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**HOW CAN THE PRACTICE OF REFLECTIVE TEACHING
PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EACH OF THE
CONSTITUENTS OF TEACHER EDUCATION – KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS, ATTITUDE AND AWARENESS?**

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ABSTRACT:

Reflective teaching can promote professional development in each of the constituents of teacher education, such as knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness. I want to illustrate it with personal experiences as an English teacher and give my opinion regarding this topic.

KEY WORDS: reflective teaching, development, teacher education

“Experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, and that experience coupled with reflection is a much more powerful impetus for development”

Richard and Nunan (1990)

Everything we do inside the classroom has a backdrop, even when we are not aware of our practices. Everything is related to our beliefs and values, which according to Richards and Lockhart (1994) serve as the background to much of the teachers' decisions making and action. These beliefs are derived from different sources, such as the experience as language learners, of what works best, established practice, personality factors, educationally based or principles derived from an approach or method. After reflecting on these sources, the ones that have influenced more my teaching practice are: my own experience as a language learner, experience of what works best combined with research based principles and principles derived from approaches. All of them influence, in one way or another, my beliefs and as a consequence my classroom practices.

According to Bailey et al. (2001) reflective teaching involves critical examination of our motivation, thinking, and practice. We can not say that we are reflective teachers, if we only plan our lessons carefully and mark learners' papers. Reflective teaching is a skill that can be developed over time. When I started teaching I did ask myself some questions, reflecting on how my class had been and how I could improve it for next time. However, as the time passes by I incorporate more elements into my reflection since I am aware and have more knowledge. The reflection I prefer to do takes place inside the classroom while teaching (reflection in action) and outside the classroom after the class is over (reflection on action), sometimes even covering the five dimensions of reflection that Zichner and Liston (1996) describe: rapid reflection, repair, review, research, and retheorizing and reformulating.

Some years ago I had a problem and tried to solve it through reflection. I was working with children and I realized I had a problem managing the group because I left the classroom with a headache due to the noise they continuously did while chatting, screaming and playing. The first thing I did was to identify the issue and observed my class. I realized I did not know how to control the group. It was influenced by my belief that a good teacher should not take a student out of the classroom when they cause trouble but to find a way to work the situation out. Then, I started to ask for suggestions with my colleagues. They had more experience than me and provided me with good ideas. However, I did not feel that was enough to solve the problem, so I began to search through the internet and in different books to find more about classroom management. After that, I made decisions, and put some suggestions and activities into practice to see how they worked. According to the results, I saved the ones that worked best for me in my repertoire, changing my points of view. Therefore, I followed some steps that Canning (1991) mentions to develop professionally in an active process of integrating the best advice of others (research, reports, methods, materials), my own experience, what I believed was right and my own goals related to what I wanted to change.

I agree with Canning (1991) that reflection is an interpersonal experience leading to insight about ourselves as actors in our worlds. Reflective practice has the broad meaning of being able to look at our own professional behavior and practice with the intention of improving and developing (Clarke & Croft, 1998). Hence, this development and improvement involve different areas in our profession, such as our knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness that we change through reflective teaching because as Kemmis (1985) proposes, reflection is a process which involves an inward examination of our thoughts and thought processes, and an outward consideration of the situation in which we find ourselves. In effect, reflection is a mirror to practice. However, we need to develop some attitudes in order to be reflective teachers, such as: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. With these attitudes and with reflective teaching, we will certainly change our beliefs, attitudes, skills, knowledge and awareness.

What we have to do in order to be reflective teachers is to look at what we do in the classroom, thinking about why we do it, and considering if it works - a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in our classroom, and by analyzing and evaluating this information, we identify and explore our own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in our teaching. Reflective teaching is therefore a means of professional development which begins in our classroom.

To conclude, I would like to say that reflective teaching is a cyclical process, because once we start to implement the changes, then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins again. As a result of my reflection, I can decide to do something in a different way, or I may just decide that what I am doing is the best way. And that is what professional development is all about. We have to be prepared for a work with diverse populations in an ever-changing cultural and global context which requires teachers who are knowledgeable, caring, and responsive.

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