

# Examining the Current State of Reflective Teaching Practices Among Newly Appointed Primary School Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study focused on three newly appointed primary school teachers in City D as research subjects. Utilizing research methods such as interviews, text analysis, and observation, the findings revealed that these teachers exhibited a substantial grasp of teaching reflection. The predominant emphasis in their teaching reflection levels was observed at the technical reasonable reflection and practical action reflection stages. To enhance the reflection levels of these novice teachers, it is recommended to foster their professional ethics, institute a diverse training system, and enhance the school's infrastructure and institutional support systems.

**Keywords:** Teaching reflection; New primary school teachers; Reflection level

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## 1. The essence of teaching reflection levels

Currently, the academic community widely acknowledges teaching reflection as a cognitive process wherein teachers contemplate educational and instructional activities, seeking diverse approaches to address challenges encountered during this reflective process<sup>[1]</sup>. The teaching reflection level is centered on the profoundness of teachers' reflective practices. According to Meinan Fan, three distinct levels of teaching reflection exist: reasonable reflection, practical action reflection, and critical reflection<sup>[2]</sup>.

Teachers operating at the reasonable reflection level staunchly adhere to the theories proposed by education experts. Their reflective focus lies in classroom teaching, exploring strategies to enhance teaching outcomes. On the practical action reflection level, teachers adeptly apply relevant theories to troubleshoot issues encountered in teaching practice, engaging in comprehensive reflection on all facets of the teaching process to acquire practical knowledge. Finally, teachers at the critical reflection level possess the ability to impartially critique the ethical and moral dimensions of teaching events, positioning themselves as catalysts and active contributors to educational reform<sup>[3]</sup>.

## **2. Study design and methods**

The newly appointed teachers under consideration are in-service teachers who have successfully completed pre-service training courses, obtained teacher qualification certificates, and are within their first three years of teaching experience <sup>[4]</sup>. This study focused on three elementary school teachers in City D. Initially, daily participatory observations were conducted, followed by semi-structured interviews. The interview outline encompassed aspects such as the comprehension of teaching reflection, reflective practices, motivation for reflection, and factors influencing reflection. The interview data were categorized by the teacher's initial and the day of the interview, with, for instance, Teacher Z's interview marked as ZF: 2022-11-3. Simultaneously, their teaching reflection logs were gathered, totaling 33 entries, and marked as JA: Z-2022-9-2. This analysis of the teaching reflection level of new primary school teachers was conducted through a comprehensive examination of observation, interviews, and text analysis.

## **3. Analysis of the current state of teaching reflection levels among new primary school teachers**

### **3.1. Mr. Z**

#### **3.1.1. Reflection content**

Teacher Z places significant emphasis on the impact of classroom teaching. In his reflection log, terms related to teaching objectives such as “Chinese elements” and “reading ability” appeared 12 and 9 times, respectively. Alongside classroom teaching, he frequently documents experiences in class management, prioritizing the development of students' behavioral habits and actively working to establish a tacit understanding with the entire class.

#### **3.1.2. Reflection method**

As a young teacher immersed in the information age, he believes that the Internet transcends spatial and experiential limitations, providing inspiration for teaching. Consequently, he frequently utilizes online resources to enhance his reflective practices.

#### **3.1.3. Reflective motivation**

Teacher Z recognized the vital role of teaching reflection in the development of new teachers. He engages in frequent reflection, asserting that the ability for reflective practice is not developed but hinges on a teacher's self-development consciousness. “I think this ability is not developed, but whether you have a heart; if you want to do well, you will reflect” (ZF: 2022-11-3).

### **3.2. Mr. S**

#### **3.2.1. Reflection content**

Teacher S, unlike many peers, carefully crafts teaching plans only for open classes and occasionally downloads teaching reflections from the Internet. His focus lies on achieving teaching goals, with a simpler perspective on classroom teaching. “Let the students experience the characteristics of the graphics in the activities such as folding and cutting... and thus trigger the desire for further exploration... In this class, I should first let the students explore the discovery, rather than teach them hand in hand, which limits the students' thinking” (JA: S-2022-10-30).

### **3.2.2. Reflection methods**

Teacher S tends to engage in reflective discussions with colleagues, although his reflections primarily remain at the “thinking” level, with minimal written documentation. “Learn some good experiences from the senior teachers and then apply them to our class according to the actual situation. I don’t like to write words” (SF: 2021-12-4).

### **3.2.3. Reflective motivation**

Teacher S’s reflective motivation stems more from external factors, such as school requirements and the pressure associated with class leadership. He perceives the limited role of teaching reflection in teachers’ professional development and often relies on experiential problem-solving in teaching practice, exhibiting minimal consideration for pedagogical theory.

## **3.3. Miss W**

### **3.3.1. Understanding of teaching reflection**

“I’m so annoyed that I don’t want to write (teaching reflection) ... I don’t think reflection works for me” (WF: 2021-12-3). Teacher W holds a negative stance toward teaching reflection, preferring to adhere to the guidance of experienced senior teachers. This guidance tends to be unilateral and passive, confirming Teacher W’s reflection level to the surface level of technical reasonable reflection.

## **3.4. Study analysis**

Through analysis, it is evident that the teaching reflection levels of the three novice teachers exhibit notable variations. Teacher Z demonstrates a relatively ideal practical action reflection, while Teachers S and W, at this early stage, lack a comprehensive understanding of the significance of teaching reflection, with their reflection levels limited to compliance with authority and simple descriptions of educational phenomena.

## **4. Enhancing reflective thinking in new primary school teachers**

### **4.1. Cultivate a lifelong learning mindset**

Due to the lingering influence of traditional educational paradigms, some new teachers perceive the teacher-student relationship as one of command and obedience, focusing on demonstration and imitation while placing themselves above students <sup>[5]</sup>. This mindset impedes their willingness to reflect. Furthermore, without a foundation in professional ethics, reflection often becomes a reactive response to teaching accidents. It is imperative for teachers to embrace the concept of lifelong learning and development, consciously instilling a reflective mindset. Additionally, addressing gaps in understanding teaching reflection theories is crucial. Some new teachers, relying solely on experiential knowledge, risk losing the consciousness and ability to reflect. Therefore, teachers should actively engage in practical teaching, adopting a “learning by doing” approach, while continuously staying informed about the latest educational theoretical advancements.

### **4.2. Establish a diversified training system**

New primary school teachers often find themselves juggling the responsibilities of a head teacher, including class management alongside daily teaching tasks. This situation contradicts the aspirations of new teachers seeking to enhance their teaching prowess. Attention must be given to cultivating reflective abilities during pre-service education. Primary and secondary school teacher training programs should focus on improving teachers’ awareness, analytical skills, and problem-solving abilities through various means. Research underscores

the significance of reflective diaries as a valuable data source for evaluating teachers' reflective capabilities [6]. Therefore, pre-service training should place particular emphasis on honing teachers' ability to maintain reflective diaries [7-9]. Additionally, educational administrative departments should take the lead in fostering an integrated development approach to teacher education, spanning from primary and secondary schools to universities, offering targeted training initiatives for teachers [10-13].

### 4.3. Enhance school infrastructure and support systems

Recognizing the external factors influencing personal development, schools must provide comprehensive support in both infrastructure and systems. Regarding infrastructure, schools should continuously enhance the environment and facilities necessary for teachers' reflective practices [14,15].

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, as lifelong learners, teachers' ability for teaching reflection becomes a continuous thread woven throughout their entire career development. The reflective capacities of new teachers are influenced by various intricate factors, necessitating guidance in conceptual understanding, reform in school management mechanisms, and support through policies. These factors collectively aid teachers during the crucial initial stage of their career development, fostering robust reflection abilities. This, in turn, contributes significantly to the genuine enhancement of the overall quality of primary school teachers in China.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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