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Language Competency for a Humane Teacher

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Abstract

Teaching is an art. It is a mark of a concerned teacher who is skilled enough to examine his/her beliefs, values and assumptions behind the teaching practices. Teachers are the nation-builders of our country; they are the providers of reflective thinking, knowledge and wisdom. They play the role to transacting knowledge to children, but a humane teacher is the one who transacts the content knowledge from head to heart. A humane reflecting teacher possesses the quality of sensitiveness, compassion, and is proficient towards his/her profession. Such a teacher prepares children to fulfil their deeds, enabling them to cater for the global need. But possessing humane qualities, a teacher also requires command over language to be effective. This paper highlights the concept of humanely reflective teacher to possess good and effective language. It also deals with the components and approaches to critical reflection. In the paper researchers have also incorporated some suggestions for the development of humanely reflective thinking to become a good teacher.

Introduction

Education, as an area of interdisciplinary knowledge, is not merely an application of a few core disciplines, but a praxis and a context where theories and practical wisdom are generated continuously as Learning is not confined to the four walls of the classroom. For this to happen there is a need to connect knowledge to life outside the school and enrich the curriculum by making it less textbook-centred. And it is rightly observed that, in the absence of good teachers, even the best of systems is bound to fail. But with good teachers, the defects of the system can largely be overcome. So, the role of a teacher or a *Guru* cannot be overlooked. Teachers are the greatest assets of an education system. They stand in the interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills and values. Teacher education plays a vital role in reforming and strengthening the education system of any country. The quality of education depends on the quality of teachers and teaching.

The teaching process is generally in the state of transition. The method used in the past were conventional and tradition. Now they are superannuated. There is a shift from 'what' to 'why' and 'how'. Many times it is seen that 'what' taught in the classroom to the students is well understood but they are unable to produce it practically in their real life. A good teacher needs to look down inside himself/herself and bring changes in the teaching learning process to overcome the problems. This introspection is commonly called "reflection", and professionals usually adopt it in order to improve their practice. For educators reflection involves "critical thinking" about past or current experiences that have occurred or are occurring in classroom settings.

Who are Humanly Reflective Teachers?

A teacher builds a nation by constructing students' mind in classroom. If a teacher is a reflective practitioner of education, he/she can shape the destiny of the nation in the classroom as emphasized by the Education Commission (1964-66). Staying in the field of teaching, many responsibilities lies on a teacher and for that a teacher is required to have or blessed with many qualities to bring changes to the children and education system. Those qualities can be counted as: possessing an attractive personality, competency over content, become a patient listener, be an impressive communicator, have a sound character, be compassionate, and committed to the duty as well as be reflective in his/her approach towards the teaching learning process. Raizada (2012) emphasized the need for quality teachers and quoted as contained in the UNESCO report-2009 (on projecting the demand for teachers to meet the goals of Universal Primary Education by 2015). It clearly states that "Without adequate numbers of professionally qualified teachers, including female teachers, who are deployed in the right places, are well-remunerated and motivated, adequately supported and proficient in local languages, we cannot offer the children quality education."

Humanely reflective teachers are the teachers who think over their teaching practices, go on analyzing how something was taught and how the practice might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes. Some points of consideration in the reflection process might be—'what is currently being done, why it is being done and how well students are learning.' A teacher can use reflection as a way to learn more about his/her own practice, improve a certain practice or focus on the problem students are having.

Reflection is the process by which the self-revisits, rethinks and reconfigures one's knowledge and understand own-self and others in a way that develops a sympathetic

resonance in relation between one's own self and others'. Consequently, one is able to respond sympathetically to the needs of the others in a given context.

Reflective thinking is not an innovation in teaching. It has its roots in the work of a number of educational theorists and practitioners. The concept has been around for more than 50 years. Leitch & Day (2000) clarified Dewey's considerations by explaining that being an effective *reflective practitioner*, is more than just improving practice and developing additional competence. It is more than that reflective practitioner should possess a set of attitudes towards teaching practice based upon broader understandings of the self and society. This attitude helps stopping, slowing down, noticing, examining, analyzing and inquiring about aspects and complexities encountered in different situations.

Most definitions on reflective thinking found in the literature in the 1980's, unfolded by such educationists as Donald Schön and Dewey, talk about foundational aspects on reflection. These educationists coined two new concepts on reflective thinking: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on action*. Reflection-in-action relates thinking and doing. These two actions (thinking/doing) lead to modifying teaching practices with the purpose of improving learning. Reflection-in action is an internal conversation of the practitioner where he/she takes hold of the process/ or experience that has occurred, reframes it, and tries to experience it from a different perspective. He/she develops on-the-spot strategies of action to improve or adjust previous experiences. Thus, the competent practitioner learns to think on his/her feet and is able to improvise as she/he takes in new information and/or encounters the unexpected (Pickett, 1996). Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, is viewed by Schön. He expects "teachers to possess thoughtful considerations and can make retrospective analysis of their performance in order to gain knowledge from experience" (cited in Leitch and Day, 2000). Pickett (1996) clarified that reflection-on-action is when "the practitioner reflects on the tacit, understandings and assumptions she/he holds and subjects them to scrutiny in order to achieve deeper understanding of instructor/student roles, motivations and behaviors".

Components of Reflective Thinking

Schön's distinction in critical reflection has been investigated by Ross (1990), Spraks-Langer & Colton (1991) and Pickett (1996) by identifying five components of reflective thinking:

1. Recognizing an educational dilemma.
2. Responding to a dilemma by recognizing both the similarities to other situations and special qualities of the particular situation.
3. Framing and reframing the dilemma.
4. Experimenting with the dilemma to discover the consequences and implications of various solutions.
5. Examining the intended and unintended consequences of an implemented solution and reevaluating the solution by determining whether the consequences are desirable or not.

In order to do this, educators are forced to look back and introspect their own teaching practices, beliefs, attitudes, goals as well as those beliefs and attitudes of their students, of their colleagues, and of the teaching community itself. Educators, thus, need to be aware of the importance of the theory-practice relationship to really engage themselves in reflective inquiry effectively and appropriately. This awareness may enable teachers to become thoughtful, as Dewey suggested, and help learning from their work in the light of purposes and principles that are *moral*.

Approaches to Critical Reflections

➤ **Peer Observation:** Peer observation can provide opportunities for teachers to view each other's teaching in order to expose them to different teaching styles and to provide opportunities for critical reflection on their own teaching. Some suggestions for peer observation are:

1. **Each participant would observe and be observed:** Teachers would work in pairs and take turns observing each other's classes.
2. **Pre-observation orientation session:** Prior to each observation, both the teachers would meet to discuss the nature of the class to be observed, the kind of material being taught, the teachers' approach to teaching, the kinds of students in the class, typical patterns of interaction and class participation, and any problems that might be expected. The teacher being observed, would also assign the observer a goal for the observation and a task to accomplish. The task would involve collecting information about some aspect of the lesson, but would not include any evaluation of the lesson. Observation procedures or instruments to be used would be agreed upon during this session and a schedule for the observations arranged.

3. **The Observation:** The observer would then visit his or her partner's class and complete the observation using the procedures that both partners had agreed on.
 4. **Post-observation:** The two teachers would meet as soon as possible after the lesson. The observer would report on the information that had been collected and discuss it with the teacher (Richards & Lockhart, 1991).
- **Written Accounts of Experiences:** Another useful way of engaging in the reflective process is through the use of written accounts of experiences (Powell 1985) and their potential is increasingly being recognized in teacher education. A number of different approaches can be used. For example-self-reporting, which involves completing an inventory or check list in which the teacher indicates which teaching practices were used within a lesson or within a specified time period and how often they were employed (Pak, 1985).
- **Journal writing:** A procedure which is becoming more widely acknowledged as a valuable tool for developing critical reflection is the journal or diary. The goals of journal writing are:
1. To provide a record of the significant learning experiences that has taken place.
 2. To help the participant come into touch and keep in touch with the self-development process that is taking place for them.
 3. To provide the participants with an opportunity to express, in a personal and dynamic way, their self-development.
 4. To foster a creative interaction:-
 - a. Between the participant and the self-development process that is taking place.
 - b. Between the participant and other participants who are also in the process of self-development
 - c. Between the participant and the facilitator whose role it is to foster such development (Powell, 1985 & Bailey, 1990)

Williams (1994) proposes the *following eight principles* which should guide a constructivist and is a prerequisite to reflective approach to teacher preparation:

- Developmental
- Culture-sensitive

- Non-Prescriptive
- Emphasis on Reflecting on Experience and themizing from it
- Theoretical input should be processed in light of previous experience
- Trainees' experience should be valued
- Trainer and trainee learning from each other
- Course content should be negotiated with trainees

The proposal to adopt a reflective approach in developing teachers' language, education has gained much support in recent years. Parrott (1993) advocates that a task-based approach to develop teachers' reflective practice, provides teachers with a bank of ready-made activities which teachers may use immediately either individually, or better still, in groups in a teacher development programme. Tanner & Green (1998) provided specific class-room tasks, and ideas for lesson observation and journal writing, that deal with language teaching techniques such as teaching the macro skills and presenting and practicing new language effectively and efficiently.

Need and Role of a Humanely Reflective Teacher

Developing empathy and sensitivity among students through HRT: As we are getting modernized and westernized, we are losing the essence of our Indian culture and tradition. Now nobody has the time to look and step back for the other. Everybody is busy in making money and profit which in return making human being as mechanical gadgets, having no emotions for each other. So the role of humanely reflective teacher is genuine as it may germinate the values, ethics and sensitivity among the students through adequately needed language.

- **Preparing responsible and civilized human being for nation:** Humanely reflective teacher primarily contributes in the development of moral ethics and sound character which help in building responsible and civilized citizens for the nation.
- **Developing 4Es among the student through HRT:** Equity, Excellence, Employability and Expansion are the 4Es of the education system which can only grow if we prepare humanely reflective teachers.
- **Developing healthy competition through HRT:** Now-a-days the profession of teaching is preparing children to meet and face the challenges and competition of global world. This can be tackled through teachers who possess humane and reflective qualities which not only help developing professionalism among students

but also incorporate the quality of cooperation which may keep them to grow altogether.

- **Developing 3Hs through HRT:** It is rightly said that education is the development of all 3Hs that is head, heart and hand. It should work all together then only a person will grow and develop not for himself but for the society, nation and also for the whole world.

Importance of Adequate Language for a Humane Teacher

Students are the paramount pillars of teaching-learning process. So our curriculum and teaching strategies, approaches, methods etc. rotate around them. Many committees and educational policies focus on child centred teaching. Likewise for effective and reflective teaching a quality teacher is mandatory. Teachers are role models for students. They are the one whom they admire and applaud for their future life. For being a quality teacher, she/he should be skilful and expert in language. To be an effective communicator a teacher need to have competency over the language. Accomplishment over the language is one of the determinants for a humane teacher.

The importance of language cannot be overlooked as it has its roots from our Vedic times. The Vedas were composed and orally transmitted by the *Gurus*. Likewise in the present scenario the need of right language by a compassionate teacher is even more. A teacher nowadays has to play a multitasking role in the classroom. She/he has to play the role of a friend, philosopher, guide, mentor, ideal, counsellor and expert. So for the same she/he must use the language appropriately.

Teachers of 21st century need to move primarily from being only an information provider but to extend right kind of knowledge for adequate development of students. So she/he has to play various roles when and where required in the classroom. Teachers, through their appropriate language, can come closer to students and only then they will be able to understand the needs and abilities of their students. They also need to give reinforcement to their students with the help of effective and productive language so that they feel motivated and enthusiastic to move ahead in their studies as well as career.

Language used by the humane reflecting teacher in classroom is not simply used for communicating purpose or providing textual knowledge but also to develop ethical values and sound character among students. Through an appropriate language, a humane teacher,

will be able to transmit the right knowledge from head to heart. It will also contribute in developing social skills which later on help in enhancing the personality of the child.

Conclusion

Education is all about developing a holistic child. For that a teacher should first equip himself/herself with the quality of compassion, devotion, sensitivity, empathy, and competency. He/she needs to move primarily from being only an information keeper and dispenser but much more than that. A humane teacher through competent command over language in classroom, may give a lot more than that. He/she may develop several abilities among children and also prepare them for the global need.

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