

# Reflective Teacher

## Pilot Testing of Activity Based Module for Teaching Social Sciences

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### Abstract

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*The paper advocates activity based pedagogy for reflective teachers who can reflect upon their practices to ensure equity in participation and concentrate on execution of social justice while transacting the curriculum. The other purpose circumvents around needs for changes found in the mode of teaching which advocates status quo and perpetuates personal prejudices in the classroom. Training for reflective teachers is needed to develop competencies for successfully carrying out reform in the area of curricula so that teachers engage all the students and integrate diversity in the classroom. It is advisable for teachers to engage in an intellectual discourse with their peers to exchange their insight and reflect upon their teaching. It was on this challenge that two modules of activity based pedagogy in economics were tested. The paper attempts to reflect upon pilot testing of two modules which were practised during the training session meant for trained graduate teachers (TGT) in social sciences. The feedback and experiences suggest that the execution of the two modules where the participants engage in discussion, debate and enact critical issues are more successful than the lecture method where the participants sit as passive learners.*

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### Introduction

Dynamics of classroom teaching often portray the teacher-student relationship as a snapshot for social

justice in action. Teachers in general meet a large number of students who differ in terms of their family backgrounds. Diversity is also

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witnessed on social-economic and cultural background and in terms of understanding the language of instruction as well as in meeting the expectations of the teachers.

Teachers certify the basic qualification for teaching and are proficient in the subject knowledge but lack in skill for application of pedagogy (Dalton). The classroom in general follows the cemetery model of teaching where students silently listen to their teachers. Most classrooms have permanent fixed arrangement in terms of organisation of chairs and desks. Blackboards are fixed on the wall and chalks placed near it for the teachers to write as per the requirement of their lesson. This mode of arrangement makes the teaching-learning of the subject unattractive and monotonous for the learners.

Next, teachers in general use the methods adopted by their teachers in classroom, when they were students (Dalton). This model of teaching often overlooks the heterogeneity among the learners. The teachings in the classroom are mostly examination driven where teachers focus on transaction of content. Therefore, the execution of this model acknowledges success particularly in the field of education for learners and teachers, too, feel comfortable

through its regular practise over the years.

### **Pedagogies which a Reflective Teacher Uses**

The use of pedagogy in the classroom facilitates effective teaching. Pedagogy etymologically means “to lead the child”. This cannot happen through conventional teaching-learning method. It is executed through the use of different teaching strategies that encourage students to learn through activity and dialogue. Pedagogy, in addition to learning within the classroom, assists learning for the students outside the school. Teachers’ awareness regarding the usefulness of pedagogy enables her to reflect upon alternative methods of teaching. Various components of pedagogy include teacher-student interaction, classroom organisation through change in the setting of chairs and desks, time management, designing of activity, expectation and value attached to teaching and learning in the classroom. Use of such pedagogies in the classroom can help teachers to ensure students’ participation in teaching-learning and enhancing their performance through the use of a variety of activities. Thus, the importance of pedagogy lies in transforming the teaching through interactive model and support activity based teaching.

**Classroom observations – Case 1**

The school has reopened after the vacation. Miss X can be heard explaining the meaning of globalisation in the classroom. At times she shouts ‘pay attention in the classroom’ as there will be tests in the second period. The threat of the test reduces children’s noise slightly and they start whispering among themselves. They copy what is written on the board. They listen to their teachers attentively with their eyes centered on her.

She distributes blank sheets to the students at the beginning of the second period. She writes questions on the board and students copy them on the sheets provided to them. She asks students to attempt all the questions or receive a zero. Students quietly bow their heads over the sheet and start writing the answers. When the bell rings they hand over the sheet to their teacher and rush out of the classroom.

The test (mentioned in the box) was content-driven and supported by information given in the textbook. Students regurgitated the information provided to them in the classroom and scored high marks. This kind of teaching provides information to the students and grades them as per their memory based performance in the examination. Here it is evident that students are not able to connect school knowledge with their understanding and experience about their environment outside the school. There was no reflection upon

the issues and concerns attached to the phenomenon of globalisation. The students may not be able to apply received information in real life situations.

The fear of the test assured attention of the students in the classroom. Students listened to teachers in the classroom as they had to respond to the test as a follow-up of the teacher’s lecture. As evident, in the absence of appropriate pedagogy the teacher had to accept blank stares and silence in the classroom. Students’ minds were not activated in their zone of learning. In an inquiry with a high scorer student it was found that he was not able to relate the concepts with real life situations even though he scored high marks.

Reflective teacher uses the pedagogy that will complement and strengthen her teachings. The use of multiple pedagogies provides an opportunity to the students to learn through engagement with the topic or concept. Teachers then find it comfortable to assist students in their zone of learning. This requires planning and learning from their experiences acquired over the years. Here, she has to make use of numerous activities and practice sessions to introduce students to the concepts, skills and apply the same in their real life situations. She needs to use different pedagogies in the classroom to increase her face-to-

face contact with her students and provide activities to ensure participation of all. The students need to be sensitised to the challenges of discrimination, stereotyping, marginalisation in the classroom so that they can protest in situations of oppression.

### **Objective**

In view of exploring due effectiveness of reflective teaching-learning in the classroom context, pilot testing of two activity-based modules was undertaken. The objectives of this pilot testing are :

1. To explore the issues and concerns of reflective teaching practices in the teacher education programme.
2. To provide in-service teachers an exposure to reflective teaching-learning practices based on content-cum-pedagogy modules embedded with equity, activism and social literacy.

### **Methodologies**

In order to accomplish these objectives, teachers and subject experts were consulted, classrooms were observed and literature was reviewed for the development of modules in social sciences. Field experiences of a school in Shimla have also been taken care of in these modules.\* NCF 2005 holds that practices advocated in the in-service education can play an important

part in the professional growth of teachers. Teachers can, thereafter, function as an agent of change in school related practices. The teacher when being conversant with the new practices advocated in the orientation session can affirm their practice in the classroom.

### **About the Modules**

These modules were implemented in the in-service training imparted to the teachers of Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana and Delhi. The five-day training programme included teachers from both private and public schools.

The modules include practices and perspectives on content cum pedagogy and reflect upon the dialectical relationship between theory and its application in real life situations. It challenges stereotypes that are evident in terms of structural inequality and discrimination based on race, gender, class and other socio-cultural differences. It enables learners to access resources on an equal footing particularly emotional resources which strengthen belief in their worth and ability. The third major component refers to tapping and strengthening of innate talent. Last but not the least it creates a learning environment that promotes critical thinking among the teacher and student thereby act as an agent for change.

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\*The author of this article taught for three months in a rural school in Shimla in 2013-14.

### **Theoretical perspective evolved through survey of literature**

A few literatures are referred here to affirm to the practices evolved for reflective teaching. There is a need for discussion on them to support our development and pilot testing of modules.

### **The Discovery Approach—Bruner**

Bruner propounded the cognitive model of learning for improving the strategies of learning in the classroom. He advocated use of discovery approach in the school by the learners. The subject matter should not be presented in the final form before the students. Rather, the content should be organised in such a manner that students are able to discover the relationship between the content and events. The advantage of self-discovery enables such learning that facilitates transfers and retention which increases problem-solving ability and motivation among the learners (Bruner 1961).

### **Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory**

Vygotsky also believed that children are active seekers of knowledge; he however held that cognition was a collaborative effort of child and socio-cultural environment. His two crucial pedagogical techniques are 'discovery method' and 'cooperative learning'. In discovery method the

role of the teacher would be to facilitate children's learning with explanation, demonstration and verbal prompts based on child's 'zone of proximal development'. Co-operative method propagates learning through dialogue between teachers and pupils while engaged in teaching-learning in the classroom.

### **Need for Education of Reflective Teachers**

Bruner, in his book *The Process of Education*, states that the general objective of education is to cultivate 'excellence'. Excellence does not mean to look for students who can score high marks in the examination. Here excellence can be determined when any teacher reflects on her classroom teaching and makes it joyful for children with different abilities. This also means special effort have to be made, like use of pedagogy, while transacting the curriculum in the class as the level of understanding varies from student to student. In the absence of such effort, students who are not at par with others at learning levels, when not given due attention may be thrown out of mainstream education. On the other hand, if all students are helped to make optimum utilisation of their abilities, then the chance of equal participation in the classroom may survive over other exclusive methods of teaching the subject.

With the change in policy for

participatory learning, the textbooks developed as per the guidelines of National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) systematically incorporated the pedagogic standards in the context of classroom teaching-learning. Teachers who are conversant with the lecture method of teaching look for a paragraph which can be memorised. The change in the paradigm calls for orientation for reflective teachers to access new information, multiple ways of transaction of the curriculum and also creating situations for the construction of knowledge by the learners in the classroom. The teacher needs to work upon several trajectories to shift from information loaded teaching towards scientific interpretation of ideas. The reflective practitioner then tends to discover the dichotomy that exists between the child and the curriculum and provide for linkages with its application in real life situations.

It has also been felt that one need not grasp only principles and theories, for understanding a particular subject. One even needs to build upon attitude towards learning and inquiry, making wild guesses towards possibility of solving a problem. For example, scientists who believe in 'orderliness of nature', work with convictions that orders can be discovered. Similarly, young learners with similar attitude need to organise their learning in such a

way as to make it usable and meaningful in their thinking. To instil such attitudes, one requires something more than mere teaching-learning of the fundamental ideas. Teachers need to reflect to be able to generate a sense of excitement about discovery along with confidence in one's ability.

#### **Classroom Observation – Case 2**

The bell rang for the third period and miss Y entered the classroom. There was silence in the classroom and students were seated on the seats allotted to them. The teacher while teaching in the class asked a question and expected students to find an answer. She does not rebuke anyone, rather ensures their comfort and allows them to make wild guesses about the topic. She allows the participation of maximum number of students in an attempt to find an answer to her question. She does not agree with the answers given by the students. 'Not correct', 'Wrong' are her replies for the responses given by the students. At the end the correct answers are dictated by her in the class and the students tend to copy them in their notebooks.

Here also another type of pedagogy was used where the students got the opportunity to discover answers for themselves.

Students on their own do not volunteer to answer her question although she makes them comfortable enough to stand and make an attempt to make wild guesses. However she did not follow the constructivist approach throughout the class. She started evaluating students' answers and passing judgement. Rather than saying 'wrong' and 'right' to students' replies, she should encourage them to engage in a dialogue where they can question their friends as well as their teachers in the classroom. Students could have discovered the correct answers through dialogue and discussion in the classroom. Here, too, teaching was unidirectional as teacher did not appreciate various responses shared by students in the class. At the end the only reply given by the teacher had to be universally accepted. The notes were dictated in the classroom, which leads to rote memorisation. This system of teaching-learning of the subject promotes teacher-dominated classroom. Such teaching which believes in filling up of passive learner's mind, assumed to be an empty vessel, by strenuous effort of the teacher is dull and boring. It is no wonder that contemporary educational reform favours the replacement of teacher-dominated teaching with a different method where students are more explicitly involved in their own learning.

Students can clarify their doubts and teacher should respect the views of the students rather than following strict norms of silence in the classroom, students would then find the classroom a livelier place to relate them and for teachers, too, teaching can become an adventure of interesting minds. Such an environment will ensure self-confidence and self-esteem among all the learners and help in improving quality of learning in the classroom.

Reflection is an excellent tool to keep oneself in tune with what one needs to practise in the classroom. A reflective practitioner determines her attitude towards her students and builds positive relationship with the students. He/she continuously improves himself/herself, filling up self-identified gaps in his/her teaching.

### **Towards reflective subject-specific teaching-learning**

Economics has been introduced as a composite part of social sciences since Class 6. At this stage, Social Science has been introduced for the students to give them an idea of the subject without much focus on their disciplinary qualities (NCF 2005). The teachers in general are not comfortable with four subjects to be handled within the ambit of Social Sciences at the secondary stage. Some of them find difficulties in handling topics in economics as they

are not comfortable with the basics of Economics. Their classes, too, do not engage students through the use of pedagogy. Two modules in economics have been used in the training programme to help the teachers in the transaction of the Economics curriculum.

There are three reasons why Economics needs to be taught through different method evolved through reflective process of teaching learning of the subject :

- (i) There is a growing appreciation of the psychological basis of learning
- (ii) A reinterpretation of what knowing economics means for the classroom.
- (iii) The development of new ways of looking at educational aims and objectives in relation to the subject

As regards the psychological basis of learning, there is a need to gain the attention and interest of the learners, which has always been realised intuitively by good teachers. But psychological research has underlined the importance of introducing more pedagogy into teaching of the subject in order to stimulate critical thinking. Equally important has been the need to ensure the learners' active participation in the learning process. This needs experimentation and

discovery of what is being learnt. Here teacher's main concern relates to shifting towards a more learner oriented conception of the task in the classroom. For example in case of Economics classroom, the selected resource material such as statistical table, use of diagrams and graphs, case study, role play, debate, discussion open up immeasurably the possibility of inductive inquiry based teaching-learning of the subject.

Reflective thinking prior to the transaction of the lesson enables teachers to participate in a way which is less centered on her and encourages student's participation in the class. Understanding of any subject necessitates dialogical relationship between the teacher and the student who should see the relevance of the subject for themselves.

Economists like Keynes believe that understanding the content does not define the subject rather it is the method 'apparatus of the mind and a technique of thinking'. One of its purposes is to optimise the allocation of scarce resources for alternative uses. For example the objective of providing shelter for poor may also mean diverting resources or discouraging building of large houses through the imposition of high tax on such buildings.



### **Case of a Migrant Population**

Let us understand this concept through the case of migrant population in an imaginary country X. Immigrants in different parts of the world have been accused of reducing the wealth of the host country. Looking at this, Governments of such countries have laid severe restriction on migratory population. For example, migrants in X country have been accused of draining the wealth of the host countries. This accusation is made because they tend to send their earnings to the family members residing in the country from where they have come. This is not true as these migrants contribute in the growth of an economy where they are working at the moment. They tend to produce goods and services which have been highly valued by their customers. Customers desire to purchase them for they are cost effective. In fact, the immigrants in X country have added to the wealth of both the countries. Restriction, thus, should not be imposed for free movement of labourers from one country to another. Migratory population, too, should be given equal civic rights.

Similarly, as in many other cases, the economic logic is simple and uncomplicated. It is a myth and misconception which tends to complicate understanding of the subject. Thus, the study of the subject should begin with the wonder

where learners are provided with a basic understanding of how things function. This necessitates in-service teacher education through a module with integrative perspectives of content, pedagogy and social concerns such as equity and social justice. This tends to enhance students' participation in the teaching-learning of the subject. In the aforesaid example, had teacher taught students through lecture method, students would have learnt that immigration tends to drain the wealth of any country. However, on discussion, the students looked at the pros and cons of the topic and that helped in the holistic understanding of the topic.

### **Module 1 (Pilot testing)**

This module is based on the topic on 'Globalisation' drawn from the Economics textbook. The module covered various aspects of globalisation i.e what is globalisation, what are its features and its positive as well as negative impact on the economy. Here it is assumed that learners are not conversant with the key idea behind the process of globalisation, integration of market, and its impact upon the economy. Reflective teaching enables the learners to grasp the idea with clarity and relate it with their previous understanding.

It was not easy for the instructor to start the discussion as the group

was not familiar with this approach. Here the important consideration was selection of the topic to ensure their familiarity and facilitate interaction among them. Before conducting the debate there was a need for reflection on preparation for the conduct of debate. In the case of Rajasthan, the instructor made an effort to mould the discussion from India towards their own economy. The topic for debate thus read as 'Impact of globalisation on the economy of Rajasthan'. Each participant got an opportunity to voice his/her views in the discussion.

There was another important concern in terms of motivating the participants who were too shy to contribute to the discussion. There were still some who were dominating the groups with their arguments.

A free and uninhibiting environment is a necessary condition for the conduct of discussion and debate. The instructor, therefore, had to ensure that there is guidance and monitoring to avoid aimless discussion. In the absence of monitoring, the debate then centres around baseless arguments without incorporating reflective thoughts in the discussion. Learners actually learn by adding new information to what they already know. In this case the emphasis had shifted from India to their own place Rajasthan, and relating the understanding of economics to the real life situation.

The argument then provided insight into the nature of decision-making, problem-solving and other such issues encountered in their day-to-day lives. It enlisted the learner's power of introspection in order to understand economic implication of the motives and actions of others. Here, in this case the actor developed the understanding not simply of their individual roles but also of interplay among the peer groups.

Here, the conduct of debate can be characterised by an exchange of arguments and views among participants. The exchange of views also includes the question-and-answer session within the groups. In fact, the participants were charged to the extent that there was a flow of arguments, different questions outpouring from all the corners of the classroom. In this mode of engagement, the information and argument flows from powerful to the powerless, from the informed to the less informed. The emotion, too, came through as was evident in the tone and pitch of the participants.

This type of activity promotes peer learning as students become aware of strong and weak points of each other. At times students themselves negotiate a balance in participation wherein students with high level of participation make room for students with low level of participation. In the end summarising the main point would add to the

quality in the classroom instruction. The participants in the end agreed that questions and arguments signify productive outcomes of learning and understanding the subject.

The participants gave a positive feedback about this module. 'It challenges one's thinking and learners can look into the pros and cons of any topic/phenomenon'. 'The discussion in the group is so enlightening that even the uninterested participant in the class felt challenged and started participating in the debate'. She too was interested and ready to contribute in the class without much persuasion. Debate of this kind often solves the difficulties, clarifies the concepts, and problems are resolved through discussion. Participants while arguing for their points acquired useful skills such as problem solving, decision making, and engagement in critical thought with each other. Reflective teachers will feel satisfied in the classroom since there is active teaching-learning among the students.

### **Module 2 (Pilot testing)**

The second module was taken to transact another topic on 'Consumer Rights' from the Economics textbook. There has been discussion on the role of two institutions i.e market and State in any economy. In some economy market plays a dominant role whereas in the other, the state decides major activities regarding what should be produced, how it should be produced and its

distribution among the masses. In case of mixed economies both the institutions maintain a balance by keeping a check on each other. For example, if there is exploitation by the market then the State is expected to curb its malfunctioning through the enforcement of rules and regulations.

Role play is an interesting pedagogical tool for enactment of course content that stimulates students' learning. They bring problems for discussion into the classroom through the enactment of real-life situation. In this case the participants enacted the five rights granted to the consumers, i.e Right to be informed, Right to safety, Right to choose, Right to seek redressal of grievances and Right to represent. This module stimulates the kind of situation in which learners are likely to apply their basic understanding of economics to real-life situations.

The role play challenges the learners to apply theories learnt in the textbook to the real life situations. The participants were divided into five groups and were given only 10 minutes for preparation. The story was discussed in a team and members volunteered to play the role as per the character in the story. Some of the participants were hesitant to act on the stage. Encouragement from the team motivated them and they agreed to act on the stage. Role play to be

effective needs coordination among the team members in the absence of which there cannot be enactment of a story. The message of the story needs to be communicated among the learners. It can be performed at any time for it does not need any technology.

Role play helped the participants to explore the rights of the consumer. There was a dual purpose to achieve (i) understanding of real life situation being simulated to develop skill through participation (ii) reflective activity when enacted tends to hold learner's attention. It helped to create insight into the nature of decision-making, problem-solving, and other issues encountered in their day-to-day lives. It enlisted the individual power of self introspection in order to understand economic implication of the motives and actions of others. Here in this case the actors developed the understanding not simply of their individual roles but also of interplay among the peer groups.

A teacher can facilitate understanding of new topics in the classroom through role play where students can use their experiences at home and school. She can equip and inspire the students to understand issues that affect them or others in their community. The enactment of the topic raises common concerns which can be dealt with under the norms of

participatory democracy. This activity is helpful in addressing the issues of social inequality and helps to raise the students' voices in the classroom. Its practice in the classroom can build evidence for research study where learning the content and social justice can be complementary goals.

The participants expressed interest in the conduct of role play. The role play is inspiring as well as entertaining'. 'It was inspiring for it showed how valuable a role play can be in boosting learners' confidence and ensuring their creativity while performing the role". 'It was interesting to see how participants wrote the scripts and performed them confidently within the short span of time'. Enactment of such role helps to build interpersonal skill, assures equal opportunity in a group, builds team work, encourages initiative and motivates self-learning. The implication of enactment of such roles in the classroom changes the role of the teacher to that of the facilitator. The classroom atmosphere becomes vibrant and cordial.

## **Conclusion**

The integration of content and pedagogical process refines the practical skill of problem solving, decision making, critical thinking and peer learning. In the teacher education programme there is a need to cover the content from the textbook but the major issues of equity, activism and social literacy

should also be addressed. Use of pedagogy in the classroom provides an opportunity for participation especially for linguistically and culturally diverse students. The task of teaching necessitates the integration of multiple pedagogies so that it generates interest for the learners and also responds to the need of individual students. There is a significant relationship between high level of participation and modules advocated in the paper.

There is a need to integrate content with the help of transformative pedagogy so that this helps in understanding the real life situations. If curriculum intends to inculcate the value of social justice in students, then rather than giving content as theoretical prescription, practising multiple pedagogies for ensuring participation of all the learners in class is essential for a teacher.