A Critical Reflection Framework Developing Teachers' Growth Competence

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Abstract

Although there are a variety of perspectives and conceptualizations by different researchers of what it means to reflect critically on teaching (Poblete, 1999), there is an agreement that critical reflection entails a higher, more complicated level that challenges the educator (Lucas, 2012). This paper is discusses critical reflection frameworks available in the literature and suggestes a new framework that can capture a complete picture of what critical reflection entails. The framework has five levels of reflection; reacting, recalling, realizing, reconsidering, and reflecting. Those levels stimulate accessing teachers' thoughts and feelings, taking them through a thought and action process that helps them discover; what is happening, why what is happening is happening, how it can change, and ensures continuity of this process. The framework forms a reflective spiral of self-construction of learning that transforms the teacher's behavior and leads to growth competence.

Keywords: Critical reflection frameworks; Professional development; Reflection; Reflective practice; Teacher education; Teachers' growth competence.

1. Introduction

In literature, different terms for critical reflection were used. "The terms reflection, critical reflection, reflective practice, reflective thinking, and reflexivity have similar meanings and application in educational literature, as well as, used interchangeably" (Lucas, 2012, p.1). The concept of critical reflection is a form of continuous thought followed by action transforming teachers' behavior. Lucas (2012) saw that the most crucial feature of critical reflection is its ability to conceptualize the experience and lead to transforming learning. The term transformative learning refers to the "ability to revise the meaning structures" (Moon, 2005, P.96).) Conceptualization through the constructivist model of knowing is; "humans developing (forming and reforming) their constructed concepts, and processing their meaning construction" (Badie, 2016, p.293).

2. Literature Review

A wide variety of techniques and approaches are used in practicing critical reflection ranging from informal discussions to a highly structured format (Lucas, 2012). Each framework focused on specific features of reflection, dividing them into levels. Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991) framework reflective levels were; reacting, elaborating, and contemplating. Lee (2005) levels were; recall, realization, and reflectivity. Larrivee (2008) levels were; surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection. Hatton and Smith (1995) levels were; descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogue reflection, and critical reflection. O'Dowell, Reeve, and Smith (2011) levels were; recall, analysis, and reflection. Korhtagen & Vasalos (2005) levels were; environment, behavior, competence, beliefs, professional identity, and mission. Miller (2011) levels were; reacting, elaborating, and reconstructing.Table (1) and the discussion that follows compare/contrast the key features of different frameworks of critical reflection:

Elaborating on details was the only aspect that all frameworks approached except Korhtagen and Vasalos (2005). Each framework had a different perspective when seeing the details of the experience. Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991), Larrivee (2008), and Miller (2011) understood the event by relating and comparing it to pedagogical theories. In Lee (2005), O'Dowell, Reeve, and Smith (2011), and Hatton and Smith (1995) frameworks, it was recalling the experience by describing it. Reacting to the experience using 'feelings' was approached only by Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991), and Miller (2011) as an emotional trigger to bring to consciousness any personal concerns.

According to Lucas (2012), critical reflection is identified by two aspects; first, not accepting the situation at face value but looking 'deeper' to see the influences on the situation, and second the ability to examine the 'broader' the bigger picture and see the situation more holistically by considering the context. Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991) and Miller (2011)

Table 1. Summary of Key Features of Different Frameworks of Critical Reflection

Researches / Reflective aspect	Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991)	Miller (2011)	Larrivee (2008)	Lee (2005)	Hatton and Smith (1995)	O'Dowell, Reeve, and Smith (2011)	Korhtagen and Vasalos (2005)
Attending to emotions	✓	✓					
Elaborating Details	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Reasoning (*depth*)				✓	✓	✓	✓
Considering the Context (*breadth*)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Considering pedagogical identity, and mission (*core reflection*)							✓
Considering Pedagogical Theories	✓	✓	✓				
Building conclusions and insights	✓	✓					
Identifying Future plans		✓				✓	

frameworks approached neither the depth of the experience by considering reasons nor the breadth of the experience by considering the broader context. Larrivee (2008) considered the context by examining ethical, social ,and political issues, but it did not consider the depth of the experience.

Although Lee (2005), Hatton and Smith (1995), and O'Dowell, Reeve, and Smith (2011) frameworks considered both the depth and the breadth of the experience, they all missed out on most aspects of what others considered critical reflection--attending to emotions, considering pedagogical theories, building conclusions and insights and identifying future plans, as aspects of critical reflection. Building conclusions and insights, and identifying future plans are two essential aspects of reflection (El Fiki, 2012). Very few frameworks attended to those two aspects. Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991), and Miller (2011) were the only frameworks that had drawing conclusions and insights as a reflective level. O'Dowell, Reeve and Smith (2011) and Miller (2011) were the only frameworks that gave a chance for the teacher to identify future plans.

Korhtagen and Vasalos (2005) took a different perspective in exploring levels of refection focusing on the teacher. Although their framework introduced novel ideas, it did not clearly approach; elicit feelings and experience, build conclusions and insights, or identify future plans.

3. The Suggested Spiral Critical Reflection Framework Developing Growth Competence

The above discussion of critical reflection frameworks available in the literature showed that each approached critical reflection differently, but none of them was able to capture a complete picture of what critical reflection could entail. Besides, none of the critical reflection frameworks considered 'taking action' as part of reaching critical reflection. Reflection can not be critical unless it ends with taking action and reflecting again. The criticality of reflection increases by repeating the cycle of reflection (EL Souefi, 2021). Kolb, 1984; Wallace, 1991; Korhtagen and Vasalos, 2005; Pollard, 2014; El Fiki, 2012, saw reflection as a spiral, ending by taking action and then reflecting again.

The definition of critical reflection adopted here is the reflection that leads to a transformation of behavior (Moon, 2005) and develops growth competence (Korhtagen and Vasalos, 2005), i.e., taking reflective action is a result of critical reflection. To reach this end, critical reflection has to have a discrete eye exploring the experience from different aspects;
- what is happening
- why what is happening is happening
- how do the teacher's feelings and actions contribute to those reasons
- how the context is contributing to those reasons
- how it can change, and why
- In addition, it ensures that reflection is continuous by taking action and building on discoveries from past reflections guaranteeing self-construction of learning that transforms the teacher's behavior.

Accordingly, the following is a suggested critical reflection framework. The framework has five levels of reflection; reacting, recalling, realizing, reconsidering, and reflecting. Each level deals with significant aspects of reflection in literature; this is illustrated in Table (2) and the discussion that follows:

Table 2. Suggested critical reflection framework with significant aspects for each level

Level	Description of the level	Significant aspects of reflection extracted from literature
Reacting	Attending to emotions and feelings	- Emotions and Cognitions - Cognition and Consciousness
Recalling	Describing the situation in detail	- Expressing ideas and Consciousness - Elaborating Details
Realizing	Interpreting reasoning of personal judgments. Analyzing and promoting dialogue with oneself and others	- Analyzing and evaluating ideas - Considering contextual factors and power issues
Reconstructing	Building insights, drawing conclusions and planning the next steps	- Conceptualization of the experience - Planning Action
Reflecting	Linking experiences to support transformation and personal growth	- Reflection is Spiral - Reflective Thinking-on-action and Reflective Thinking-in-action

3.1. Reacting

The first level explores personal emotions and feelings, which facilitates approaching cognition and consciousness. Miller (2011) argued that to think critically about reflection, we have to start by reacting to the experience by describing feelings related to an event.

- *Emotions and Cognitions*

According to Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), emotions direct aspects of cognition like; learning, attention, memory, motivation, high reason and rational thinking, and social functioning. "Emotions help to direct our reasoning into the sector of knowledge that is relevant to the current situation" (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007, p.8).

- *Cognition and Consciousness*

Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) linked emotion, cognition, and consciousness. The researchers argued that emotions move aspects of cognition that bring the experience to consciousness. Emotional triggers create changes in the body and mind that leads to focusing of attention, calling up relevant memories, and learning the associations between events and their outcomes. Reacting to the experience allows teachers to comment on their feelings bringing to consciousness any personal concerns (Surbeck, Han and Move, 1991); Korhtagen and Vasalos', 2005).

3.2. Recalling

Components of consciousness operate mainly through the linguistic medium (Bandura, 2006). What the teachers raised to the consciousness is activated when it is expressed, whether verbally or non-verbally.

- ***Expressing ideas and Consciousness***

Our understanding is activated and clarified when we go into a conversation talking about the experience (Connel, 2014). The conversation can act as a theory-building activity when we search for and organize meaning.When teachers articulate their ideas to others, it helps form an open critical perspective (Solomon, 1987).

- ***Elaborating Details***

When expressing ideas, teachers' amount of details gives a good foundation for critical reflection (Korhtagen and Vasalos, 2005). Lee (2005) first level of reflection recalled the experience, describing it without alternatives. Surbeck, Han and Mover (1991) second level of reflection elaborates on the experience, comparing it to a general principle or criteria. Hatton, and Smith (1995) identified the first level as descriptive writing, describing the situation with no discussion beyond description. O'Dowell, Reeve, and Smith (2011) first level was recalled, where teachers remember what happened in the class without looking at alternative explanations. Korhtagen and Vasalos (2005) encouraged description of the experience through questions.

3.3. Realizing

The third level starts to consider influences that made what happened to happen. In this level, the teacher interprets the reasons behind personal judgment and feelings expressed in the reacting level. This dialogue with oneself or others analyses the experience and starts realizing a 'deeper' consideration of the event. Thinking of reasons also can approach some contextual issues that 'broaden' the reflection into new areas.

- ***Analyzing and evaluating ideas***

McKnight (2002) referred to reflection as " an analysis of classroom events and circumstances. By virtue of its complexity, the task of teaching requires constant and continual classroom observation, evaluation, and subsequent action" (p. 1). Most critical reflection frameworks focus on analyzing and evaluating ideas as a vital framework component. Lee's (2005) second level of reflection is realization, where the teachers interpret the reasons behind the situation, and come up with generalizations from the experience. Hatton and Smith's (1995) third level is dialogue reflection, encouraging teachers to 'step back' and analyze the experience. O'Dowell, Reeve, and Smith's (2011) third level is analyses; search for the 'whys' and look for relations between pieces of the classroom experience. Korhtagen and Vasalos (2005) gave weight to analyzing the reasons behind actions by digging deeper into complicated factors. Larrivee (2008) argued that levels of reflection add 'depth' to the second level by considering the rationale behind the incident.

- *Considering contextual factors and power issues*

For Lucas (2012), one of the critical reflection aspects is to examining the 'broader' picture and seeing the situation more holistically by considering the context. Teachers make their decisions based on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs (Borg, 2003). Some of the critical reflection frameworks considered contextual factors. Larrivee's (2008) third level of reflection examines ethical, social, and political issues. For Hatton and Smith (1995), critical reflection was an awareness of the multiple (historical, socio-political contexts) influences on actions and events. O'Dowell, Reeve and Smith (2011) second level of reflection was going 'broader' considering the context. Lee (2005) third level framework analyzes the experience from different perspectives with the intention to change.

3.4. Reconstructing

The fourth level is drawing insights and building conclusions by conceptualizing the experience and planning for future actions. This level is crucial in the framework when the experience is conceptualized and ready for application. Dewey (1933) noted that growth comes from a "reconstruction of experience" (p. 87), leading to the reconstruction of approaches to teaching.

- *Conceptualization of the experience*

Reflection requires cognitive processing of conceptualizing teaching practice, resulting in conceptual development and, consequently, professional renewal (Burton, 2009). The role of reflective practice is to help teachers make sense of meaning and conceptualize the experience (Harvey et al., 2012). Surbeck, Han, and Mover (1991) third level of the critical reflective framework was; contemplating; this is when they start building their own insights. Larrivee's (2008) second level of the critical reflective framework was; pedagogical reflection: considering the theory and rationale for current practice. Miller (2011) third level of the critical reflective framework was; reconstructing: drawing conclusions about one's practices and the practices of others exploring the relationships between practice, literature and theory.

- *Planning Action*

For teachers to reconstruct their practice, they need to contextualize the experience after conceptualizing it by planning to take action and test the experience in context. When learning is activated in the person's socio-cultural community, transformative learning happens with critical reflection on this activation in context (Webster-Wright, 2009). Planning for action was part of some critical reflection frameworks and reflective models. Lee's (2005) third level of the framework was the reflectivity level: analyzing the experience from different perspectives with the intention of changing. The third level of Miller's (2011)

framework was planning further learning based on reflections. Korhtagen and Vasalos's (2005) model fifth stage was creating alternative methods of action and trial.

3.5. Reflecting

The last level of the critical reflection framework ensures that reflection is continuously linking different reflections that lead to transformation and personal growth. Moon (2005) and Korhtagen and Vasalos (2005) marked this stage as leading to a change of behavior and developing growth competence. For this to happen, the reflection process is to be spiral; being repeated, and reflective thinking on action encourages reflective thinking in action.

- ***Taking Action/Reflection is Spiral***

Reflective action completes the cycle of professional action that follows reflection. Consequently, it leads to modified practice (Hatton and Smith, 1999). Pollard (2014) believed that a fundamental characteristic of reflective practice is not just 'Cyclic' but 'spiral' in which teachers constantly monitor, evaluate and revise their practices. Wallace's (1991) model for teachers' professional learning took the theory to practice approach, by providing teachers with received knowledge and examining those theories in everyday practice.

- ***Reflective Thinking-in-action***

The process of reflection is an extended process of being systematically and constantly aware of the circumstances of teaching and the implications of issues arising during teaching (Burton, 2009). Schon (1983) supported this idea by seeing reflection-in-action occurring inside the classroom while teaching, leading to teachers changing their practice.

4. Conclusion

For reflection to be used for authentic continuous professional learning, it has to help teachers conceptualize their practice and apply it as a basis for further learning. The study introduces a new reflective framework of five levels; reflection, reacting, recalling, realizing, reconsidering, and reflecting, ensuring a deep and complete reconstruction of the teachers' practices leading to their growth competence.

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