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ABSTRACT

The paper argues that it is not wise to encourage reflective teaching in general without first establishing clear priorities for the reflection that emerges out of a reasoned educational and social philosophy. It does not accept the implication that exists throughout much of the literature that teachers' actions are necessarily better merely because they are more deliberate and intentional. It recommends that people in the field of education ask themselves and others more questions about the nature and purpose of teacher reflection as a goal, suggesting a move beyond the current view of reflective teaching as a distinct programmatic emphasis. After describing the conceptions of reflective teaching practice, the paper discusses a social reconstructionist conception of reflective practice developed in the teacher education program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The key elements of this approach are: (1) the teachers' attention is focused both inwardly at their own practice and outwardly at the social conditions in which the practices are situated; (2) the teachers' deliberations are focused upon substantive issues that raise instances of inequality and injustice within schooling and society for close scrutiny; and (3) the teacher is committed to reflection as a social practice. (Contains 29 references) (SM)

Educational and Social Commitments in Reflective Teacher Education Programs

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In the last decade, the slogans "reflective teaching," "reflective practitioners," "action research," "teachers-as-researchers" and a host of related terms have become fashionable throughout all segments of the teacher education community. This is true not only in the United States but also in many other countries as well, such as Canada, Australia, England, and even Thailand. It has come to the point now that we don't really know very much at all about a practice if it is merely described as something aimed at facilitating the development of reflective teachers. I am in full agreement with both Jim Calderhead of the U. K. (Calderhead, 1989) and Sharon Feiman-Nemser of Michigan State (Feiman-Nemser, 1990) who have recently argued that the full range of beliefs and perspectives about teaching, schooling, teacher education, and the social order has now been incorporated into the discourse about reflective practice. About the only thing that we haven't seen yet is the transformation of reflection into a behavioral competency to be trained in a CBTE program, but as Virginia Richardson (1990) warns us, this too is likely to come.

There isn't a single teacher educator today who would claim that he or she isn't concerned about preparing teachers who are reflective. The criteria that have become attached to the label of reflective practice are so diverse however, that important conceptual differences among different practices are masked by the use of the common rhetoric.

On the one hand, the recent work of teacher educators such as Don Cruickshank at Ohio State (1987) gives us some guidance. The distinction that he makes between reflective and routine practices is not trivial and enables us to make some important qualitative distinctions among different teachers and teaching practices.

Similarly, the enormously popular work of Don Schon (1983, 1987, in press) which has challenged the dominant technical rationality in professional education and argued for more attention to promoting artistry in teaching by encouraging reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action among teachers, also directs our attention to the preparation of particular kinds of teachers and not others. These generic approaches to reflective teaching lose their heuristic value, however, after a certain point and begin to hide more than they reveal.

After we have agreed with Cruickshank and Schon for example, that thoughtful teachers who reflect about their practice (on and in action) are more desirable than thoughtless teachers, who are ruled by tradition, authority, and circumstance (Dewey, 1933), there are still many unanswered questions. Advocates of generic models of reflection do not usually have much to say, for example, about what it is that teachers ought to be reflecting about, the kinds of criteria that should come into play during the process of reflection (i.e., what distinguishes acceptable from unacceptable educational practice), and the degree to which teachers' deliberations should incorporate a critique of the institutional contexts in which they work. In some extreme cases where teacher educators have adapted this general work on reflection, the impression is given that as long as teachers reflect about something, in some manner, whatever they have decided to do is ok since they have reflected about it. As Linda Valli (1990b:9) has argued:

> How to get students to reflect can take on a life of its own, and can become the programmatic goal. What they reflect about can become immaterial. For example, racial tension as a school issue can become no more or less worthy of reflection than field trips or homework assignments.

One of the reasons that these generic conceptions of reflection have been so popular is that they can be employed by teacher educators of every ideological persuasion. Everyone can identify with them and they offend no one, except possibly those who would seek to tightly control teachers' actions through external prescription. Despite the important distinctions between reflective and routine practice on the one hand, and between technical rationality and an epistemology of practice on the other, both of which affirm the value of teacher's practical knowledge, I do not believe that it is wise to seek to encourage reflective practice in general, without establishing clear priorities for the reflection that emerges out of a reasoned educational and social philosophy. I do not accept the implication that exists throughout much of the literature that teachers' actions are necessarily better merely because they are more deliberate and intentional.

Conceptions of Reflective Teaching Practice

There are various ways in which we can distinguish particular proposals for reflective teaching from one another. Peter Grimmett, Linda Valli, Alan Tom,[1] and several others have recently provided us with conceptual lenses with which to view the variety of commitments associated with reflective teacher education reforms. I have my own way of thinking about these differences. What I'll do in the few minutes that I have left is to give you a brief overview of the framework that I have used to help me situate particular cases in the reflective teacher education movement and to give you some notion of where I see my own position within the range of alternatives that I lay out.

In a recent article in the Journal of Teacher Education Dan Liston and I (see Zeichner & Liston, 1990), building upon the work of our colleague Herb Klierbard (1986), identified four traditions of reform in 20th century U. S. teacher education: (1) an academic tradition, (2) a social efficiency tradition, (3) a developmentalist tradition, and (4) a social reconstructionist tradition. We argue that current reforms in teacher education need to be understood in part, by identifying the historical traditions from which they emerge. In taking this position, we are in agreement with the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1988:13) who has argued that:

> To appeal to tradition is to insist that we cannot adequately identify either our own commitments or those of others in the argumentative conflicts of the present except by situating them within those histories which have made them what they have now become.

Bob Tabachnick and I (see Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991) have recently extended this work to describe four varieties of reflective teaching practice: (1) an academic version that stresses reflection upon subject matter and the representation and translation of subject matter knowledge to promote student understanding (e.g., Shulman, 1987); (2) a social efficiency version that emphasizes the thoughtful application of particular teaching strategies that have been suggested by a knowledge base external to the practice being studied (e.g., research on teaching studies) (e.g., Ross & Kyle, 1987); (3) a developmentalist version that prioritizes teaching that is sensitive to students' interests, thinking, and patterns of developmental growth (e.g., Duckworth, 1987); and (5) a social reconstructionist version that stresses reflection about the institutional, social, and political context of schooling and the assessment of classroom actions for their ability to contribute toward greater equality, social justice, and humane conditions in schooling and society (e.g., Beyer, 1988).

In each of these views of reflective teaching practice, certain priorities are established about schooling and society that emerge out of particular educational and social philosophies. None of these traditions is sufficient by itself for providing a moral basis for teaching and teacher education.

Good teaching and teacher education need to attend in some way to all of the elements that are brought into focus by the various traditions: the representation and transformation of subject matter, student thinking and understandings, teaching strategies and modes of classroom organization suggested by research conducted by university academics and classroom teachers, and the institutional, social, and political contexts of schooling. These elements do not take the same form or receive the same emphasis, however, within each tradition. For example, technical competence in teaching, when viewed as an end in itself apart from its ability to promote student understanding (a fairly common phenomenon in the U. S.) is not the same as technical competence that is sensitive to or builds upon student understanding or a technical competence that serves to redress existing inequalities in schooling and society.

Despite the difference in emphasis given to various factors within the different traditions of reflective teaching, these traditions are not mutually exclusive. In practice, the traditions overlap in many ways and each one does in fact attend in some manner to all of the issues that are raised by the traditions as a group. The differences among the traditions of reflection are defined in terms of the particular meaning, emphasis, and priority that are given to particular factors within traditions. Through these priorities, each tradition communicates an allegiance to particular styles of teaching and a rejection of others. Also, with the exception of the social reconstructionist tradition, the traditions reflect a benign view of the social order, focusing the teacher's attention inwardly.

A Social Reconstructionist Conception of Reflective Practice

My own position on reflective teaching has developed considerably since I first started using the term in my writing and in my work as the director of a student teaching program in the late 1970's. As a result of a series of studies conducted by faculty and graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the mid-1970's (see Zeichner & Liston), 1987), my colleagues and I became concerned about the ways in which our teacher education program in elementary education seemed to be encouraging an overly technical and narrow emphasis on the part of our students where the main concern seemed to be with the mastery of teaching skills within classrooms, oftentimes ignoring the goals toward which those skills were directed and the educational and social contexts in which the teaching was carried out. For many of our students pedagogy was separated from its moral, ethical, and political roots, and "good" teaching became the equivalent of getting the students through lessons on time without major disruptions (Tabachnick, Popkewitz, & Zeichner, 1979).

In many ways the student teaching component of this program resembled a typical apprenticeship approach to clinical teacher education (Stones, 1984), where it is implicitly assumed that good teaching is "caught" and not taught, and where, if good things happened, they happened more by accidental misfortune than by deliberate design (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Over the last decade, faculty, graduate students, and cooperating teachers have sought to develop strategies that would foster more systematic and deliberate attention to teacher learning during the practicum.

During this process of reconceptualizing our program, the term "reflective teaching" became a construct that organized our thinking. "Reflective teaching" began as a slogan that represented more of a reaction against what we did not like about our program than as a clearly articulated and elaborated vision of the kind of teachers we wanted to prepare.

Over the years, we gradually developed both our own notions about what "reflective teaching" means in our program and a repertoire of teaching strategies and curricular plans for attempting to bring it about.

We began with the Deweynian distinction between "reflective action" (the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief in light of the grounds that support it and the consequences to which it leads) and "routine action" (that which is guided by habit, external authority, and circumstance). Using Dewey's (1933) concept of reflective action as the organizing principle for our program, we stressed a desire to develop in student teachers those orientations (openmindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness) and those skills (e.g., of keen observation and analysis) which are constitutative of reflective action.

In addition to this basic distinction between reflective and routine action, the program literature has also made distinctions among different domains of reflection by drawing upon the work of Max Van Mannen (1977) and his conception of levels of reflectivity. The theoretical stance taken in our teacher education program has been that reflective teaching involves reflection in all three of the domains identified by Van Mannen: technical, practical, and critical.[2] From this perspective, technical issues are not transcended at some point in time, but become linked to discussions of the nature of and justification for educational ends and goals.

Along with specifying the particular quality of reflection that we have sought to develop with our students, we have also stressed the importance of problematicizing the teaching context and of seeing relationships between everyday actions within the classroom and issues of schooling and society. One way in which we have pursued the development of this relational thinking is by deliberately focusing students' attention on particular kinds of issues connected to their everyday teaching activities that raise issues of equity and social justice (e.g., those associated with the allocation of teacher time among different pupils, the grouping of pupils).

Finally, we have also stressed the view that reflection is not merely an intellectual activity but is one moment in a larger process of strategic action. Reflection informs and is informed by action. As we continued to develop our notion of reflective teaching, we began to move beyond the issue of teacher thinking and became clearer about the kinds of teaching and classrooms that were and were not compatible with our stance on reflective teaching. You cannot develop a position on reflective teaching, in my view, and remain neutral about pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom organization and management. This is not to say that one should prescribe particular kinds of teaching for teachers to engage in or particular beliefs for teachers to adopt. This would be indoctrination and not teacher education. I do believe though that the range of acceptable action needs to be narrowed somewhat with a conception of reflective teaching or we are in the position of having to accept anything that a teacher does as long as she reflects about it. I am not willing to do this. In an earlier paper, I argued that the practice of assertive discipline is an example of a classroom activity that is incompatible with the conception of reflective teaching shared by myself and my colleagues because it violates an ethic of care and the democratic principle of non-repression that are central to our perspective (see Zeichner, 1988).

Most recently, I have begun to more clearly identify my work within the social reconstructionist tradition of practice in teacher education. This historically based tradition of practice emerged early in this century out of deep discontent over social and economic realities in the nation, and sees both schooling and teacher education as crucial elements in the movement toward a more just and humane society.[3] In our new book Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling, Dan Liston and I (Liston & Zeichner, 1991) elaborate a view of reflective teaching as a process of moral deliberation, where prospective teachers confront the difficult questions about what counts as good reasons for educational actions by reflecting about their educational actions and about the institutional, social, and political contexts in which these actions are carried out (what we refer to as the social conditions of schooling). This moral deliberation is encouraged both in campus courses and in clinical experiences and requires students to confront issues taking into account a variety of perspectives.

Our concern is to help student teachers develop the capability to articulate reasons for good educational actions by situating their beliefs and actions in relation to alternative educational traditions. For some this goal may violate a premise that credible rationales should appeal to universal claims and not be bound by context or tradition. We do not think that we can appeal in all cases to universal criteria that transcend particular educational traditions. The aim of articulation in our proposal recognizes these distinct values. It encourages future teachers to recognize the distinctions and to come to terms with their own beliefs and practices within the context of these distinct traditions.[4]

The question still remains however, about how we resolve differences about aims, procedures, and practices among different educational traditions. In seeking to resolve this issue for ourselves, we have drawn upon Amy Gutmann's work (Gutmann, 1987) in arguing that a commitment to a democratic way of life limits what are acceptable aims. Gutmann proposes two restraints on the process of deliberation about educational practice: the principle of nonrepression, and the principle of nondiscrimination. Following Gutmann, we argue that irrespective of the tradition or context in which an individual articulates his or her aims, it must be the case that the aims and their practical consequences be neither repressive or discriminatory. If they are, the practice needs to be opposed. As I stated earlier, our proposal for the encouragement of reflective teaching is most closely associated with the social reconstructionist tradition of reform in teacher education. In closing, I want to summarize what I see as the key elements of a social reconstructionist approach to reflective teaching.

Key Elements of a Social Reconstructionist Conception of Reflective Teaching

First, in a social reconstructionist conception of reflective teaching, the teacher's attention is focused both inwardly at their own practice (and the collective practices of a group of colleagues) and outwardly at the social conditions in which these practices are situated. How teachers' actions maintain and/or disrupt the status quo in schooling and society is of central concern. The reflection here is aimed in part, at the elimination of the social conditions that distort the self-understandings of teachers and undermine the educative potential and moral basis of teaching.

A second characteristic of a social reconstructionist conception of reflective teaching is its democratic and emancipatory impulse and the focus of the teacher's deliberations upon substantive issues that raise instances of inequality and injustice within schooling and society for close scrutiny. Recognizing the fundamentally political character of all schooling, the teacher's reflections center upon such issues as the gendered nature of schooling and of the teacher's work, and the relationships between race and social class on the one hand and access to school knowledge and school achievement on the other. These and similar issues are addressed in concrete form as they arise within the immediate context of the teacher's work.

For example, an issue that is confronted fairly frequently by student teachers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is the disproportionate assignment of pupils of color to the lower tracks of school programs and to such remedial categories as learning disabled. In the Madison area, pupils of color also have higher than average school suspension rates and lower than average graduation rates (Ptak, 1988). All of this is fairly common across the U. S. In a social reconstructionist conception of reflection teaching, these so called facts about the context of the teacher's work, which highlight racial and class differences in school outcomes, would be made problematic and examined as part of the teacher's deliberations about teaching. These reflections would stimulate an exploration of alternative possibilities through which the painful effects of these practices could be lessened. The more usual scenario is for these and similar issues to serve as part of the taken-for-granted background during teachers' deliberations.

The third and final characteristic of a social reconstructionist conception of reflective teaching is its commitment to reflection as a social practice. Here there is an attempt to create communities of learning where teachers support and sustain each others' growth. This commitment to collaborative modes of learning indicates a dual commitment by teacher educators to an ethic where justice and equity on the one hand, and care and compassion on the other are valued. This commitment is also thought to be of strategic value in the transformation of unjust and inhumane institutional structures. It is felt that the empowerment of individual teachers as individuals is an inadequate strategy for creating conditions for institutional and social change. Teachers need to see their individual situations as linked with those of their colleagues.

Conclusion

Whether or not you are in agreement with a social reconstructionist perspective on reflective teaching and with my educational and political commitments, I hope that you will at least accept my general argument that we need to begin asking others as well as ourselves more questions about the nature and purpose of teacher reflection as a goal in particular teacher education programs. We need to move beyond the current confusion in the field where reflective teaching by itself is seen as a distinct programmatic emphasis.

Endnotes

1. See Grimett et. al. (1990); Valli (1990 a,b), and Tom (1985).

2. Van Mannen (1977) presents three levels of reflection. The hierarchical implications of the notion of levels conveys the mistaken impression of a developmental framework where technical and practical reflection are eventually transcended and critical reflection prevails. This devalues technical skill and the reality of teachers and should therefore be rejected.

3. In more openly affiliating my own work with the social reconstructionist tradition of practice in teacher education, I am not suggesting that this tradition is without problems. For example, until recently, very little of the work within this tradition gave any attention to issues of gender and race in teacher education. Although I see my work as social reconstructionist because of its focus on the social conditions of schooling and because of my desire to contribute toward social transformation, I do not want to contribute to a reification of the label or to romanticising about the past.

4. In our book we identify (drawing on Dan's work in a philosophy of education class at Washington University) three traditions that represent ideal types rather than the historically-based traditions of practice in which we situate our proposals. These ideal types are a conservative tradition, a progressive tradition, and a radical tradition. While each of these traditions is fairly diverse (e.g., the differences within and among various feminist and neo-marxist proposals within the radical tradition), they also each represent a common commitment to a core set of beliefs.

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