REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE - A REQUIREMENT OF ACTUAL TEACHING PROFESSIONALISM

Georgiana DUMITRU[*]

Abstract: *The contemporary models of professional development based on the role of experience considering it a relevant subject in learning. But experience alone is not enough. Experience has to be adopted in order to obtain a specific improvement. (Skovolt and Jennings, 2004). The key component of these actual concepts concerning experience is the practice of reflection on experience (Strasser and Gruber, 2006; Neufeld, Karno, Nelson,1996; Rønnestad and Skovholt, 2001). Through reflexive practice over his own activity, the teacher can realize his weak and strong points; he can adjust his own didactic style in order for him to attain his objectives. A teacher must have reflexive teaching skills to support and motivate students to reflect on how they can perform the learning activity in order to improve its, to build appropriate perspective on the group of students, to assess objectively their performance, to determine and analyse scientific educational situations, to train and develop the metacognitive skills. The reflexive approach has been incorporated among pedagogical competences: reflexive teaching appeared as an indispensable competence in teaching and it had a contribution in improving the efficiency of the educational activity. The present article stresses mainly this type of competence associated to the educator's profile of competences and it offers a useful work instrument in his teaching activity.*

Keywords: *quality in education, professionalism, reflexive practice, reflexive teaching, reflexive teacher.*

Introduction

When we imagine and choose our career most of us desire to be recognized as good professionals and the first condition in order for this to be realized *is to be indeed good professionals*. What makes a professional to be really good? An amount of factors, but among these is also the fact that one should be a reflexive practitioner.

What does it mean to be a reflective teacher? To reflect first, during and after teaching, taking into consideration the ways in which the teacher (the set of personal beliefs, knowledge, experiences, attitudes) and the context in which learning takes place (the compulsions generated by the social context) influence his personal learning and that of his students.

Teachers' professionalism is an intrinsic condition for the success of the school actions. The teacher who acts in a professional way must be a practitioner and a reflective researcher; professionalism supposes among other attitudes and aptitudes (self) reflection, exercised competences of investigation and reinterpretation of educational practices with the aim to improve, permanent interest for the quality of his didactic acts.

Many researchers have been interested in the problem of "reflection" within the educational process. They took different approaches of this problem, as a proof being the amount of terms used: "reflective practice", "reflective teaching", "reflective critics", "reflective thinking".

[*] University of Pitesti, geo_dumitru81@yahoo.co.uk

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The teacher's reflective practice represents a cognitive and metacognitive process, in which he deliberately examines educational practices, has as its aim to require a profound understanding of the entire educational process in order to improve it. It supposes adopting some informant and logical decisions and the analysis of the consequences of this decision. (Weir and Tilney, 2004)

Theoretical models of the reflective practice

In the paper "How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process", John Dewey (1933:89) offers a great amount of arguments in order to consolidate the idea of reflective practice in education. The author opposes „reflective action" and „routine action". If the first supposes responsibility, intuition and passion, the second is guided mainly by impulses, tradition and authority: in each schools, explains Dewey, exist one or more predefined ways, taken as they come, to define reality, exist the so called „collective codes" to treat objectives, to solve problems („This is how we do it in our school"). As long as these „codes" are respected without major discrepancies one considers that everything is functioning without problems, even if this fact limits the acknowledgment and experimentation of some alternative points of view. But „educators and quality education cannot limit to the imitation of techniques that functioned in the past, but even more should understand the principles behind these techniques. Shortly, it is proved the fact that when one reflects more, the quality of teaching increases"; „unreflective" teachers tend to accept day by day reality, concentrating on finding those ways that help them finish what they consider according to their culture to be the objectives; but doing only this, they remain the slaves of circumstances".

A more formal and structural approach than „learning by experience" is „learning based on experience' or experiential learning. This is based on a circular model of learning, that is on a succession of many steps that permit keeping continuity in passing from one step to the other. The model elaborated by David Kolb in 1984, in his book "Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development" is a significant support in understanding this form of learning. Thus, Kolb describe the adults learning process in a circle of four steps: experience, reflection, generalization, application, illustrated in the following figure:

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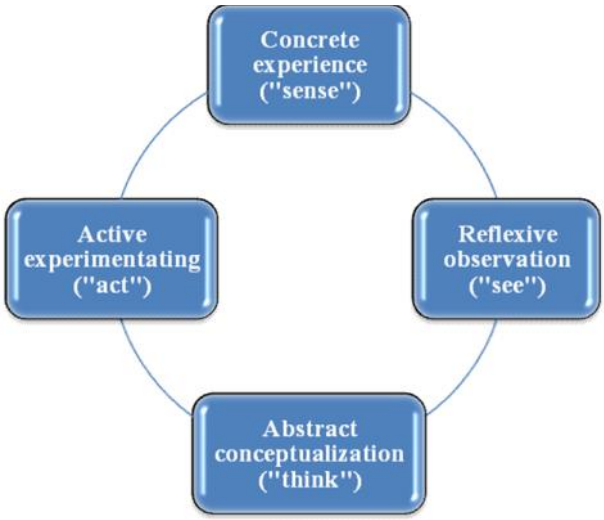


Fig. 1 The circle of learning according to Kolb, 1984

Thus, in his circle, Kolb's model demonstrates us that the efficiency of learning depends in the same measure of action and reflection. Having an experience is in a desirable way followed by a moment of analysis, a kind of "step back" as when we need a certain distance in order to better understand a picture. Now one can observe what happened, one can identify he important facts and errors, one can ask questions (like "Did it work well?" "Why did it function?" "Can we do better?") and one searches for answers. On the base of this process of reflection one builds theories, experience transforming in this step of conceptualization in structured information.

Another important lesson on reflection in education can be taken from the paper written by Donald Schon: "The reflective practitioner – how professionals think in action (1995). Taking care of the ways in which professionals think when they act, Schon brings in the centre of discussions about reflectivity a famous formula, base for multiple analyses and personal and institutional developments: reflection in action vs. reflection over action. Schon argues that real professionals, indifferently of their area, are reflective practitioners and that all their efficient professional acts can be defined as reflective practices. And thus because they think while they take action and action on the basis of what they think (reflect-in-action), moreover, complementary to this type of "thinking in action", what professionals do requires a "thinking over action" integrated thus in a complex of multilevel reflexive attitude in order to produce an adequate verbal description (of this thinking on thinking in action) and is completely something else to be able to think of the obtained description.

One can separate many elements of a process of reflective practice that we show in the following figure:

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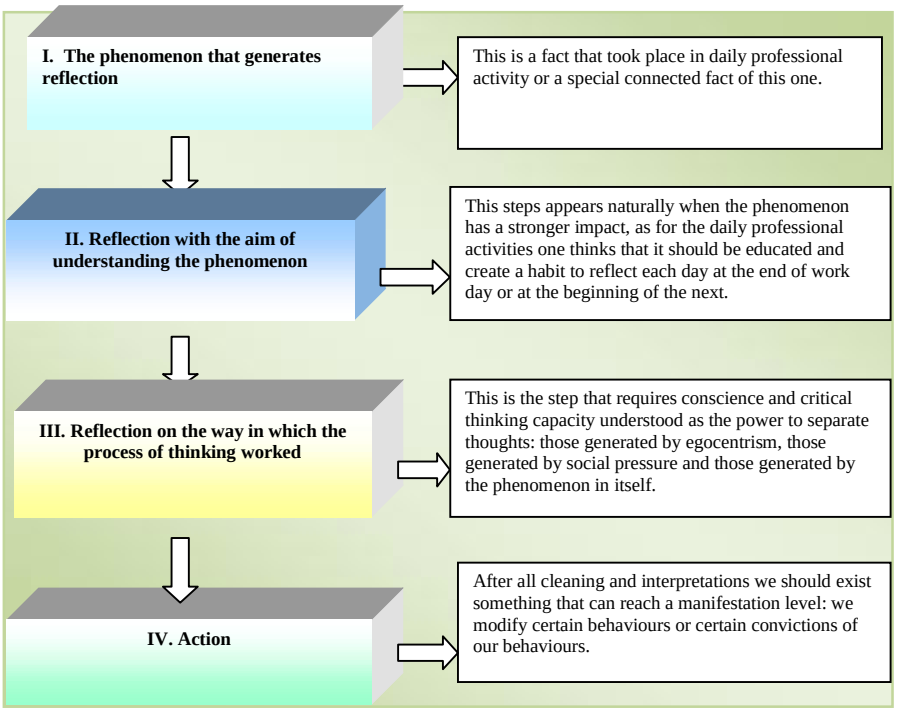


Fig. 2 Steps in the process of reflective process

Reflective practice correlates with other pieces of professionalism: the desire for better, mistrust that one reached the maximum of development, polite scepticism towards the ideas heard from the others and towards the compliments received for teaching activity.

Tools of reflection

For a teacher that desires to be a reflective practitioner an instrument that proves to be helpful and with didactic potential is the diary. The reflective teacher is curious; ask himself questions in all steps of teaching and searches for answers, not only in the pre-learning step, but also in the assessment of evaluating the educational activity and its regulation.

Asking himself questions like: “What is it/does it mean..?”, “Why did we get these results/did the students/pupils react in this way….?”, “How can one react/explain….?”,”What were the strong and the weak points of the didactic strategy/method/means of learning…?”, “With what can one correlate the idea/result/conclusion….?, “What consequences has…?” the teacher starts investigate more or less in the direction of finding the *most efficient means of organizing learning experiences.*

Among the *benefits* of a diary we enumerate:

- *It documents the professional evolution;*
- *Keeps at the same place useful examples* for the parents’ meeting (real behaviours of children), special homework done by children, ideas that you can

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present at professional meetings, ideas that you can use when you prepare a presentation for a conference or an article for a publication;
- It is *a source of inspiration* for thinks better done in class;
- *Reduces professional stress*. Stress can be generated also by difficult things or by successes.

On the other hand, the diary can be combined with other forms of professional development: pedagogical researches, reflective practice groups, lectures, conferences, courses, etc.

Conclusions

The conclusions of the present article stress out the following aspects: reflective approach of teaching involves exchanges in the way teachers usually perceive teaching and their role in the process of learning; teachers who explore their own teaching through critical reflection develop changes in attitudes and realize that they contribute to their professional growth, as well as to the improvement of support they offer to their students; reflective teaching shows the fact that experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, but experience associated with reflection can be a strong impulse for teachers' development.

In the field of profession, beneficent influences for the reflective teacher are connected to: enlargement of knowledge horizon; intensification of the self-improvement process by receipting positive didactic experience, by taking, adapting its creativity and value it in his own educative practices; reporting new data to his own experience and vice versa, reporting his own teaching experiences to other experiences.

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