
Book Review

The Reflective Teacher

Case Studies of Action Research

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Recent discourse on Teacher Education in India has been greatly emphasising on developing 'reflective teachers' and observing 'reflective practice as the central aim of Teacher Education' (*National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education* 2010, p. 19). Further, recent studies on Teacher Education in India have also pointed towards what has to be done and why it has to be done. However, no study has elaborated upon how it can be attained. The book, *The Reflective Teacher: Case Studies of Action Research* written by Dr Neeraja Raghavan begins to fill this void in the Indian context.

Situating her work in the frame of action research, the author proposes

'reflective thinking' which helps teachers in reviewing and improving their practice in the light of evidence and changed values related to the practice. The book is a product of the action research undertaken by teachers at the Azim Premji School in Uttarakhand, under the guidance of facilitators from the Azim Premji Foundation.

The book is divided into three main sections—the first section discusses the broad theoretical disposition around the 'action research method' and 'reflection'. Through a detailed theoretical discussion and research-based studies, relationship between action research and reflection has been

established and rationalised in this section. It also discusses in detail the aims and setting of the study, and a 'snapshot' of the teachers involved. The second section is based on the detailed field data which includes a range of sources like the facilitators' diary, teachers' plans, field notes, learning, reflective journals, etc. The third part of the book provides an in-depth analysis of the teachers' action research documents and classroom observations with the theoretical linkages (especially with Dewey's and Schön's work). The author provides around 60 pages of analysis of the overall process of action research and its outcome, in the form of developed reflective practice in the concerned teachers.

The author has tried to develop and explore reflective thinking in teachers through 'action research', where they have to find out one problem related to their teaching method or approach and then accordingly, plan, develop strategies, take actions, assess, reflect and document the processes and critical issues. A total of seven action research problems are identified by nine teachers in the area of reading-writing, scientific observation, place value, etc. The author has provided details of the action research and discussed them at great length, emphasising the importance of understanding various practices in the field.

The teachers have recognised the importance of thinking, planning, reflecting and responding to the

problems occurred during the action research and reflection writing and documentation. It is observed that with the process of appropriate documentation of action research, the quality of reflection has increased considerably. The author discusses that '... Mohit (a teacher) acknowledged an increased sensitivity to students whose mother tongue is not Hindi and realised how he may well have assumed that their silence earlier was indicative of ignorance', and 'his action research resulted in acknowledging (and questioning) the prevalent bias towards written and spoken means of expression' (p. 213). Thus, his action research experience forced him to revisit and dismiss this belief. Discussing another example, she wrote, 'Madan's (another teacher) changed practice of using the combination of phonetic and Whole Language Approach resulted from his questioning the efficacy of a single approach to teaching language' (p. 206). The author also emphasised in the book that teachers mentioned that now the focus of their discussion, planning and reflection has changed from what the teacher is teaching to what the children are learning (p. 130).

The book emphasises that if teachers are supported and given enough confidence in carrying out research-based inquiries, they tend to express their keenness to change their beliefs and adapt to new teaching methods (irrespective of their multiple years of experience). To be a reflective practitioner, this support is essentially needed, and hence,

availability, quality, appropriateness and sufficiency of the feedback given by the facilitator or mentor are significant. However, this book does not discuss in depth what particular kind of support is required and how teachers were supported by their mentor. This book is a fundamental step towards understanding the culture of reflective practice as an essential component of professional learning and securing the future of quality education in India. The book is quite useful for Teacher Educators who are interested in assisting

and understanding the process of reflection in teachers (those who are directly engaged with teachers in becoming reflective practitioners at both pre-service and in-service level) as well as for researchers who can use it as reference in developing tools in the field of studying reflection as a practice.

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