WHEN YOU REFLECT ARE YOU ALSO BEING REFLEXIVE?

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Teaching, researching and leading in the classroom and school community is largely an intuitive action. However, it can also be seen as scripted to some extent. Educators have plans that they first visualize and then attempt to predict on paper what may happen in the teaching environment. Planning in any manner requires a person to see within the mind's eye. Once detailed on paper the teaching act usually follows and that is when unpredictability and reflection surfaces.

In my class, this surfacing often occurs in the midst of acting, and I think about what has just happened in a cognitive sense. It seems to be a means to monitor oneself as life unfolds. You sense, comprehend and process the events in a millisecond. It is systematic, even habitual in education. I mull over my thoughts, I reflect on my actions. The instant I speak or move; these actions are followed by feedback from my senses. My muscles deliver kinesthetic information and my evaluative thoughts of myself are weighed immediately. I hear myself speak and judge my word choice and tone. The feedback loops are numerous and if you attend to each you are in a position to make adjustments. But, why do this?

I did this because I was, like most educators, interested in improving (which means altering my practice). Education cannot stand still. It changes moment by moment, day by day, and year to year. Some educators would like it if change stayed away as predictability would ensure certain outcomes. However, change can be a useful element in our lives as it gives us an opportunity to improve whatever we are doing or have done. While teaching at the Secondary level I found that my class was best by the end of the day as I would have taught the same thing more than once and eliminated tension from the lesson. At the elementary level I found that every year I improved and added novelty via new material

While teaching I would reflect on my actions and scrutinize what had just happened with a desire to get better. The recursive process did improve my comprehension and understanding of self, the events and the context. I was focused on the present with an eye to the future and this perspective motivated and encouraged me to change each day. No matter how much I changed and improved, I could connect (relations) where I was at present with where I was at some point in the past. I had evidence (data) all around me in the classroom and as I accumulated more data (notes, illustrations, photos, daybook, and plans), the more change and improvement seemed to follow. This made sense since I had read that,

> good qualitative research . . . requires careful record keeping as a way of connecting with important audiences. The first audience is self: The notebooks of the molecular biologist, the industrial sociologist, or the clinical drug tester help each keep track of what was done along the way, suggest ways of improving next steps, and give reassurance about the reproducibility of the results. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 280)

The need to reflect on self as a means of self-development is widely endorsed in schools of education globally. Often there is a requirement to reflect on practice, which can be traced back to the work of John Dewey (felt need) and Donald Schön (reflective practice), both of whom put forward the notion that reflection is a critical underpinning of growth and learning. Indeed, Dewey (1934) argued, "all direct experience is qualitative, and qualities are what make life-experience itself directly precious. Yet reflection goes behind immediate qualities, for it is interested in relations . . . (p. 293). We can do something yet not be aware of how various elements are related and this lack of awareness can impede immediate understanding and growth. Similarly, Schön (1987) talked about pre-service students learning to teach and suggested,

any reflective practicum [requires] that they plunge into the doing, and try to educate themselves before they know what it is they're trying to learn. *The teachers cannot tell them*. The teachers can say things to them but they cannot understand what's meant at that point. (p.1)

In my case, my reflections on action were being carefully noted in daybooks, and lesson plans, unit plans, year plans and a reflective journal. This record kept motivating me to further examine and study reflection as a means of professional development. In so doing, I determined how unclear and confused I was about reflection.

What I discovered is that I was actually being personally reflexive which is quite different from being reflective. The reflexive process involves introspection. A deep inward gaze into every interaction whether it be in teaching or any other interaction in life. Interactive introspection was the tool I used to improve my interactions and study my thoughts, feelings and behavior. I considered my mental state, my emotional being, thoughts and motives within a context. I also used reflection: However, this occurred after my action and not during, which meant I was being personally reflexive when I was introspective during the moment. The tension of reflection and being reflexive was bothersome since I was still confused conceptually. So, I read deeper and wider.

I then discovered that being reflexive is not a straightforward matter. There are, and have been for many years in various disciplines (such as, Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology) types of reflexivity which involve introspection. Within education, reflexivity often involves the teacher as researcher and educational reflexivity occurs most often, yet not exclusively, in the school and classroom contexts. Reflexivity is impacted by the changes in environment and the participants involved. To be reflexive, participants (teachers) investigate their interactions via introspection as they occur and in the reflective mode participants reflect on various elements (verbal, nonverbal, feelings, and thoughts) following the action. "Reflective knowledge has to do with normative states in social, economic and political realms. It concerns a vision of what ought to be" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 7). There is a place in every research inquiry for both reflexivity and reflection.

Being both reflective and reflexive is a good sign within a study as Sandelowski & Barroso (2002) explain,

> Reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research and it entails the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge. Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share. (p. 222)

Being reflexive and discussing reflexivity in education increases the credibility of research and professional development yet it is important to illuminate and describe the different kinds of reflexivity. Reflexivity has deep roots and breadth in most disciplines especially in the social sciences. We find out that "systematic reflexivity is the constant analysis of one's own theoretical and methodological presuppositions" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 6). As a teacher, there are many presuppositions to explore. For instance, the belief that a firm tone of voice will encourage appropriate student behaviors or a friendly smiling disposition will cause students to look upon the teacher favorably is worth pondering. Both of these presuppositions can be scrutinized reflexively during the moment they occur.

Systematic reflexivity has given birth to *epistemic* and *methodological* reflexivity. Epistemic reflexivity concerns the researcher's or teacher's belief system and allows for the examination and testing of assumptions. Looking deeper, it can be suggested that, "epistemic reflexivity is the constant analysis of your lived experience as well as your own theoretical and

methodological presuppositions" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 62). Teachers (researchers) who investigate epistemological assumptions are interested in not only description, understanding and change they are interested in critical progress. Critical thinking requires questioning and judging of various selected teaching assumptions and it is necessary to move forward to expose data and realize meaning in praxis. Also, critical theorization through questioning allows the unearthing of what may be hidden within an assumption. The goal is most often to discover emancipation via critical thinking and action (Holmes, Cockburn-Wootten, Motion, Zorn, & Roper, 2005). Emancipation can indicate that the teacher has put in place a new system, activity, perspective, understanding or approach that frees the educator from past practices.

As well as critical thinking and theorizing in the classroom, which is really a means of research, Nightingale and Cromby, (1999) add,
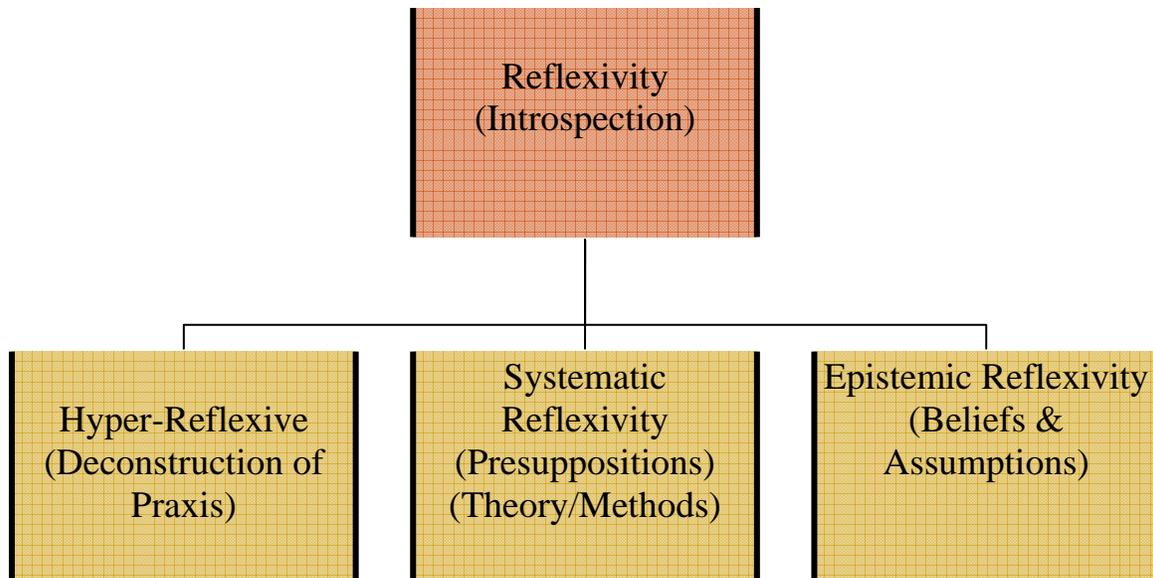
>Epistemological reflexivity= requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found?' Thus, epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings. How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? (p. 228)

This critical stance gives way to understanding, theory, and change. It is the very assumptions that may have been hidden before any reflexive action that are at issue. It is a means to study personal beliefs and assumptions embedded in cognition. If a teacher wanted to analyze their behavior and not their thoughts then we need to explore another vein of reflexivity.

Methodological reflexivity requires the teacher to observe and examine his or her own behavior within the classroom or school as it occurs. For example, a teacher could experiment with nonverbal communicative behaviors to find out if the changes made in nonverbal behavior caused desired outcomes. The methodological reflexive educator is hoping to improve their methods and realize just how well these are implemented as the actions unfold. Within pre-service teaching programs the expectation is very much the same in courses labeled 'methods' as students need to think within the moment and it is a preparatory task as the practicum demands that the student teacher judge actions as they occur to fine tune their performance introspectively. Similarly, the in-service educator will often change their praxis due to their own self-examination (Ryan, 2005). Being reflexive when you are close to the data, in fact you are the data in many cases, is vital to explore in any professional development effort.

Teaching, changing and being reflexive often requires the deconstruction of praxis. As we examine and uncover layers of concern, we actually change because of our efforts. This deconstruction and analysis of our own praxis has been labeled hyper-reflexivity (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 6), and linked to a postmodern stance. "The teacher practicing from a postmodern perspective is committed to revealing and deconstructing the politics of difference in education. Deconstruction is not just a method but is a way of thinking about or seeing the danger of what is powerful and useful" (Ironside, 2001, p. 81). Hyper-reflexive practice will have an instantaneous collision with existing praxis yet the outcome is often improved practice, as teachers install fresh insights into each interaction. The relationship of these terms is displayed in the following image.

Figure 1 Types of Reflexivity

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                    │    Reflexivity      │
                    │  (Introspection)    │
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| Hyper-Reflexive (Deconstruction of Praxis) | Systematic Reflexivity (Presuppositions) (Theory/Methods) | Epistemic Reflexivity (Beliefs & Assumptions) |

(Ryan 2005)

Teaching is arguably an opportunity to explore self, praxis and human nature. Educators learn about what they know and uncover their own ignorance. This uncovering can be a positive force if the decision is made to use this opportunity to move forward, change and learn. Gabel (2001) concludes,

> We are in an era of teacher education during which reflective practice . . . and the value of reflexivity between experience and pedagogy are common research themes . … Race, class, gender, and ethnicity are explored in texts and courses in teacher education. Case studies are used to help teacher candidates examine their experiences and make use of them while they grow as teachers. Teaching journals are assigned to facilitate deep and critical reflection on one's experiences in the field. At times, it seems that every possible identity is explored, every experience is examined, and every personal story is told. (p. 37)

Nonetheless, we need to continue along this path. Teachers need to explore and be reflective as it is this habit of mind which is indeed a useful source of professional development however, to be also reflexive supports critical introspection. To be reflexive can actually nourish reflections as introspection leads to heightened awareness, change, growth and improvement of self and our profession.

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