

# How to Be a Reflective Teacher?

Yuting Wu\*

Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou 730070, Gansu Province, China

\*Corresponding author: Yuting Wu, 921249595@qq.com

**Copyright:** © 2022 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** Since the 1980s, educational experts and scholars from western countries have carried out multi-level and multi-angle research on “reflection,” “reflective teaching,” “reflective teacher,” and other subject matters, and fruitful results have been achieved <sup>[1]</sup>. Since the late 1990s, the research on reflective teachers in China has gradually deepened. Not only a considerable number of papers have been published, but also numerous monographs. This paper defines the term “reflective teacher,” explores and studies the nurturing of reflective teachers, clarifies the relationship between reflection and classroom, and highlights the characteristics that reflective teachers should have.

**Keywords:** Reflection; Teaching; Reflective teacher

**Online publication:** June 22, 2022

## 1. Introduction

Under the background of the new curriculum reform, teachers are no longer traditional “teachers,” but educators with wisdom and knowledge to promote the generation through teaching. The work teachers engaged in is a complex social activity, which is closely related to the completion of various tasks. Therefore, teachers should not only have extensive knowledge and deep understanding, but also able to make rational and practical judgments based on these broad knowledge and understandings. However, it is now very common that many school textbooks are out of date, and the invariable teaching content is causing teachers to slack in their thinking. Therefore, many of them still have backward thinking, in which their teaching plans and courseware are stuck in the same routine since years ago. The absence of reflection in teaching among teachers has become a barrier in enhancing teaching quality and a shackle in the development of professional quality among teachers. Reflective teaching shows the continuous pursuit of rationality in the teaching practice and is a new attempt to improve teaching quality <sup>[2]</sup>. The new era of teaching requires reflective teachers; hence, it is worthwhile to consider and explore how to become a reflective teacher.

## 2. Definition of a “reflective teacher”

Huang Xiaoying pointed out that a “reflective teacher” is a teacher who is able to think critically, analyze, explore, and improve his or her own educational and teaching concepts and practical activities with the help of advanced educational and teaching theories as well as other people’s teaching experiences, so as to continuously improve his or her professional level <sup>[3]</sup>. Shao Lijuan believes that a “reflective teacher” refers to a teacher who can constantly analyze his or her own educational and teaching work, improve and create new educational experience, as well as propose new educational ideas <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3. Characteristics of a reflective teacher**

Huang Xiaoying holds the view that reflective teachers have several characteristics. First, reflective teachers have strong observational skills<sup>[3]</sup>. Students are unique individuals, and their performances in class certainly differ from one another. Reflective teachers can accurately capture the experience, feeling, attitude, emotion, and understanding of all kinds of students during teaching activities, and thus make timely analysis, so as to improve the teaching strategies. Second, reflective teachers devote themselves to learning new knowledge. Knowledge is constantly changing, and reflective teachers are able to learn new and advanced educational and teaching theories, especially those related to their own majors; these teachers also learn from the teaching experiences of others. Only in this way can scientific, reasonable, and effective reflection be carried out. In addition, reflective teachers dare to criticize. They will not blindly follow the footsteps of others since authority does not affect their judgment, nor will they keep pursuing their own philosophies and experiences without considering those of others. In the teaching practice, reflective teachers are brave to question and criticize unreasonable teaching ideas<sup>[5]</sup>. Lastly, they also cooperate with students and colleagues in a friendly manner. They will consult the opinions of students, actively cooperate and interact with colleagues, as well as accept feedback and suggestions from all levels, including students, colleagues, leaders, and experts, to promote reflection.

### **4. Development trend of reflective teachers**

In foreign countries, Dewey was the first to propose the idea of “reflection” in teaching and systematically expound on it<sup>[6]</sup>. Dewey believes that this kind of reflective behavior is derived from the difficulties, doubts, or other issues encountered by teachers in their teaching practice, which require time to solve. Reflection is a more complex process than logical and rational problem solving, which involves intuition, emotion, and passion. There are three attitudes of a reflective teacher: modesty, sense of responsibility, and passion. In 1983, an American scholar, Schon, published a book “The Reflective Practitioner: How Professional Think in Action,” in which the term “reflective teaching” formally appeared in<sup>[7]</sup>. In the book, Schon believes that reflective teaching is a process in which teachers learn from their own teaching experiences<sup>[8]</sup>. The emergence of reflective teaching is beyond simply labeling teaching reform as success or failure. With the development of education and teaching theory and practice, people are acknowledging that reflection is one of the important qualities that teachers should have, and it has gained recognition from the majority of educational theorists<sup>[9]</sup>. As GJ Posner has pointed out, “Experience without reflection is narrow, at most producing superficial knowledge. If a teacher is only satisfied with gaining experience rather than thinking deeply about it, the teacher’s development will be greatly limited.” For the reform of education and teaching in China, teachers need to have reflective skills. Therefore, becoming a reflective teacher will not only be a social requirement for teachers, but also an inevitable trend of quality development among teachers.

### **5. How to become a reflective teacher?**

#### **5.1. Record the teaching process**

Teachers must record and analyze the activities as well as their feelings and experiences in teaching<sup>[10]</sup>. First of all, teachers should consider whether the teaching objectives are reasonable or not. Every subject has its own teaching objectives, which are inextricably linked to the impact of teaching and define the value of the teaching process<sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, teachers must record the teaching process in a serious manner. Reviewing the teaching process is a basic step that every teacher should conform to. At the end of each lesson, a few minutes should be given to review and record the lesson briefly, so as to conduct periodic reflection in the future. The contents of the record include the following:

- (1) What knowledge do students have doubts about?
- (2) What kind of question stimulates students' interest?
- (3) How do the students feel in class?
- (4) Has the ideal teaching objective been achieved?

In case of insufficient time, classroom and video recordings can be used to record the entire lesson, so that it is easier to review the details in the teaching process <sup>[12]</sup>.

### **5.2. Observe and discuss with colleagues**

Teachers can observe the teaching of other classes when they are free. Then, they should communicate with each other and analyze together to improve <sup>[13]</sup>. Meanwhile, schools could hold teaching seminars regularly to come up with solutions to problems in the teaching process. In teaching and research activities, teachers can use the same text, compare different teaching ideas, and reflect on their own teaching plans, so as to learn from each other. At the same time, they should also put forward their problems encountered while preparing for lessons and discuss them. This is an effective way to improve their professional level. Micro teaching skills can also be used as the topic of discussion, so as to optimize their teaching methods.

### **5.3. Assessment from students**

Listening to students' assessment is a shortcut to understanding and analyzing teaching from the students' point of view. Students are the subjects of learning, and the purpose of teachers' reflection is also to enhance students' interest in learning and improve their learning efficiency. Therefore, communication with students is also an important form of reflection. Teachers can come to understand students' feelings and their evaluation of teaching activities by using questionnaires. In order to enhance objectivity, teachers can ask students to put forward various opinions and suggestions in an anonymous way. This can help teachers to perceive their own achievements and shortcomings in an objective way, thus promoting reflection. In addition, teachers may also communicate with students face to face, understand their difficulties in learning, and put forward reasonable suggestions. When interacting with students, teachers should strive to create an equal, respectful, and harmonious atmosphere. In this way, students can criticize and provide constructive feedback in a relaxed manner.

### **5.4. Evaluate the teaching effect**

Determining the teaching effect is an effective way to reflect on classroom teaching. Especially with certain examinations, it is easier for teachers to carry out such work. For teachers, the final examination of each semester, the national CET-4 examination, and the National English Competition are all indicators to determine the teaching effect and reflect on individual professional level. Such examinations have uniform standards; hence, the results are also more objective. Although not everyone advocates using examinations to determine teaching quality, it is undeniable that examinations are indeed direct indicators of teaching evaluation to a certain extent. In terms of exam results, both the students' and teachers' efforts should be taken into consideration in the scores; that is to say, teaching evaluation should be objective and comprehensive.

### **5.5. Action research**

Teachers should pay attention to the problems they encounter in class to look for solutions. Action research is the research for teaching action, in which the subject of this research is action itself <sup>[14]</sup>. It has several steps: finding and identifying problems, making research plans, collecting and analyzing data, taking action, observing, and reflecting.

For example, Mr. Li, a middle school grade two English teacher, has given two tests since the start of school; he found that the students' learning effect is generally poor. When Mr. Li discovered the problem, he began to read about the factors affecting students' learning. From there, he found that teachers' knowledge level, personality, and expectation, students' learning attitude and motivation, as well as teaching methods, teaching equipment, and teaching hours more or less influence the learning effect. Through discussion, Mr. Li and two other English teachers of the same grade came up with a research plan, which is to identify the problems by observing each other's teaching. After observing each other's classes using observation sheets that they prepared themselves, the three teachers compared and analyzed the data. Mr. Li also designed a questionnaire to investigate the learning problems encountered by students. Based on the results from the observation and questionnaire, they attributed the poor learning effect of Mr. Li's classes to the single teaching method. The two teachers helped Mr. Li to develop an action plan, suggesting that a drama class should be held at least once a week and frequent interactions should be made with foreign teachers every two weeks. One month later, the students were evaluated again to look for any improvement in their learning effect. This kind of research is inseparable from teaching activities, which aims at improving teachers' professional level. Therefore, action research can be used as a method for teachers to reflect on their own educational and teaching behaviors.

## **6. Conclusion**

Each student is different, thus requiring teachers to work in line with human temperament. Expert teachers are no longer popular in China, and it is now replaced with a new image of teachers; that is, reflective teachers<sup>[15]</sup>. Such teachers will make faster progress than those who do not reflect. However, the nurturing of teachers' reflective skills has not aroused enough attention in its implementation. Many teachers themselves have not formed a strong sense of reflection, with their thinking stuck in the past and refusing to learn new knowledge and teaching methods. They still do not see the differences between students and are complacent with treating all students in the same manner. In addition, schools also do not pay enough attention to the cultivation of reflective teachers as embodied in the lack of appropriate conditions and environment for teachers' reflection. In many schools, there are no opportunities for interaction, lectures, exchanges, or discussions. The evaluation of teachers is also not scientific enough. It is necessary to change this situation from both subjective and objective aspects, build a good platform for the nurturing of "reflective teachers," actively promote teachers' reflective consciousness and reflective skills, as well as improve the teaching level and quality.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## **References**

- [1] Tian J, 2003, A Study on the Characteristics of Reflective Teachers Teaching Behavior. *Research in Higher Education*, 2003(01): 76-79.
- [2] Xiong C, 2000, On Reflective Teaching. *Education Research*, 2000(02): 59-63, 76.
- [3] Huang X, 2006, Thoughts on How to Cultivate "Reflective Teachers". *Modern Education Science*, 2006(05): 63.
- [4] Shao L, 2009, How to Become a Reflective Teacher. *Journal of Changchun Institute of Education*, 2009(04): 27.

- [5] Han X, 2016, An Analysis of the Professional Growth Mechanism of Reflective Teachers. *Education Theory and Practice*, 2016(35): 37-39.
- [6] Wang Y, 2015, How to Become a Reflective Teacher. *Shan Hai Jing*, 2015(17): 121.
- [7] Schon DA, 1983, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professional Think in Action*, Basic Book, New York.
- [8] Chen E, 2003, *On Reflective Teachers and Their Ability Cultivation*. Capital Normal University.
- [9] Schon DA, 1987, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- [10] Shi X, Liu L, 2012, On Reflective Teaching and the Training of English Teachers. *China Adult Education*, 2012(09): 43.
- [11] Di S, 2015, The Application of Reflective Teaching in Junior High School English Teaching. *Curriculum Education Research*, 2015(28): 125.
- [12] Zhang R, 2021, Reflective Learning Is the Key to Professional Growth of New Teachers. *New Wisdom*, 2021(12): 32.
- [13] Xu W, 2003, Reflective Ability: A Necessary Quality for Teachers' Sustainable Development. *Chinese Journal of Education*, 2003(10): 28-29.
- [14] Zhang Z, Li S, 2003, Development of English Teachers. *Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method*, 23(11): 59-66.
- [15] Hu Y, 2006, Cultivating Reflective Teachers Is an Important Task of Teacher Education. *Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method*, 2006(06): 18.

**Publisher's note**

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.