
THE TEACHING PROFESSION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THE REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF A CLASSROOM TEACHER

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Received: December 2022

Accepted: February 2023

Published: June 2023

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe the common situations happening in an actual classroom encounter in a Philippine school. It also points out the external expectations of the fresh graduates of education from the training to the actual real teaching. This article used an auto-ethnographical study that highlights the personal experience of the author to highlight the events of most teachers. It was noted that teaching is not only all about the subject matter but more about building a relationship with the students as well. Therefore, building relationships with students requires approaches to be used, reflective stage, observation, and personal encounters as the best way to start learning. Because this is the time when you will start to understand and learn their nature when they are on the verge of a non-threatening atmosphere.

Keywords: Reflection, Teaching experience, Motivational encounter, Teacher, Critical Analysis



UJER

Suggested citation:

Gula, L. P. (2023). The Teaching Profession: A Critical Analysis on the Reflective Experience of a Classroom Teacher. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(2), 160-167.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a relational experience. Relational experience is an encounter wherein an intimate relationship is built through quality time and experiences together, it deals with the concept of give-and-take (Shelton G., 2016). Relationship pertains to the mutual dealings, connections, or feelings that exist between two parties, countries, people, etc. (Rözer, J., 2016). There are different forms of relationship and the most common we have is intimate feelings towards our family. Teachers must be the ones who should initiate building relationships. In teaching, the definition of a relationship with a family is closely related to the teacher-student relationship. Relationship in the teaching-learning process is very important to be understood and as the teacher in the film, he was never ready to welcome the newcomer (Camp, M., 2011). Ideally, building a relationship is not an immediate process, it involves several aspects of realization. Including approaches involved, reflection stage, observation, and personal encounters.

Reflection is a process of self-examination and self-evaluation that competent educators participate in regularly to enhance their professional practices. Reflective teaching has its origins in the ideas of John Dewey (1933, 1938), who claimed that reflection is an important component of learning from experience. Reflective thinking encourages educators to act thoughtfully and purposefully rather than haphazardly and reactively. Reflective exercises are not undertaken by all instructors. A teacher, for example, may refuse to acknowledge the advantages of reflection, or a teacher's reflection may be informal—a combination of emoting about how she or he felt and thinking about what happened, without learning or continuing from that retrospective point. Reflection for professional growth occurs when a teacher engages in active and purposeful reflection and analysis of events that may lead to the formulation of new techniques for altering behavior in the classroom (Reagan et al., 2000).

According to Brookfield (2004), instructors are always at risk of making incorrect decisions and wrong judgments if they do not reflect. Instructors unquestioningly think that pupils may appropriately understand their actions as intended; moreover, teachers may continue to plan and educate based on unexamined assumptions. They then develop the habit of explaining their actions as "common sense," even though "unexamined common sense is a notoriously inaccurate guide to behavior." By definition, reflection is not crucial. For example, one may concentrate entirely on the nuts and bolts of the classroom process, such as the time of coffee breaks or how strictly she or he wants to adhere to assignment deadlines for students. These can be reflections, but they do not have to be critical reflections.

Reflective thinking is a complex process. It is an examination of events and conditions in the classroom. Because of its complexities, teaching necessitates ongoing and continuous classroom observation, evaluation, and subsequent action. It is not enough to be able to perceive what happens in the classroom to be an excellent teacher. Rather, it is critical to comprehend the "whys," "hows," and "what ifs." This insight is gained via persistent reflective thinking exercises (McKnight, 2002).

What makes reflection so important? Is it a more in-depth, probing type of reflection? No, not always. While critical thought on experience does tend to reveal paradigmatic, structural assumptions, the depth of a reflective effort does not, in and of itself, constitute it critically (Brookfield, 2004). When it serves two separate functions, reflection becomes crucial. The first is to comprehend how power issues underpin, structure, and distort so many educational processes and relationships. The second is to examine beliefs and behaviors that appear to make our teaching life easier but work against our greatest long-term interests—in other words, hegemonic practices.

Consider the instructor who arranges her students in a circle to enable debate and foster an attitude of equality. Even though some pupils may take this as the teacher's goal to encourage, others may find it invasive or a symptom of the teacher's method of exposing the shy students. Others may be reluctant to participate in the conversation because they are fearful of being mistaken and facing scorn from their peers. So, underneath the democratic façade of the circle, there may lurk a far more disturbing and ambiguous reality.

This study highlights the in-depth personal experience of the teacher in a common Philippine classroom setting. It also describes the strategies employed by the teacher in handling and resolving the

conflicts during the teaching-learning process. Thus, it will give an idea to the readers that the idealistic approach to teaching does not necessarily reflect on the actual happening in the classroom.

This paper aims to describe the common situations happening in an actual classroom encounter in a Philippine school. It also points out the external expectations of the fresh graduates of education from the training to the actual real teaching.

Research Questions

1. What are the common challenges faced by a teacher in a classroom setting?
2. What are the strategies used by the teacher in addressing the problem?
3. How does the teacher solve the problem?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized the auto-ethnographic design of the research study to highlight the personal experiences of a classroom teacher. Autoethnography, also known as personal ethnography, is a qualitative research method that aims to describe and systematically analyze (graph in Ancient Greek, 'writing') personal experience (autós in Ancient Greek, 'self') to comprehend cultural experience (éthnos in Ancient Greek, 'nation' or 'culture'). Autoethnography falls within the ethnographic tradition of confessional tales, in which the researcher, who is situated as an object of inquiry, writes detail-rich stories from an emotional standpoint to represent a specific socio-cultural milieu in terms of personal experience consciousness, and experience. Autoethnography is composed of well-crafted writing that can be acknowledged by literary critics and social scientists alike, and it must be both emotionally engaging and critically self-reflexive of one's sociopolitical engagement. Bad autoethnography can be accused of reflecting postmodernism's worst excesses since the author develops a too self-indulgent, egotistical, and personalized story. Autoethnography that is good reveals voices that would not have been heard and insights that could have been too delicate to elicit (Lucero, A., 2018).

Research Participants

This study is an avenue of my ethnography as a representation of the beginning of an experienced classroom teacher. I am a junior high school teacher for almost three years in a private institution in Southern Leyte, Philippines. I teach grades 8, 9, and 10 in the areas of Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health. I have also taught college students in higher education in the field of Physical Education.

The data collected in this study are based on my personal experiences from the time that I started practicing my profession right after I earned my bachelor's degree to the time of the COVID-19 pandemic until I am finally a holder of a Master of Education degree major in Physical Education with a minor in English.

Data Analysis

This research study is conducted with the use of a descriptive method of my personal experiences. It highlights the different transitions from my experience as a beginner to becoming a learned classroom teacher. It also reveals the differences in the approaches and teaching-learning experiences during the transition from face-to-face classes to online learning and finally to limited face-to-face classes.

This paper aims to describe the common situations happening in an actual classroom encounter in a Philippine school. It also points out the external expectations of the fresh graduates of education from the training to the actual real teaching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First Year of Employment as a Junior High School Teacher (August 2019)

Theme 1: Teaching Methods and Approaches

Teaching deals with approaches, techniques, and strategies to create a meaningful experience that would be beneficial to the students (Wegner, C., et al, 2013). However, the techniques in teaching do not always apply to every student and every day is a challenge for whole new learning. Sometimes we would solely resort to just being a teacher only, using the same process and methods. Traditionalist teachers pertain to someone who aspires to train students with a single style of teaching. Sometimes, teachers will encounter an unusual student that will need attention and thorough training, and for some reason, it will surprise the teacher for there are things that cannot be taught in a single method. And this is something that teachers usually cannot be foreseen while in the profession. Being a teacher, is not necessarily learned all in school. The expertise in a field and the bearing of being a teacher could be learned through theories and practice but being a teacher beyond teaching facts is a whole different story (Wrenn, J., et al, 2009). This is somewhat working on a masterpiece that would last for years of building. It must be acquired through meaningful experiences and hard truths. According to John Dewey, hands-on learning is better than being solely explained. Sacrifices and overdue personality adjusting from different learners.

"I understood the slapping truth of being in a noble profession when I was hired in a catholic private institution. I was fresh from all the theories learned in college back then, and I was ahead of my skills and ready for the job. Confidently, I always thought that I hold all the authority in the classroom and I have with me all the knowledge that could back me up in the field. When I first entered my very first class in an old classroom and prepared to start the lesson immediately, I deliberately opened my eyes and later my consciousness. Ideally, this is not what am I expecting of a classroom, it was messy, students were noisy, and from the looks of it, they didn't entirely respect me at that time. I felt like a passerby and stepped in just to announce something. They ignored me, and it took a minute before I composed the class. From that moment, I blacked out, I didn't know what to do, how should I start and how will I divert their attention. My memorized theories were of no use, wasted in some corners not useful when dealing with behaviors. All of my expectations flashbaked and crumpled me into pieces. Good luck with being a teacher! Every day I wrestled with similar situations and thought of a better way to handle the situation. During the process, I was too ashamed to talk to my colleagues and ask them, "how to make them listen to me?" it was the dumbest question that might be heard from a teacher. From that moment, I started with myself, how to orient them and how will I impose my authority in the classroom. Slowly, I eventually understood and adapted to the situation. But the most challenging part was relating to them, the idea of making myself "belonged" in the group. There are various possibilities that it would flop once managed mistakenly and it would create an awkwardness that might impose a different impression on the students."

Second Year of Employment as a Junior High School Teacher (Pandemic Era, 2020)

Theme 2: Teaching as a vocation

There are some points in our life that we surprisingly reflect on why we chose to teach. And during these times we often felt empty, hopeless, and even just tired. There are lots of possibilities that might occur in teaching that we wouldn't be able to handle, foresee and sometimes we just don't know. This is the time that we have to solve it on our own and find a little hope in a huge impossibility. From that moment, we will realize some of the things in the life of being a teacher. What type of teacher I might be? Would I be consistent in different circumstances? Will I hold on to my principles? Or am I going to adjust to the best situation favorable to the students? Like the teacher in the film, he meditated and tried to find answers to his confusion.

"My second year of teaching was also the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I have been using online learning even before the pandemic occurs. I used it as my mode of self-assessment when the students are tasked with a special assignment. It enhances the ability of the students of being independent and the

sense of exploration to search for themselves on the topic they are assigned to. In this way, the learning is personal and it comes from them. They have questions for themselves and they would answer them for themselves, after which, the teacher will guide them and facilitate the sources they have, and validate their answers. We are not yet behind; we are highly in need of remote learning which is at the top of the demand for the delivery of instruction and continuing education. Based on my experience in delivering lessons online, I can say that technology challenges our capabilities and literacy in online modes. One of the easiest accesses I had was "Messenger" this is a system part of Facebook wherein it functions for the delivery of the message and is free for data connection. Even for the least planning, aside from Google generated system, a messenger would be the best aid for it. The majority, as estimated has an access to messenger, which could be useful for temporary online learning. For free data connection, it is still accessible for communication but is unable for showing photos. It can still be utilized by sending modules and activities in a typed-in format so that it could still be readable for some who are in free-data connection."

The continuing year of my employment as a Junior High School Teacher (Transitioning Pandemic Era, 2021)

Theme 3: Teaching as a vocation

Building a relationship requires observation. Being a teacher is not merely teaching facts and such. Frankly speaking, every day we learn things around us aside from the content that we are about to discuss. And these things are usually acquired through observation and understanding of our environment (Hurst, B., et al, 2013). In connection with that, we tend to observe our environment and from that point, we are starting to learn from them too. Unconsciously, we would be able to build a relationship that will last for some time, and that would be an opening for a meaningful experience. In my opinion, when we are teaching, we are not the only one's flooding facts and information to the students, we learned also from the environment and most especially from our students. Based on behaviorism, we could learn and understand better based on the observable behaviors acted directly around us. And from that observation, we collect data that would help relate to our learners (Forman, G., 2005). Honestly, one of the difficult parts of being a teacher is when you try to enter their world and you couldn't grasp their attention and interest. Most importantly, relating and understanding their nature as a whole class is very important for us teachers to identify where to start our relationship with them and how we can teach them in a more fun way. Building a connection is a very critical move because first impressions last and we have to work on ourselves to create a better impression from the students.

"There are different ways of program and system that lessen the burden of delivering the lesson and with assured efficiency, but it only limits on the accessibility of the students on the internet connection. Remote learning is not the only option we have during this crisis, we still have a lot of incoming strategies to be used in class discussions. We should not let the hindrance limit us from making our education of top quality. Certain favorable strategies could be applied in a particular situation and particular location. The stability and consistency of the learners must also be adhered to cater to the best possible way of lesson delivery. Some considerations must also be addressed properly to avoid complaints and students would continuously be interested in the activities given. Most of the time now, we are closely losing the momentum of the students in learning for academics, some of them maybe are losing interest to learn and are taking for granted the lesson that the teachers designed, which is somehow alarming. Even though we are at the peak of the crisis, we still have to integrate the enthusiasm and interest of the learners sustained over a continuous period so that it would not look like they are only learning because they should be, they must learn to understand that these lessons are for their benefits."

The limited Face-to-Face Classes as a Junior High School Teacher (Post-Pandemic Era, 2022)

Theme 4: Teaching in a form of relating to students

Relating is not making the class look at the teacher as a mere friend only without boundaries, but only for a limited situation. From that time, my views of being a teacher were changed and there is more to just teaching ABCs and counting. That there is more to learn aside from writing and story-telling and this is learning how to build relationships and connections. Practically, we are now facing a new set of learners that better learn with gadgets and interact more on social media. The traditional way of holding authority might worsen the situation of adjusting the learning styles of the students. The best way of understanding their nature is through observation and using the data to find out in what ways students learn better and feel that they are not threatened academically (Boyle, B., 2014).

“Teaching-learning process has been challenged for years already in the system of education. We have heard different sentiments as to how education has been compromised from the students’ settings up to the teachers’ experiences. Webinars have been implemented by schools to fill the gaps in the teachers’ readiness in the process of teaching. As a teacher by profession, who directly affected and experienced teaching during hard times, I have a few points used as my weapon in combating these challenges. Thorough planning, ICT readiness, counseling, prayers, and communication are the things I used and shared with my students.

The system of delivery is as equally important in creating my lesson. The lesson should not be taken for granted just because of the compliance of the administration. The passion should still wave. There are a lot of interesting changes that could be adapted and implemented to maintain the interest of the students in working on an assignment. Whether it is taking a photo or sharing an image on Facebook, having your students use apps like Instagram and Snapchat is extremely useful. So is allowing your students to video chat with each other. This will allow the students to support one another on future assignments and make sure their writing is as thorough as possible. To create an effective PowerPoint presentation, students should work on their presentation as if they are taking lessons to encourage creativity. In this way, their ability to the exploration of ideas would be enhanced.

This would allow them to improve and refine their communication, emphasizing the nuances and subtleties of each subject, rather than getting bogged down in rapid-fire critical analysis. This would also allow them to experiment with their writing style, allowing them to evolve in the vernacular of their audience.

The right choice of activities is also the highest consideration to maintain the clarity of my lesson objectives. It is necessary to design an activity that is not demanding but improves the student in every aspect even if the class is not face-to-face. You can have an activity in that not only the learners are involved in the goal but include their families since they are also quarantined in one place. It is also better to design an activity that breaks boredom and promotes entertainment, in this way, their psychological aspect would be improved. You can create activities that promote bonding within their family, it could also be an opportunity to let the parents talk and play with their children for learning and fun as well”.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, I could say that building relationship with students requires approaches to be used, reflective stage, observation, and personal encounters as the best way to start learning. Because this is the time when you will start to understand and learn their nature when they are on the verge of a non-threatening atmosphere. Maybe there are some points in our lives, that often made us wonder, what is our purpose? In what way that we could be of use? How will we use our expertise to help the rest? These are reflective questions that apply to different situations and are dependent on each of us. I have realized that to what extent we could be of use might depend on the willingness and courage we all have. There are times that we simply do not know how to build the situation but there are more times on fixing and making the situation even better. As a teacher, there are still a lot of things to learn based on experiences and observations from the environment. There is also a lot of time to utilize the inputs learned every day. In other words, our role as a teacher stretches more to building relationships with the students rather than just mere concepts and ideas.

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