

## A Case Study of Beginning Teachers Professional Development: Based on the Perspective of Reflective Teaching Under the Background of the New Curriculum Reform

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### Abstract

Affected by the thought of western reflective teaching, Chinese educators began to study the theory and practice of the reflective teaching in 1990s. Reflective teaching is the core factor for the teachers professional development and professional growth, especially for the beginning teacher. This paper conducts a case study of a beginning teacher by the interview method and documentary method under the background of the new curriculum reform. This case study mainly describes the four key events of a beginning teacher professional development based on the concept of reflective teaching during the past one year teaching life: The teaching design, having classes, having demonstration class and high-quality class competition in the prefecture-level city, and writing down 51 teaching reflection notes, etc., which have the realistic guiding significance to the practice of beginning teachers professional development.

**Key words:** Beginning teachers; Professional development; Reflective teaching

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### INTRODUCTION

Professor Chuanwu Xiong wrote in the book of Reflective Teaching:

the reflective teaching is a continuous process in which the teaching subject explores and solves the problems of the teacher’s teaching behaviors, teaching objectives and the teaching tools, etc., combines the learning how to teach with the learning how to learn, tries to improve the rationality of the teaching practice, and establishes himself as a scholar-type teacher by means of action research.

Reflective teaching has become the trend of the world teacher education development, and is also the important direction of teacher education reform in China. At present, that the reflective teaching greatly promotes the teacher professional development attracts more and more teachers’ attention. Reflective teaching, as a kind of teaching idea, has penetrated into the teacher’s daily teaching. What’s more, teaching reflection is also regarded as an educational principle and is perforated the whole teaching process. Beginning teacher generally refers to who works within three years. Education theory and practice show that beginning teacher is at a critical stage of the teacher’s growth and comparatively is lack of the experience of teaching practice and teaching skills, so beginning teacher professional growth greatly affects the teacher’s whole career. If beginning teacher developed the habit of reflective teaching, he will benefit from it a lot and enhance his professional development rapidly.

In order to truly understand the present situation of beginning teacher’s reflective teaching, the author chooses teacher A as a case. Teacher A is working in a rural primary school as a beginning Chinese teacher in grade five for one year or so. He has graduated from Chinese language and literature major. During the past one year teaching life, he adheres to the reflective teaching under the guidance of new curriculum reform, has more than 20 periods demonstration class, often participates in the teaching competition for young teachers in the prefecture-level city, and writes down 51 teaching reflection notes.

Due to his diligence and valuable practical experience, gradually he becomes the main researcher of municipal key projects. What's more, many of his students have won the first prize in municipal composition competition in his tutorship. Teacher A's rapid growth in a short period mainly benefits from his persevering reflective teaching, which is typical of promoting beginning teachers professional development with the help of reflective teaching. So the careful analysis of the four key events of his growth provides beginning teachers with great enlightenment.

## 1. TEACHING DESIGN

Because teacher A regards the teaching design as the basis of a good lesson and the starting point of reflective teaching, he has developed the habit of designing the teaching seriously in daily teaching life. During the interview, we learn that he always consults a certain special-class teacher about the relevant problems of the teaching design and gets much effective guidance from him. Meanwhile, he has strong awareness of enhancing the quality of the teaching design and has high level of self-requirement on teaching design. Besides studying the teaching material seriously, teacher A also takes advantage of surfing the Internet, reading the educational journals and learning from the star teachers, etc. to guarantee the quality of the teaching design.

The following is one of teacher A's reflection notes about the teaching design:

A good teaching design is the foundation of a good lesson. And in order to guarantee the quality of the class, the key is how the teacher designs it. For example, when designing the text two and text three, I didn't spend much time designing them very carefully, so that the whole class was lack of enough interaction with the students in dull atmosphere, and the class didn't arouse students' great enthusiasm. While designing the text five and text seven, I tried my best to dig the teaching content deeply. I studied the materials about the launch of the "Shenzhou V Spaceship" and the clone phenomenon by searching the relevant information and consulting the parents. Owing to the full preparation of the teaching design, the atmosphere of the teaching implementation was very active and the class got quite good teaching effect.

Sukhomlynsky, a former Soviet Union educator, once said in the book of the *Suggestions for Teachers*: a teacher just spends 15 minutes designing a good lesson and the reason why he can do it is that the teacher always keeps studying. Thus, a good teacher needs to keep studying and tries to design a good lesson with the whole teaching life.

From the reflection notes above, teacher A illustrates the differences between the good and the bad teaching design from positive and negative aspects with an example. He draws the conclusion that a good teaching design is the foundation of a good lesson, and the beginning teachers need to keep studying to design a good lesson with the whole teaching life. Obviously, teacher A's reflection on teaching design is very rational. Reflective

teaching not only improves his teaching ability; what's more important is that it enhances his awareness of professional self-development; and it supply the beginning teacher professional development with continuous motivation.

## 2. HAVING CLASSES

The classroom is the laboratory of beginning teachers' practice, the main front of their professional development, and also the foundation of their reflective teaching. Whether beginning teachers could reflect on their teaching and students' learning in the specific teaching practice, and whether they could timely adjust their strategies of classroom teaching, determine whether beginning teachers could update their professional ability in the adaptation period.

From the interview, it is found that the focus of teacher A's teaching reflection notes experiences from teachers' teaching to students' learning.

### 2.1 Reflection on Teachers' Teaching

The following is teacher A's teaching reflection notes from the perspective of teachers' teaching:

Today, students and I learned The Beacon of Lugou Bridge together, and there was a plot in the teaching:

T: It is written that it's obvious a long-planned provocation in the text. But how the Chinese soldiers there determine it's the Japanese soldiers' provocation rather than searching for the missing soldiers?

S: If the Japanese soldiers really want to look for the lost soldiers, they should do it at the daytime rather than a very dark and silent night.

S: And when the Japanese soldiers are searching, they are heavily armed and aggressive.

S: The word of the Obvious fully embodies the Chinese defenders' wisdom.

The teaching plot above and the teaching record from the teaching references are basically the same. When preparing this lesson at the very start, I didn't watch the teaching record and didn't sort out a main line to ask the questions. I made the corresponding adjustment after watching the teaching record. Then, I created three main questions and explained the text around those three questions. Finally, the teaching was well-organized and students were very active to answer the questions because such questions had broadened their way of thinking.

I am thinking that why I can't find out the clue to asking the questions and can't sort out the main questions without the help of the teaching references? Although it's very important for the beginning teachers to internalize other teachers' experience to their own by often reading educational journals and studying the lesson plans of the star teachers, the teachers should grope independently in the practice by themselves. Only by this way, the teachers could enhance their capability of textbooks interpretation and teaching implementation rapidly.

Teacher A conducts deep analysis to his own classroom teaching details and sublimates his reflection to the level of extracting the classroom questioning, which proves that he could conduct a certain deep reflection. Meanwhile, teacher A put forward to internalize other teachers'

experience to his own by often reading educational journals and learning from the star teachers, so as to promote his professional development.

## 2.2 Reflection on Students' Learning

The following is teacher A's teaching reflection notes from the perspective of students' learning:

Today, when students were having a test in the classroom, a student named Gaoshan stood up suddenly and asked, "what does the word of Walk in the sentence of a Chinese ancient poetry, a child walks fast to chase a yellow butterfly, mean?" I thought I had already talked about this question in class, and this was a test, so I couldn't answer her question. Then, I put on a solemn face and said that we could discuss this question only after the test, and she sat down reluctantly. When the test ended, I just understood what was going on after I asked her why she asked that question in the test. In the class, I just explained that walking fast meant running, but it's required for the students to answer what did the Walk mean in the test, so this student didn't know the correct answer.

The spirit of perseverance of this student, Gaoshan, is worthy of praise! At the same time, the teacher should have a deep reflection that the teacher should keep calm and patient when dealing with students' various questions, even though their questions are not very accurate and they ask the questions at the wrong time. Furthermore, if the teachers often put on a solemn face, it really means a blow to them. After several frastractions, the students are unwilling to ask the questions any more, even though they really have the questions. So I remind myself that I must keep calm, clearheaded and very patient when coping with students' all kinds of questions.

Seen from the reflection above, teacher A has already focused on the students' learning. By the teaching reflection, teacher A has improved his practical knowledge and the ability to deal with emergencies in the classroom, which has positive significance to promote the development of his professional ability.

## 3. HAVING DEMONSTRATION CLASS AND HIGH-QUALITY CLASS COMPETITION

In the interview, teacher A thinks both having demonstration class and high-quality class competition have an obvious positive effect to promote his professional development. In the past one year or so, teacher A takes part in more than 20 times demonstration class.

I have made full preparation for every class with my unique thinking. The deficiency of the class is pointed out and the solutions to the problems are found out with the suggestions from the experts, peers and my own reflection after the class to enhance my teaching design. This kind of cyclic process can greatly promote the development of my own professional ability. In addition, having high-quality class competition at various levels can greatly promote the teaching ability.

Thus, having demonstration class and high-quality class competition can obviously enhance the reflective teaching ability of the beginning teachers and improve their professional development.

The following is teacher A's teaching reflection notes after he participates in a high-quality class competition in the prefecture-level city:

Recently, I had taken part in a high-quality class competition in the prefecture-level city and benefited a lot because of the careful guidance from the Teacher Xu, a special-class teacher. Firstly, the teacher should not repeat what did the students say and the teacher should give appropriate praise, encouragement or evaluation after students answered the questions.

Secondly, the teacher should pay attention to the creation of appropriate difficult problems when analyzing language materials together with the students. Then the students read the materials independently with those questions and exchanged the reading benefit with other students. At last, the teacher should do the summarize. In addition, because the difficulty level of the problems I created was too high in the past, only a few students were willing to give their comments to the questions. Thus, I created many simple questions about the teaching content in the competition, so more students were active to answer the questions. What's more, the students's answer wouldn't be beyond the teacher's expectation, although the classroom atmosphere seemed to be more active. However, the students' mind was imprisoned over the long term, just like feeding a child: the child would eat when you fed but wouldn't eat when you didn't feed, which was worth thinking about deeply.

Thirdly, to guarantee a good lesson, the teacher should be clearheaded and the teaching should go from the easy to the difficult and complicated with some highlights. The teaching should contact with the real life and current news. For instance, when learning the text of Defence for the Yangtze River, the teacher could illustrate the role the people's army played in the Wenchuan earthquake and snow disaster in the south of China, which could let the students learn the spirit of the text and significance of the knowledge construction deeply.

Seen from the above, teacher A often has many teaching reflections after having demonstration class and high-quality class competition in the prefecture-level city, which promotes his understanding of classroom teaching practice rapidly. For example, "in order to have a good lesson, the relationship between teachers and students is like kite-flying, and the teacher should keep clearheaded." Those deep reflections are good for the beginning teachers professional development.

## 4. WRITING DOWN 51 REFLECTION NOTES

In teacher A's mind, insisting on writing reflection notes greatly enhances his own professional development. During the past one year, he has already written down 51 teaching reflection notes, which include all aspects of the teaching practice. Meanwhile, those teaching reflection notes focus to improve the teaching from the reflection of the students' learning and put forward corresponding suggestions.

A few days ago, I required the students to write the observation note and its topic was to give advice to the teacher's teaching. There were some good suggestions, which were as follows. Firstly, when the students were learning the new words, the teacher should write them down on the blackboard and remind

the students to focus on the words easy to make mistake. Secondly, the teacher should use the refined language to give the lecture. Thirdly, the teacher should pay special attention to the quality of the class assignments in the classroom.

Teacher A can let the students write the observation notes to give advice to his teaching, which proves that he possesses high level of initiative to the teaching reflection.

The following is teacher A's teaching reflection notes to cultivate students' listening ability:

Nowadays, the students generally lack of listening ability. In order to cultivate students' listening ability, I had bought a set of Wisdom Rucksacks, in which there were some philosophical essays and there was a passage, Gently Tell You, after each essay, mainly making insightful comments.

Every morning, I would read one essay to the students just only twice. After reading, I let the students think fast what the author wanted to tell us, and then write down their own opinion. When most of the students finished, I would choose three or four students to exchange their own opinion together with others students and I would make some comments after their sharing. After a period of training, the students' listening ability had improved, so I began to assign this training as the homework. At home, the parents read the essay, and the students wrote down the connotation. Then the students and the parents carried on the analysis and discussion with the help of the part of Gently Tell You.

As time goes by, I gradually enhanced the difficulty of this training: the level of the selected essays was from easy to difficult, and the reading times were from twice to only once. After a period of training, the students' listening ability had obvious progress.

Obviously, teacher A has his own unique way to cultivate the students' learning ability and can seize this important learning ability, listening, to carry on the creative cultivation.

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## CONCLUSION

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The rapid professional development of beginning teachers benefits a lot from the reflective teaching. During the past one year teaching life, teacher A, as a beginning teacher, promotes his professional development by teaching reflection under the concept of the new curriculum reform. This case study has realistic guiding significance to the beginning teachers' professional development under the background of the new curriculum reform.

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