

PROFESSIONAL ATTRIBUTES: IMPLICATIONS TO REFLECTIVE PRACTICES OF TEACHERS

¹Nelia S. Raganas*

Abstract

This study focused on the professional attributes and reflective practices of teachers in 11 elementary schools in a Butuan City District. The professional attributes of the teachers included teaching experience, educational qualification, and trainings attended. The reflective practices were categorized into reflections gathered from self-reflection and feedback from colleagues. A descriptive research design was used in the conduct of the study. The data revealed that less than half the number of teachers in the district has pursued post-baccalaureate studies. Many of these teachers have been in the service for more than seven years. However, the majority of them have not been sent to trainings other than a few in-service trainings in the District. The data also disclosed that despite the considerable length of teaching experience, the teachers seldom made use of self-reflections and feedbacks in their teaching from colleagues save for some of them who had been sent to trainings. Professional growth via the graduate studies did not effect a significant difference in the use of reflective practices for effective teaching. These findings clearly indicate that the teachers have not realized for themselves the benefits of reflective practices, both from self-reflection and from feedbacks from colleagues. This could also be due to the fact that the majority of these teachers were not exposed to trainings on reflective practices and other forms of professional development. Such trainings need not only retool the teachers in the different teaching strategies but also on how to make maximum use of reflections as basis for making more sound instructional decisions.

Keywords: reflective practices, professional attributes, effective teaching, feedbacks from colleagues

*Corresponding Author: Nelia S. Raganas, nsraganas@yahoo.com

1.0 Introduction

Powerful education requires teachers to be able to analyze and reflect on their practice. Individually and with others, they need to assess the effects of their work and to refine and improve their practice (Schon, 1983; Shulman, 1987). Teachers who are assiduous in their jobs always seek to assess the progress of the students in the learning continuum and at the same time look back on how far they have gone with their job and how they may be able to move on productively from there. Intuitively, this process makes it imperative for the teachers to be honest and determined to gain from their reflections: for the students and themselves, as well.

Reflective practice moves teachers from their knowledge base of distinct skills to the stage in their careers where they can modify their skills to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually to invent new strategies. In implementing a process of Reflective Practice teachers will be able to move themselves, and their schools, beyond existing theories in practice (Larrivee, 2000).

The cultivation of the capacity to reflect in action (while doing something) and on action (after doing something) has become an important feature of professional training programmes in many disciplines, and its encouragement is seen as particularly important aspect of the role of the mentor (Schon, 1987). By gaining a better understanding of their individual teaching styles through effective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Lieberman & Miller (1999) also pointed out that the practice of reflective teaching, reflective inquiry, and reflection-on practice, results in gaining of the personal and professional knowledge that is so important to being

an effective teacher and in shaping children's learning.

At the level of in-service teaching, studies have shown that critical reflection upon experience continues to be an effective technique for professional development. Licklider's review of adult learning theory (1997) found that a self-directness -- including self-learning from experience in natural settings -- is an important component of adult learning. Therefore, effective teacher professional development should involve more than occasional large-group sessions; it should include activities such as study teams and peer coaching in which teachers continuously examine their assumptions and practices.

A research on reflective practices conducted by Rayford (2010) displayed that teachers believed reflections were important and worthwhile. They liked reflecting about their teaching. Teachers often reflected in the midst of teaching to make adjustments. Additionally, teachers needed time to reflect and preferred to dialogue/ collaborate with peers. Ferraro (2000) posited that participation in some professional development institutes can also be a way to incorporate reflection into practice. Professional development programs need not always focus on specific teaching methods and strategies; they can also focus on teacher attitudes that affect the practice.

As a university professor, the researcher observed that there is an increased keen interest among basic education teachers to undertake graduate studies. This is evidenced by their growing population in many graduate schools. It is a remarkable indicator of a growing interest in professional growth. It also poses a challenge to university professors to be able to contribute effectively to a significant effect

of graduate studies on improved teaching performance of these teachers. This challenge is brought into force due to some revelations of these teachers in graduate school that tend to give the impression that graduate studies are aimed at promotion of ranks. These observations have posed a question in the mind of the researcher: To what extent have these teachers been able to reflect from the "lessons" and incorporate the same for the enhancement of their teaching? Had their trainings help develop "real" reflections?

These questions came out as a result of evaluations done during demonstration teaching sessions of student teachers. It was gleaned from the grand demonstration activity that most of the student teachers were not being given the needed assistance by their cooperating teachers. Almost similar gaps in lesson delivery were observed year after year during practice teaching activity.

It seemed that most of these teachers were not able to impart their reflections of previous activities which could lend more inputs for a good performance of the students.

Three main objectives guided the conduct of the study: 1) to describe the professional attributes of the teachers; 2) to determine the level of reflective practices of the teachers; and 3) to determine the implications of professional attributes on the reflective practices of the teachers.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The work by Schon (1983) and Kolb (1984) have given reflective practice the currency in recent years, using and applying a basic principle of reflecting on an experience, to improve action and professional practice. However, this is not a new or original idea. It was developed by educationists, such as Dewey (Reflective Practice, 1909) and Lewin (Group Dynamics Theory, 1952) which can be traced back to the work of Socrates in the form of learning through questioning and feedback. Central to the development of reflective theory was the interest in the integration of theory and practice, the cyclic pattern of experience and the conscious application of that learning experience.

Reflective practice can be an important tool in practice-based professional learning settings where individuals learning from their professional experiences, rather than from formal teaching or knowledge transfer, may be the most important source of personal, professional development and improvement (McBrien, 2007). Further, it is also an important way to be able to bring together theory and practice; through reflection one can see and label schools of thought and theory within the context of the work. At present, reflection is recognized as a good practice which helps to develop teachers' self-awareness and is acknowledged as a first step in self-development. It is a continuous process, and

while "autonomous learning" is a current hot trend for learners, reflection can be viewed as a way for teachers to become "autonomous professionals" looking to better themselves.

Daudelin (1996) added that a reflection is the process of stepping back from the experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences; learning is the creation of meaning from past or current events that serve as a guide for future behavior. In the light of the No Child Left Behind law and the need for "highly qualified" teachers, state departments of education, institutions of higher learning, and school districts around the country are struggling to set criteria that designate educators as highly qualified. In a meta-analysis that focuses on empirical studies of teacher quality and qualifications, Rice (2003) found five broad professional categories of teacher attributes that appear to contribute to teacher quality. These are: (1) experience, (2) preparation programs and degrees, (3) type of certification, (4) coursework taken in preparation for the profession, and (5) teachers' own test scores.

The teacher who joins the mainstream of the teaching profession bears with him/her the appropriate educational training and acquired skills that are utilized in the performance of the job. As the teacher gathers experience in the practice, he/she faces the challenge to grow in the profession in order to cope with the dynamism of education. Experience matters, but more is not always better. The impact of experience is strongest during the first few years of teaching; after that, marginal returns diminish. A number of CALDER studies confirm findings from existing research that, on average, brand new teachers are less effective than those with some experience under their belts (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor 2007). Boyd, et al (2007) added that teachers show the greatest productivity gains during their first few years on the job, after which their performance tends to level off.

On the other hand, teachers with higher qualification are in a better position to lead students to achieve more, as they are equipped with the pedagogical content knowledge to teach their subjects. Also teachers who continually update their knowledge by further degrees will be able to manipulate the learning environment and process to make learning easier for their students. One of the most significant studies in this area was performed by Hanushek (1990). It was disclosed that eighty-five percent of the studies found no positive correlation between the educational performance of the students and the teacher's educational background. Although 7 percent of the studies did find a positive correlation, 5 percent found a negative impact. Higher teacher qualification does not make better students.

In addition, it is the goal of Department of Education that every teacher becomes not only efficient but also effective. It is in this mission that today, a lot of

trainings and seminars are being conducted to improve and develop the craft of each mentor in school. Seminars and the likes are being held in different parts of the country so as to prepare all the teachers in globalization (Felipe, 2013). Their attendance to these seminars will help create an effective learning environment, improve teaching-learning situations, keep updated on modern instructional devices and inspire them to become better teachers in the modern world. These are opportunities for professional growth and rich avenues for reflections that the teacher may incorporate into her instructional plans, delivery and assessment.

Conceptual understanding about effective teaching was explored among basic education teachers from public schools situated in the City of Manila (Abulon, 2002). Five major themes ultimately emerged to characterize the conglomeration of conceptions of effective teaching from personality-based dispositions, teaching competence traits, content mastery and expertise, pedagogical knowledge and extension of the self. The study concluded that there was no single, predominant factor or heuristic that was identified upon which effective teaching is largely and/or solely contingent. Instead, effective teaching was viewed as a confluence of various dispositions, traits, knowledge, and skill sets.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study was conducted with the use of descriptive research design, particularly, it was an assessment of the present teaching enhancement endeavors of teachers in the field. A validated questionnaire was utilized to gather the needed data on reflective practices. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted to validate the responses of the teachers on salient points about reflective practices. A descriptive statistics was used to facilitate the interpretation of the findings of the study. The Weighted Mean was used to describe the extent of reflective practices of the teachers. In order to test significant difference of the levels of teachers’ reflective practices when they are grouped according to educational qualifications, the T-test was utilized; the Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance was employed when they were grouped according to trainings attended and years of teaching experience.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The data on the professional attributes of the teachers in terms of educational qualifications shows that majority of them in the group do not pursued post-baccalaureate studies (Fig. 1). During the FGD, teachers have expressed their desire to pursue graduate studies but were hindered by financial constraints. Some said they had many paperwork to do in school that may get in the way with the many research work required in graduate school. These teachers have been in the

field for at least eight years that implies that they are expected to have encountered varied experiences in their job that could be very significant points for reflections (Fig. 2). These reflective practices could have been entwined in their lesson preparation and other phases of lesson delivery. Attendance to trainings is encouraged in the Department of Education as a venue for professional growth. However, data show that the greater majority of the teachers have not attended any training at all (Fig. 3). Those who have attended trainings and seminars in the national level may echo the knowledge learned to their colleagues. The recent shift to the K-12 curriculum made it imperative for teachers to attend trainings on pedagogical innovations in the subjects that they teach.

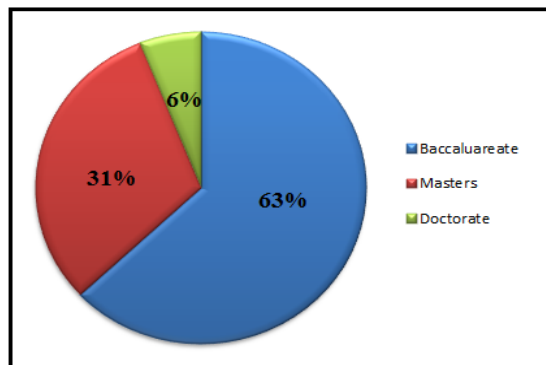


Figure 1. Distributions of teachers in terms of educational qualifications

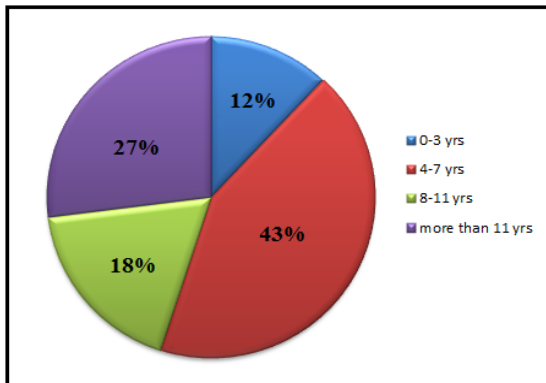


Figure 2. Distributions of teachers in terms of teaching experience

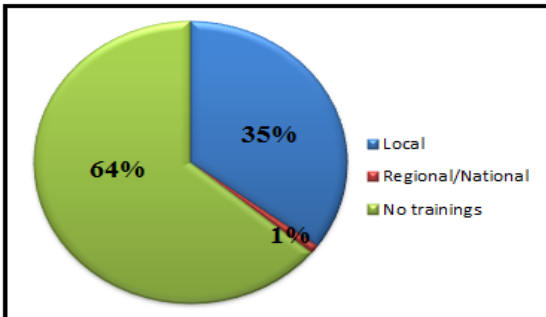


Figure 3. Distributions of teachers in terms of trainings attended

Reflective Practices of Teachers

The reflective practices of teachers in terms of self-reflection were assessed through a 10-item questionnaire. Three items are given responses of "Always" indicating that; indeed, there are a majority of teachers who look into the result of their classroom assessments as a reference for teaching success. Items three and seven which relate with reflections for future instructional decision are never done by the majority of teachers. In the FGD, it was found out that these teachers were handling so many pupils with varied forms of deficiencies. Self-reflection seemed to focus on addressing the very pressing classroom behavior problems and / or depressing student performance, especially in the subjects that are assessed in the National Achievement Test (NAT).

Table 1. Reflective practices of teachers in terms of self-reflection

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
I plan what I need to do next class hour to ensure that the students learn the unclear content.	2.77	Always
I try to find proofs of the students' learning.	2.74	Always
I wait for students to tell me why some tasks are difficult to do.	1.31	Never
I reflect on whether the students got the essential learning from the lesson.	2.69	Always
I trust that all my lessons are easy to understand.	1.52	Sometimes
While teaching I learn new things about students individual differences.	2.96	Always
I find it difficult to plan for my future teaching practices.	1.25	Never
I search on the internet for possible alternatives for my current teaching practices.	1.94	Sometimes
I keep a personal professional portfolio in which I collect proofs of my learning as a teacher over a specified period of time.	2.32	Sometimes
I wait for the time that I can find possible meaning and implication of classroom events	1.64	Sometimes
Overall Weighted Mean	2.12	Sometimes

Feedbacking between colleagues is a constant practice among the teachers. This practice implies that the teachers can freely share their classroom experiences to help them improve their teaching. This finding also implies that the teachers are willing to grow together in their profession so that their respective pupils may be helped to perform well. In the FGD with the teachers, it

was gathered that these sharing of classroom experiences, and reflections as well, were done during break time and/ or during in-house trainings. It is during these activities where they are able to talk about their own methods and other instructional modes in the classroom as well as solicit possible solutions to meet some classroom behavior problems.

Table 2. Reflective practices of teachers in terms of feedbacks from colleagues.

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
I talk to my colleagues about problematic issues in my classroom in order to have new ideas.	2.69	Always
I avoid discussing educational issues with my colleagues formally in meetings	1.65	Sometimes
I get helpful feedback from Colleagues and superiors that can be the basis for improvement of my teaching strategies.	2.60	Always
I asked academic background of my students from previous teacher.	2.56	Always
I share incident/situation to my colleagues to solicit ideas to overcome the situation	2.73	Always
I avoid soliciting ideas from my colleagues to improve my instructional materials needed in my teaching	1.44	Never
I find it degrading soliciting ideas from my colleagues for the improvement of my classroom physical appearance to be conducive to learning.	1.41	Never
I find it discouraging to take the colleagues advice for personal upbringing of myself.	1.43	Never
I select a colleague whose inputs in value and I feel comfortable	2.61	Always
If I receive negative feedback I will react in similarly	1.59	Sometimes
Overall Weighted Mean	2.07	Sometimes

The t-test between levels of reflective practices of the teachers when grouped according to educational qualification is presented in table 3. The t-test resulted with t-values that do not warrant for a significance of the difference. This result means that the enrolment to graduate studies does not spell significant difference in the reflective practices of teachers. This finding corroborates the findings of Hanushek (1990) which revealed that higher teacher qualifications do not make better students. In fact, it was also gathered from the FGD that there are teachers who are not enrolled in graduate schools who

Table 3. T-test between levels of reflective practices of teachers when grouped according to educational qualification

Source of Reflection	Educational Qualification	Mean	SD	t	Sig.	Decision
Self-Reflection	Baccalaureate	2.05	0.14	1.72	0.09	Do not reject H_0
	Masters	2.12	0.15			
Feedbacks from Colleagues	Baccalaureate	2.03	0.22	-0.31	0.75	Do not reject H_0
	Masters	2.07	0.17			

perform well in their teaching career as evidenced by the impressive performances of their pupils.

The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance as presented in table 4 was employed to determine if the reflective practices of the teachers differ significantly when grouped according to trainings attended and length of service. It can be gleaned from the table that respective to trainings attended the H-value obtains with self-reflections is 11.25 and the significant value is 0.00 which is very significant at the 0.01 level and therefore within the 0.05 level of significance set for analysis. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected with respect to self-reflection. This means that the self-reflections of the teachers differ significantly when they are grouped according to trainings attended. It can be recalled that the majority of the teachers were not able to attend trainings. Thus, the finding suggests that if the teachers are trained adequately, then they would be able to improve their reflective practices, thereby also improving their instructional management skills.

The result of the Kruskal-Wallis test reveals that the level of reflective practices of the teachers did not differ significantly when they are grouped according to length of service. This finding implies that the teachers have not maximized the use of reflective practices over the years in the field. This implies that the teachers in the District, old and new alike, have almost similar levels of reflective practices. This finding runs counter with Boyd et al., (2007) who said that teachers show the greatest productivity gains during their first few years on the job, after which their performance tends to level off.

This further implies that the administrators may look into the development of enhancement program that will include inputs for development of reflective practice will redound to more effective teaching and better pupil

performance.

5.0 Conclusion

Teachers generally agree that reflective practices are part of their job. For many teachers, reflection means looking at the assessment results every day as a measure of success. If the majority of the students get passing marks in the test, then instruction continues. Otherwise, instruction must be repeated. Another form of reflective practice is to gather affirmation from fellow teachers on the appropriateness of plans that were borne out of their self-reflections. The teachers in the study just did this. The enhancement of the professional attributes in terms of educational qualification and length of service of the teachers did not spell a significant difference in their reflective practices. This indicates that those teachers who are into graduate studies have not gained from their endeavors the benefits of reflective practice. The realization of the significance of continuous professional growth and development seems wanting. By professional growth, the teacher is expected of going through the process of introspection for the purpose of improving instructional decisions, particularly in the delivery of the goods to students. By this process, teachers should take a more conscious look at the emotions, actions and responses of students and add these to their understanding of the nature of the learners so that a more responsive instructional map may be drawn that will bring out the desired level of student performance. Perhaps if teachers can sharpen their consciousness of what reflection in learning can involve and how it can be influenced then they may be able to improve their practice of learning and help those who learn with them.

Trainings came out as a significant differentiating factor in the development of reflective practice. This is

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis test of significant difference between levels of reflective practices when grouped according to trainings attended and length of service

Professional Attributes	Source of Reflections	H	df	Sig.	Decision
Trainings Attended	Self Reflections	11.25**	2	0.00	Reject H_0
	Feedbacks from Colleagues	0.43	2	0.61	Do not reject H_0
Length of Service	Self Reflections	7.03	2	0.07	Do not reject H_0
	Feedbacks from Colleagues	2.39	2	0.50	Do not reject H_0

**very significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

indicative of the need for teachers to be trained to develop this skill. It is therefore recommended that teacher trainings incorporate the tooling of teachers for effective and meaningful reflective practice in the profession.

Much have yet to be understood about the benefits of reflective practice. The findings of this study hope to lend an avenue for further investigation that may provide insightful inputs for an enhancement program that will help teachers integrate reflective practice into the scheme of their day-to-day encounters with their students.

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