Professional Development – A Reflective Process

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I believe that education and learning are life-long processes and that professional development is an important part of these undertakings. In order to develop as a teacher, it is necessary to learn from experience and through reflection (Dewey, 1904/1977). Critical analysis of my own practice allows me to realize new perspectives. We must "see our ideas and practices as needing constant investigation" (Brookfield, 1995, p.42). It is valuable to incorporate into a teacher's daily routine a reflective stance or a willingness to look critically at one's own teaching so that it can be improved upon or enhanced (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). My authenticity as a teacher is the degree to which I am faithful to my own personality, spirit, and character, despite the external pressures and influences that might intrude. Brookfield (1995) suggests that critically reflective teachers are excellent teachers who continually hone their personalized authentic voice. Self-reflection is the foundation for reflective teaching because it goes further to understanding student experiences. Palmer (1998) maintains that good teaching comes from developing my identity (an evolving nexus) and integrity. I find it is important to always question and reflect on my personal identity as I teach**,** forming or deforming the way in which I relate to students.

Professional development should aim to develop teachers' professional thinking and practice towards enhancing the quality of instructing and learning. A wide variety of activities and practices can support on-going and evidence-based reflective practice (Cambridge, n.d.). Therefore the outcomes of successful professional development should result in specific changes in professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and actions. For example, engaging with a professional learning community or network enables instructors to collaborate with colleagues in a mutually supportive manner. An involvement in a professional learning community/network leads to sharing ideas, observing, recording, and providing useful feedback. Moreover, there needs to be on-going critical conversations with colleagues. Have we stretched, challenged, questioned, and introduced our students to new perspectives? I consider there is a need to transform and improve our teaching practices and to engage students more meaningfully with subject content while developing their metacognitive skills. I believe in the power of collaboration whereby groups construct knowledge socially from one another. Situated cognitions enables teachers and students to achieve a fundamental understanding of one's positioned experiences, and the significance of those experiences (Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Making use of mentors and coaches is also a powerful supportive way to improve teaching skills and contribute to the learning of others or taking note

of new recognized research techniques also aids in improving teaching practice. Investigate about what others' are doing in various disciplines. Professional development also means utilizing resources, such as the *Groundwork* brochure (Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia, 2016) published for educators in the field of adult education; being appreciative of colleagues that share information, such as webinars on upcoming facilitated professional development opportunities; forwarding links to recent journal publications; and also being willing to communalize interdisciplinary ideas and knowledge with others. I further argue that all subjects are of equal importance, should be connected, and related to one another. There should be no hierarchy of subject matter. The subject matter of education is the social life and actual experience of the learner and the basis of growth. I trust that good teaching involves *being* questioning in a thoughtful, constructive, and reflective way; education should empower all learners to be critical. Greene (1995) insists on the need to consciously look at the world, without attaching labels, and look at the multiple realities abounding. She maintains that the hope for a general consciousness must come from the development of a vocabulary that articulates and accounts for all differences.

Seeking ideas, dialogue, and resources is encouraged, and in addition, attending scholarly conferences are ways in which to seek professional development. Conferences are one way to build networks, increase awareness of new trends in a specific area of interest, highlight great discoveries, and expand pedagogical resources (Colorado Technical University, 2013). Conferences can also be thought of as learning episodes involving keeping track of whether interest was increased or destroyed, whether intellects and emotions were engaged, and organizing follow-up workshops (Brookfield, 1995). Reflecting on current practices in general helps identify where any facet of professional development might be needed. In sum, teachers are always in need of continual support and guidance from fellow instructors, educational leaders, administrators, policy makers, and the general public.

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