Reflective Teaching, Reflective Practice, and… What Else?

Malena Galvez-Martin
University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida

The objective of this study is to inform the direction that pre-service teacher reflection needs to take.

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Through reflective teaching preservice teachers learn to be thoughtful about the teaching and learning process, how to link theory with practice, to solve problems and make decisions, and to self-evaluate themselves (Cruickshank, 1991; Posner, 1985). The objective of Reflective Teaching is to start shaping preservice teachers into reflective practitioners.

Reflection is defined by Cruickshank and Applegate (1981) as the means through which preservice teachers can be helped to think about what happened, why it happened, what they could have done to be more effective, and what they would change to improve their teaching performance. For Van Manen (1991) reflection can take place only if preservice teachers or teachers in general have the time to think about their teaching in terms of what was done, what could have been done, and what should be done. This carries the connotation of deliberation, making choices, and reaching decisions about a course of action.

Reflective Practice is defined by Serafini (2002) as the stance and the willingness teachers (preservice or inservice) have to question their teaching and the learning experiences provided to students. Therefore, it is a purposeful process that teachers use to improve their teaching performance and to critically analyze what, how and why they do
what they do. They have the open-mindedness (Dewey, 1933) to look back at the whole learning experience. Willingness to question teaching performance and learning experiences is its critical component. According to Dewey (1933), the purpose of reflective practice is to change teachers’ actions and decisions and how it impacts the outcomes of those decisions. Thus, “the value of reflection lies in its potential to refine classroom practice and improve the quality of the teaching-learning process for both teachers and students” (Serafini, 2002).

This study has attempted to analyze the direction that preservice teacher reflection needs to take. There are studies that have focused on the reflective attitudes of preservice teachers while being involved in Reflective Teaching. There are other studies that have analyzed the levels of reflection attained by preservice teachers and classroom teachers as well.

After revising several studies (Bainer & Cantrell, 1992, 1993; Cruickshank, 1987, 1991; Galvez, 1995; Gipe & Richard, 1992; Gore, 1987; Posner, 1985; Roth, 1989; Troyer 1988; Wright 1990) that focused on Reflective Teaching, it was revealed that preservice teachers improve in their reflective abilities when addressing issues related with teaching and learning, their reflectivity is enhanced, and they achieve somewhat higher levels of reflection by the end of the Reflective Teaching sessions. Just by being exposed to the Reflective Teaching experience, preservice teachers do not reach higher levels of reflection as to be statistically significant. It seems evident that there is growth in their reflective abilities. This is due to the fact that they are starting to reflect and the more they reflect, the higher levels of reflection they will be able to reach. Additional
reflective exercises are necessary and critical to determine their continuous growth in their reflectivity and achieving the highest reflective levels.

There are several studies (Galvez, 1995; Galvez-Martin, Bowman, & Morrison, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; Ross, 1989; Shulman, 1987; Van Manen, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1985) that have attempted to study the levels of reflection achieved by preservice teachers and if they can reach the highest levels through a variety of reflective exercises and experiences. These levels of reflection have been determined from frameworks (Galvez, 1995; Ross, 1989; Shulman, 1987; Van Manen, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1985) developed for this purpose or that emerged from the data. These studies have revealed that preservice teachers can achieve the highest levels of reflection over time and if reflective exercises are present throughout their whole program especially during the field experience component by using reflective journals.

There are very few studies (Campoy & Radeliffè, 2002; Galvez-Martin, 1997) that have focused on classroom teachers’ reflections. The results of these studies have revealed that many classroom teachers are very reflective and achieve the highest levels of reflection but there are others who are reflective but do not reach those highest levels of reflection. Some classroom teachers do not reach those levels of reflection and are as reflective or less than preservice teachers.

Conclusions

Preservice teachers are achieving higher levels of reflection by being involved in reflective practice. Overall, classroom teachers are more reflective than preservice teachers. The reflectivity achieved by preservice teachers by the end of their programs is being lost after their first entry years as teachers. In most schools, reflection is not being
promoted among teachers and many teachers are not interested in reflecting at all. Therefore, reflection stagnates or vanishes over time.

When classroom teachers do not show any evidence of reflectivity to the preservice teacher assigned to them, they are wrongfully modeling that reflection is not important or necessary in the profession. This is making preservice teachers reflect less, and stop to reflect as beginning teachers. In order to avoid this, school administrators need to promote it as part of the teachers’ professional development and as a component of the school’s continuous improvement plan. Following Serafini (2002) and Van Manen’s (1991) suggestions, teachers need to be provided with time in order to be involved in reflective activity.

In order to promote reflection in classroom teachers, colleges and universities need to start working with public schools in providing time to instill reflection in classroom teachers. Schoolteachers could be surveyed to find out what they believe about reflection and how much they value it. As a result of this, classroom teachers could be trained in reflection. Eventually, they will display behaviors of reflective practitioners that will be appreciated and valued by preservice teachers.
References


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**Author Note**

Malena Galvez-Martin is associated with the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida.

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