged in observation benefit from this reflective method?

To answer these two crucial questions interview was conducted and a special focus group was taken over.

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The interview was divided in two parts. The first section determined the beliefs and assumptions towards the concrete type of reflection. The second section of the interview was fulfilled by the teacher who is under the systematic observation. For the interview five participant teachers of English language department were chosen from Chaglar Nikoloz Tsereteli International School.

Observation is done over the special focus group. English language teacher of Chaglar Nikoloz Tsereteli International School, Irma Gavashelishvili is still under the examination. She expressed her willingness to contribute to this research study. Observation continues up to the present days. Every week I attend her English language lesson during one hour and afterwards we discuss the educative process, what was done in a bad or a good way, what can be done for improvement, etc.

3. Results

Interview's first part contains several open-ended questions.

Question 1: Do you and how do you reflect on your teaching process? – informed me with following information:

Almost all the participant teachers agreed that they are engaged in self-evaluative approach. But this approach is neither written nor oral. They try to answer to the occasional problems by keeping them in their minds and thinking about the best solutions. Occasionally, like twice in a week, English language teachers attend the workshops where they discuss some crucial issues. Irma Gavashelishvili commented that it would be better if instead of being under the observation she would keep the diary with different criteria, but unfortunately journal writing needs a lot of time and contribution to such work would be impossible for her, considering the fact that nowadays she has to carry out 29 lessons per week.

Question 2: Have you ever been under the observation? - revealed the fact that none of the participants has ever been under the observation. They all have noted that sometimes when there are open-lesson at school, the spectator colleagues just attend their lessons. Peer teachers do not comment or criticize their work. So there is no feedback. One of the participants mentioned about the probationer student teachers who just sit on her lessons and observe the session.

Question 3: How do you feel when your colleagues observe you? – Some of interviewed teachers answered that they do not feel anxious because they believe that what they do isn't wrong. They told me that if someone attended their lessons, nothing special would happen. It was interesting for me how would they response to the question - Would you accept the advices and criticism related to your teaching? One of the teachers replied that generally the society doesn't show the willingness of meeting the changes. Georgians do not accept the novelties easily and prefer to take a long way in order to improve something.

I think, and what I have seen in other schools is that there is always a fear of job loss. That's why teachers do not share their ideas and prefer to work by their own. There isn't the strong collaboration between colleagues and the "healthy" competition doesn't exist. The school management system should encourage the practitioner teachers develop and feel free to take risks. Reflection practice shows that there should be endless exploration, development of our work. As I have mentioned before it is vivid that without responses from other people how someone can be sure if what it is understood in a particular way, may have various angles? In order to meet the students' needs teachers should reformulate their own methods and later on teaching will become more comfortable and less anxiety will disturb the educators. Also learners' parents play a big role in education system. May be school administration sets you free and do not bounds you to the specific approaches, but parents affect on your lessons.

Question 4: Would you accept the advices and criticism related to your teaching? - I was interested whether the age would have some impacts over the observer teacher and the teacher who would be observed. And the answer was close

to my predictions. One of the interviewee after a short silent brake answered that she would accept an advice from younger teacher, if she admitted it as an acceptable. It means that for the people who are more matured it is difficult to accept the advice or criticism from the one who is younger.

The second part of interview was just for a teacher, Irma Gavashelishvili who participates in an experiment organized for qualitative research work. It consists of following questions:

2.1 How do you feel, is your professional work enhanced after being observed during several weeks?

2.2 Do you think there is a tension in a class when observer attends your lesson?

2.3 Would you like to continue participation in the action research?

2.4 What do you think is self-observation enough for the professional growth?

This part of an interview made it clear that being reflective teacher depends on personality. Not all the teachers are introverts. Irma Gavashelishvili recalled the time when she first came to school, how she was troubled and needed help from the experienced teachers. She was pleased hearing that somebody would attend her lessons and help with occurring problems. She said that there is no tension among the students, they are more mobilized and try their best. She doesn't try to show off herself and remains as she is. If an observer has got some recommendations she follows them. The interviewee was asked whether she was willing to continue participation in an action research. She agreed and even was interested in videotaping of her lesson. She has mentioned that just self-evaluation is not enough for professional growth. Taking risks and changing teaching methods should be done purposefully. And she would recommend her colleagues to engage in cooperative reflective approaches.

4. Conclusion

Professionalism can be understood in various ways because each person will always have to face standards decided in advance forming him more "Experienced" in what he is performing. An educator should be a reflective practitioner. Most of people think that reflection is advanced automatically on a daily basis without an appropriate set of standards. Those who are open-minded and are open to advices can be improved at what they are performing. Eagerness and inspiration have got major role in the growth of a person. Without inspiration work becomes automatic. Eagerness should guide a person to examine of new ideas in order to confirm their validity alternatively of working out assumption formed only on prior experiences.

Classroom observation should be appointed at improvement and professional growth of the teacher rather than terrorizing them. It is important to indicate that the mentor's role is to examine different issues with the practitioner teacher in such way that they have the opportunity to reflect by themselves. Teachers should know that any type of reflection model is done not for scrutinizing but for evaluation of aims, beliefs. Collaboration and peer works are essential for professional development. Experience really matters, that's why matured teachers can help the amateurs. Practitioner teachers just have to be more open-minded and willing to accept the criticism and advices. Taking risks and changing teaching style is somehow difficult, but if an individual wants to be competent, professional and work hand-in-hand with XXI century requirements, he or she has to meet the needs of modern society.

And as it was written before, a basic component of our society is the response and a person may enhance from them if he is willing to listen to other people's opinions.

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