

UNDERSTANDING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

ROBA DANBI WODESSA

Bule Hora University, Ethiopia

Abstract: This paper shades light on the theory of reflective practice and its applicability in teaching context, particularly EFL teaching context based on the works of different scholars such Dewey (1933), Schon (1987), Brookfield (1995), and Loughran (2005). Many scholarly works on reflective practice are ground on the philosophy of John Dewey which distinguishes the difference between routine and reflective action. To this end, reflective practice can be defined as active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends (Dewey, 1933). Grounding on this definition, other scholars also define reflective practice as the ability to think about emerging practice at a deeper level, questioning approach, engaging with feelings, questioning assumptions and gaining greater self awareness (Bassot, 2016). It is this ability of thinking which makes bold the value of reflection in teaching and learning that it encourages one to view problems from different perspectives. Schon (1987) illustrates the importance of reflective practice by developing the notion of double loop learning through reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. Similar to this notion, Loughran (2005) developed cyclical reflective process namely: Anticipatory reflection, Retrospective reflection, and contemporaneous reflection. Finally, Brookfield (1995) postulated four critical lenses for the applicability of reflective practice in teaching and learning process, and teachers' professional development.

I. UNDERSTANDING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN EFL TEACHING

Reflective practice has been developing as an important concept in teaching and particularly teaching English as a foreign language as it is also crucial in other disciplines such as health care education (Jones, 2008; Ghaye, 2011). The key theorist on this concept of reflection, John Dewey, in his book 'How We Think', defines reflective thinking as active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends (Dewey, 1933). He relates the manifestation of reflective thinking with three important attitudes such as open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness. Deep investigation into these attitudes expands the definition of reflective thinking as both cognitive and affective. Donald Schon has also built on the work of Dewey and extends the importance of the concept of reflective practice in professional works. He has made a significant impact on the debate about both the process of reflective practice and its impact on organizations and learning cultures. In the proof of his argument, he introduced the notion of differentiation between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987). According to him, reflection on action is more focuses on retrospective action while reflection-in-action focuses on the mastery of self-aware practice. Schon (1987) suggests the applicability of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action in the process of unearthing the prescribed rules, or 'technical rationality' in his own term. He argues that because the technical rationalities are limited in their applicability to specific situations, and because individual practitioners are not always aware of the myriad of different rules that might be needed to inform any one set of actions in a changing situation, they need to reflect on the general rules in order to practice relevantly in any specific context to unearth the general rules through a process of 'reflection on action' (Schon, 1987; Fook and Gardner, 2007).

The other important work in the process of understanding reflective practice is the work of Stephen Brookfield (1995). Brookfield, in his book, *Becoming a critically reflective practitioner*, refers teaching as a complex and an ambiguous activity. This complexity and ambiguity of activity requires teacher's ability to understand cultural, political, and psychological complexity of learning, and the power relationship between student and teacher (Brookfield, 1995).

Brookfield, therefore, argues that the excellent teachers are those who continue to refine a very personal authentic voice, suggesting that this instills both values and dignity in teaching practices. Brookfield (1995) adds the critical stance on the term reflective practice believing that mere thinking or superficial understanding is not enough in the complex situations like teaching and learning process in which teachers face great challenges and disappointment if they continue in teaching innocently. According to Brookfield, innocent teachers are teachers who merely accept the cause of students' failure as their own mistake and they forget the impact of policy, environment, and other assumptions that flow to classroom where teachers and students meet for learning and teaching. The addition critical stance on the term reflective practice is, therefore, to unearth the problems that hinders real learning and teaching process by hiding itself under taken-for-granted assumption.

Therefore, teachers need to be critically reflective practitioners in order to hunt assumptions that embedded in the school settings and institutional culture of teaching and learning processes. So the work of Brookfield reminds us that though individuals are somehow neutral, autonomous and already self-aware, they need to get the awareness of educational context which is essential to an awareness of self as an individual who operate inside of a discerning context and the socially mediated and situated nature of all human activities. In order to make reflective practice applicable in teaching and learning process, Brookfield (1995) provides four critical lenses.

II. BROOKFIELD'S FOUR CRITICAL LENSES AND EFL TEACHING

Stephen D. Brookfield uses and recommends four lenses to be used by teacher educators to prepare pre-service teacher equipped with critical stance. He argues teachers should be critical to save their energy, time and even to become effective teacher who impact the life of others (Brookfield, 1995). His four lenses have many important effects to foster pre-service teachers' language use skills, understand one's own beliefs of teaching, and confidence in the professional arena. Brookfield's critical reflective teaching is a social theory in which both teachers and students get challenging at least at initial stage, but favorable environment for language use and teaching skills acquisition and professional development opportunities. Language acquisition theory favors for natural environment in which the user of the language gets access to the elements of the target language for the application of the language in real communicative context. Applying Brookfield's four lenses in pre-service EFL teacher preparation program can create safe environment for language skill development for both teacher as professionals of English language and students as learners of English language.

1. *Using Autobiography as a Critical Lens*

Autobiographical lens, as Brookfield says, is used to look back to our experience as a teacher and as a learner. During this time student teachers can get opportunity to analyze what difficulties they face as a learner, what difficulties they faced as a teacher, their beliefs about language teaching and learning, the authorities of teacher they faced as a learner, what was its effect on their language learning, and etc. while analyzing these points student teachers get time to exercise their cognitive ability and face emotional influence while getting surprised by how they have been doing and by action they have done. On the other hand, their thinking is based on real idea rather than impractical experience that is developed in theoretical books, and provided by someone else. They get opportunity to use the language they know well for the environment they experienced for themselves. I believe that using any language we know little for the environment we now more helps use to decrease the language difficulty that challenges the learners. This helps to develop communicative skills in students and confidence both as learner and professional teacher.

2. *Using Students' Eyes as a Critical Lens*

Using students eyes as lens as critical perspective for teachers learning to see how our teaching is going is very important for pre-service teacher preparation program. Brookfield argues that teachers who cannot use students' eyes to teach cannot be effective teacher. Because what teacher considers good might be very bad for the students it would be better to use students' eyes to know how they think the lesson is going. So a teacher who uses students' eyes as lens to see his work can get opportunity to get fresh idea from the students. He/she can analyze how the lesson is going, how similar or different his/her interpretation of things and students' interpretation of things, how difficulty the lesson is, where his/her students are, etc. Using students' eye's as lenses to be critically reflective teacher in pre-service teacher preparation program therefore, can help to develop language and thinking skills with particular focus on real situation help both teacher educator and student teacher to develop language use.

Brookfield (1995) develops practical activities that make the use of the lens students' eyes applicable in teaching experience. For example, the teacher can engage students to keep participants learning portfolio, hold critical incident session, write students learning journal, arrange troubleshooting session, and fill in critical incident questionnaires. These are tools to be used to examine and understand different worldviews that is available in the same classroom, and giving opportunity for students to get involved in learning help them to be responsible for their own learning. They have role to play. Through participating in this activity, both teacher and student get chances to use target language properly though it might be challenging in the initial level. Through process participation in writing different classroom, and personal incidents and discussion with partners and teachers as well for sure tackles the problem related to using English for communication, and teaching and teaching learning process. Bassot (2016) state that the process of writing helps both teacher and students to understand the things they are doing/writing. This is important step in relation to reflective writing because thoroughly think about what they are writing while they are writing. Bassot (2016) says, '[I]f you want to understand more about yourself and your practice, you need to write about it.

The bad side of this activity may be it imposes more responsibility on teachers in order to take the risk of modeling, and engaging all learners in meaningful learning activities. Equipping pre-service teachers with these skills develops their self-confidence to make conversation through both oral and written forms, and most importantly fosters the ability to analyze the meaning of their thinking and its effect on their actions.

3. *Colleagues' Eyes or Peer Review as a Critical Lens*

Many teacher educators believe that peer review is very important for profession development because peers, if they are critical thinking friends, can provide the teacher or prospective teacher to see himself through his colleagues' eyes. Bassot (2016) defines that a critical friend is someone who will help you to engage with many aspects of your development, particularly in relation to self-awareness. Working with a critical friend will help you to give and receive valuable feedback on your practice and it will be important to choose a critical friend carefully.

Brookfield (1995) makes it practical by setting different activities which might peers play to provided supportive or constructive comments and suggestion for his colleagues. These peers or colleagues can be teachers as community of practice in the same department or students in the same classroom. Brookfield says it is a teacher how asks his colleague to evaluate his own work not colleague's plan to attack or demoralize the teacher. In this case the practicing teacher provide the checklist on specific focus on where weakness and strength lays and how the colleague perceive that is the strength and the weakness. Through this process there would be communication between/among friends on the assumption why the teacher is performing the way he was doing; then the discussion going on and on. This is also very important for English language teachers. It creates a community of learning. Student teachers learn how the idea of colleague is very important for professional development. This, supported by different tools and activities, helps to foster language teachers' ability to use the language and confidence as professional teacher.

4. *Theoretical Perspective as Critical Lens*

Language teaching is based different assumptions which are grounded on different theoretical perspectives. Even the difference between language learning and language acquisition has its own position to argue one is different from the other because of a particular reason. Brookfield says these theoretical perspectives are very important to become a critically reflective teacher. He also argues reflection is not applied in a vacuum; it needs context, experience, and perspectives. Knowing these multiple perspectives helps one to follow the best alternative to ground his/her action on tested and proved assumption as a teacher. Unless otherwise any action that is based on tested and proved theory leads to taken-for-granted assumption which leads our teaching activities to a bad conclusion. Brookfield argues that theoretical perspective helps pr-service teachers to develop different vocabulary skills which are crucial for language teachers. I also see the importance of theoretical literature as it helps teachers to current and up to date by reading different literature on their profession and then develop through time as they engage in this particular activity. This helps to confirm the objective and mission statement in teacher preparation program that says 'teaching is a lifelong learning profession'.

III. LOUNGHAN'S (2005) TYPES OF REFLECTION

Lounghran (2005) suggests three types of reflection based on Dewey's (1933) definition of reflective thinking: active, persistent and careful consideration of any beliefs or supports form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that supports it and further conclusion of to which it tends. Lounghran (2005) argues that to understand such thinking in pre, during and post teaching experiences is a guide to understand how reflection influences practice. The three stages/types of reflection he forwards are anticipatory reflection, retrospective reflection, and contemporaneous reflection. Frankly speaking these stage/types of reflection is not new though its naming might be making it new. Donald Schon (1987) formerly illuminated the concept as the reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action. However, Lounghran (2005) clearly put the implementation of the concept of reflective practice in teaching scenario in a very practical ways. And I believe that going through these reflective stages helps teachers to understand what reflective practice is and how to implement it for EFL's classroom.

1. *Anticipatory Reflection*

This is a kind of reflection which is the first and common form of reflection and embraces the question, 'How might I approach teaching 'this' particular content or lesson?' (Lounghran, 2005). This question can be a guide to how one reasons through and develops a pedagogical approach that might be tested in practice. This means teachers has to think about their knowledge of the contents to teach, their students nature, and which methods is appropriate for this lesson in advance before they enter the classroom to teach. According Lounghran (2005) this stage gives opportunities for teachers to imagine and test the suggestions to make possible pedagogical decisions about a course of action to be embarked up on. For example, teacher may plan how to manage the class, control learners behavior to concentrate on learning, and how to manage his/her own interaction with students.

2. *Retrospective Reflection*

Retrospective reflection is initiated by questioning what happened and why in teaching episode (Lounghran, 2005). Retrospective reflection has similar concept with Schon's reflection-in-action. It would be initiated in response to the action embarked up on as a result of testing hypotheses and teaching approaches devised through anticipatory reflection. Retrospective reflection is likely to be influenced by the issues/concerns which prompted reflection in the first place. It also be influenced by the teachers' recognition, perception, and interpretation of other events occurs during the teaching experiences.

3. *Contemporaneous Reflection*

As Lounghran (2005) asserts, Contemporaneous reflection is where the action-present is the impetus for reflection. It is a kind of reflection that is immediately responsive to the learning environment and may be seen as shift in pedagogical approaches and behaviors which may be either anticipated or unexpected. Unlike Schon's reflection-on-action, Lounghran suggests that this stage of reflection is a very challenging stage of reflection because it includes dynamic natures of reflection. And it is, therefore, a most demanding and highly context dependent action. It also leads to learning from testing during teaching episode and requires a personal acceptance of the risks involved. Lounghran (2005) also argues that inexperienced teachers can face challenges not in identifying the problem, but be unable to respond appropriately or confidently, therefore, opportunities for contemporaneous reflection may be presented but remain unattended (Lounghran, 2005, p162).

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

To implement the concept of reflective practice in teaching practice needs rigorous attention from works of Schon (1987), Brookfield (1995), and Lounghran (2005). I preferred to frame the implementation of reflective practice with the work of these authors because their approach to reflection feeds on one another and shades light on the meaningful ways of implementing reflective practice which many people criticizes the complexity of the term. The reflective cycle of Lounghran (2005) is identical with Schon's (1987) forms of reflection. Brookfield's four critical lenses on other hand helps as building blocks of both reflective cycles and forms. The Lounghran's contemplative reflection goes similar with Schon's reflection-for-action form. For Lounghran, this stage/cycle suggests that teachers need to thoroughly think about the lesson before they start teaching. They need to be prepared regarding appropriate teaching method, appropriate content knowledge, relative understanding of learners' psychology, and the nature of schooling. This preplanning and

thorough understanding is true for both Lounghran and Schon. Brookfield, in his part, shades light on how to be prepared. For example, one of his four lenses is using literature to understanding teaching in general. Therefore, when one reads literature it would be obvious he/she can be familiar with the contents to be taught, nature of student, and possible types of leaning styles, current teaching methods with its strength and pitfalls, and the overall school context and its influence on teaching learning process. Through reading different literature, teachers can be familiar with the setting they are working. For example, Freire and Macedo (2005) assert that through reading the word critically one can read or understand the world around him. This also develops teachers self confidence, and freedom to choose what is appropriate for his students, and even brave enough to challenge meaningless activities in educational settings. This ensures as the power of teacher is not limited only in the classroom but also teacher is an agent of changes in the larger community. So, understanding reflective cycles of Lounghran and Schon's forms of reflection becomes real with the use of Brookfield's critical reflective lenses.

The second type of Lounghran's reflection is retrospective reflection which is similar with Schon's reflection-in-action. Both Lounghran and Schon agree that teachers need to understand their thinking and action while they are embarking up on the action. They need to test the implementation of contemplative/reflection-for-action plan against their action-present or what happening now, how it is happening and why it is happening in such a way while the action is embarking up on. The intelligent question one may ask here is how one can understand while he/she is embarking up on the action? Brookfield answers this in that by using student's eyes, and being conscious about one's activities. Teacher needs to be relatively flexible to interact with students freely. While interaction, she/he can get very important ideas from the students. Freire and Shor (1987) agree with this concept that teachers are both teachers and learners with their students if they believe that curiosity help them to learn and relearn useful knowledge. This means idea from students can help the teacher to test the assumption/hypotheses he/she formulated before coming to the class. Brookfield (1995) also elaborates on this concept that unless we receive critical comments from our learners we fall under the assumption students get knowledge directly from action and what we say while they may interpret action and speech to different way. The best way to avoid this kind of pitfalls is using students' eyes as critical lens to understand our assumption.

The last point is contemporaneous reflection which seems similar with Schon's reflection-on-action. What makes these two authors similar is both of them focus on thinking back to what happened or just after the action accomplished. The teachers need to look back to examine how retrospective reflection/reflection-in-action accomplished, what was successful, what was the failure, and what needs attention. Brookfield has also answer for possible question that one can ask on this stage. For example, one can evaluate his introspective reflection through gathering comments from both students and his critical colleagues/friends. He/she can do this through inviting students to write reflective journal, learning logs, portfolio, and distributing critical incident questionnaire to get import clues about his teaching. In addition, teachers can conduct learning or teaching audit at the end of single class or end of the year to know what happened and what needs more attention than usual. Through inviting colleagues to observe his/her class and provide critical comments, the teacher can learn the strength and weakness of his/her teaching experience. Through this process the teachers become rich with information about their teaching experience that they cannot see themselves. This can also help the teacher to look for alternative approaches if there are any pitfalls are registered and/or opportunities to learn more from the success of the lesson.

V. CONCLUSION

Reflective practice is inherently social and student centered, and active and more participatory. It empowers teachers to present the lesson thoughtfully and reflectively, changing what they do in response to the ways in which students are learning. Having educated through this theory, EFL student teachers supposed to be effective teachers who can control over resources, classroom time, instructional materials, and a teaching strategies, and who make curriculum decision for students. They also get relaxed to choose the content that is most appropriate for their students and the methods that will best encourage learning. As Darling-Hammond writes, good teaching requires knowledge of and insight into the minds of students, and relentless imagination in forging connections that will make understanding the possession of learner, not just the teacher. Good teaching is more than the ability to follow instructions. It requires deep understanding of the ways in which learners learn, a sophisticated knowledge of the subject being taught, and command of a broad repertoire of instructional strategy.

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