Cooperative Reflection in Teacher Education:
A Finish Perspective

By Jarkko Leino

Introduction

There can be no educational development without teacher development (Stenhouse, 1975, 83). This concerns preservice as well as inservice teacher education. Though teachers' preservice education can also be cooperatively organized, inservice education has to be cooperative to be efficient. Inservice education is often school-based, and hence deals with school development which gives it a more specific context.

Many American articles and books on reflection in teacher eduction start with Schon's well-known contribution (1983). In Europe, it was Stenhouse's book *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and School Development* which first presented ideas totally different from the previous decade. Curriculum planning in the 1970s was very rational and comprehensive. For Stenhouse, curriculum development meant a synonym for professional development, and professional develop-

Jarkko Leino is a senior facultuy member at the University of Tampere, Finland.

ment was regarded as a research process in which teachers systematically and collaboratively reflected on their practice and used the results to improve their own teaching. "Teacher-as-researcher" was the European metaphor almost a decade before Schon's "reflective practioner." It was also Stenhouse who

strongly emphasized that curriculum and school development were school-based concepts. He avoided the technical and rational approach by Tyler (1949), and the multi-level curriculum system by Goodlad (1979). Though his concept of curriculum was quite complicated, its main feature was that educational values implicitly steer teaching processes. He criticized that large and politically given curriculum remains far from what is implemented in school. What has been done in the 1980s is a detailed analysis of the nature of the professional knowledge in the work of a teacher (Carr, 1989).

The teacher as reflective professional has been a very powerful metaphor in the research of teacher education for more than a decade. Teacher's knowledge (*e.g*. Huberman, 1985; Shulman, 1986) and perspectives (Van Manen, 1977; Grimmen *et al*., 1990) have given a new approach to study teaching as a profession. What kind of profession teaching is and how the teacher thinks and makes decisions in practice are some of the questions that have been widely discussed. For instance, in Finland we have noticed that hardly any primary teacher needs or even knows the official curriculum; a colleague is a better information source than official documents or compulsory inservice courses (Korkeakoski ,1990). However, when the teachers of an individual school have adopted the idea that it is their privilege and duty to plan the curriculum of their own school—this may happen during a long-term school development project—then the curriculum gets a new meaning and the teachers' perspectives to reflection may also widen (Leino, 1991).

During the past few years I have been interested in school development and tried to find ways to encourage teachers and principals to make suggestions as to how they would develop their school and their perspectives of teacher's work. Using their ideas as a start for a series of inservice courses, we have tried to develop teachers' abilities of reflection and gradually widen their perspectives. In the following, I will give the theoretical basis for this process and examples of techniques to reach this goal. By 1994 all schools were required to plan their own curriculum with only very general guidelines and constraints given by the National School Board. This means that the official policy of our country is to get the teachers of each individual school to reflect on what the values and goals of their school are and what they mean in terms of the curriculum.

The knowledge interest of my paper is emancipatory or critical as Habermas (1974) presented it. Knowledge becomes influential only if teachers collaboratively reflect on how it (*i.e.,* a former study, etc.) could be seen in the conditions of their school and decide what they want to do. I have called this kind of knowledge dynamic (Leino, 1991). Very often even an experiment or a case study can give reflective practitioners valuable help to widen their perspectives. Hence, I am interested in tools or techniques which have seemed to be useful to get teachers to reflect on their experiences and widen their perspectives.

These tools have been experimented in teachers' long-term inservice courses (two days per term through three years). An experienced consultant, even a

professor of education, may help this process if the teachers accept him or her as an aid and co-worker, but not as an authority who tells how things should be done. The process seems to be very delicate and it easily becomes an outside-in command which may prevent teachers' professional qrowth (see Hunt,1987).

Perspective in Reflection

Speaking of teacher reflection is nothing new. The so-called Chicago school was interested in it when Dewey and Mead developed their ideas of pragmatism (Dewey, 1933). Of course, the discussion level was quite general, intuitive, and ideal. Schon (1983) presented his critical attitudes to the model of Technical Rationality according to which teaching problems are to be solved by applying scientific theories and techniques. Schon considered the teaching profession as being different from engineering. While emphasizing problem solving, we ignore problem setting, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen (p. 40). Problem setting is not a technical problem. Very seldom, if ever, the teacher can apply scientifically confirmed theories to a problematic situation in practice. Learning by doing is basicly experiential. Schon suggested the concept of reflection-in-action.

Reflection in teaching can be carried out in different ways and with different purposes. Schon's reflection-in-action is a descriptive concept without any content. That is why it is necessary for the development of reflective teacher-education programs to go beyond Schon's concept. What are teachers to reflect on and within what perspective? Dewey's view was that the moral teacher is one who is reflective; Stenhouse had educational values implicit in the process; and Schon focuses only on the problematic situation.

Grimmett *et al*. (1990) distinguish the source, mode, and purpose of reflection and give a detailed description of that. Their basic theory resembles clearly that of Habermas', originally applied to the reflection purpose by Van Manen (1977). Habermas distinguishes three knowledge interests—technical, practical, and emancipatory—when he compared different sciences and their methods in scientific inquiry. In human sciences it is probably reasonable to consider the technical interest of knowing to be in the center of the phenomenon of concern and within the practical interest, both lying within the frame of the emancipatory interest. In this way, Grimmett *et al*. present three perspectives of reflection:

1. Reflection as instrumental mediation of action. The source of knowledge usually comes from an external authority, for example from a study, and is mediated through action. The mode of reflection is technical and its purpose is directed to improve the practice. Reflection occurs on the same level as actions.

2. Reflection as deliberating among competing views of teaching. Now the perspective is wider and the meanings of experiences are to be pondered over

several contexts. Grimmett *et al*. call this mode of reflective knowing as deliberative, though Habermas and Van Manen used the term practical in the meaning on a hermeneutic-phenomenological level. The purpose of reflection is informative.

3. Reflection as reconstructing experience. The perspective is now really restructuring one's thinking mediated usually by the comments of the colleagues. Grimmett *et al*. call this mode dialectical, though critical or emancipatory is more original. Any way, the purpose of reflection is to apprehend and transform (see Habermas, 1974.)

It is probable that when reflection remains only on the technical level it has quite limited influence on teacher thinking and, hence, practice. Most school-development programs which come from outside the school remain technical (Bergman & McLaughlin, 1978). If we want to change teaching practice we have to get teachers to commit themselves in the meaning of a new developmental program (Fullan, 1991) more intensively than only on the technical level. This means reflecting concretely on what a certain development means in practice and why it is useful or necessary. When teachers share their experiences about new practice, discuss the possible difficulties with the colleagues in order to get over the situation-specific details, and compare their results with those of so-called traditional teaching, then there are opportunities also to widen the perspectives. Genuine cooperative reflection changes the perspective of the traditional practice to the direction of something new, possibly to the demands of the near future.

Most of the theoretical discussions on teacher reflection have so far dealt with the individual level, *i.e*., a student teacher or an inservice teacher reflecting on his or her own practice. Even though it may seem to be scientifically easier to deal with the problem in this way, school and other educational institutes are collectives in which the staff works together and develops its own work collaboratively. There also seem to be some limits for an indivifual to improve work alone through reflection. One of the few educational scientists who has studied teacher reflection from the point of view of shared experience is Hunt (Hunt, 1987, 1991). In his latest book, he portrays renewal as an inside-out approach, and planned (rational) change as an outside-in approach (1991, 31).

Of course, individual reflection is necessary: "If you want to facilitate change, you must be willing to change yourself." However, as Hunt has noticed: "Nonetheless, my experience has led me to believe that no one can go it alone" (p. 32). Sharing often helps us to extend our experiences, telling our findings to our colleagues helps us mostly, and while feeling lost, sharing helps to find the way back. School development and all the knowledge connected with it form a process whlch needs continuous discussions and, at least, informal evaluation about the various viewpoints of experimentations. Hunt plays a version, in a way typical of him, on the Kolb cycle of experiential learning for presenting the process of sharing experiences in small-groups (p. 35). Though he uses the model for the purpose of the

renewal of personal energy (usually in the form of images) I use his ideas for the purpose of school development. Shared responsibility for change becomes a cooperative duty whch leads to the development of the participants.

Cooperative reflection emphasizes working together and learning from each other in small-groups. There are studies which make it evident that especially school-development experiments have been successful only if the meaning of change has become shared by the staff (Fullan, 1991; Leino, 1991). Small experimental projects within the framework of overall school development are very helpful in creating the conditions in which teachers' perspectives can continuously widen.

Tools for Widening Perspectives

School improvement and attempts to make it happen are complex topics. During the 1980s, it became clear that making widespread structural changes would not necessarily affect classroom practice. The so-called "5 factor model" of school effectiveness—(a) academic goal consensus; (b) safe and orderly climate; (c) strong instructional leadership; (d) high expectations for student achievement; and (e) frequent evaluation of student progress—did not guarantee a successful change (Ramsay & Clark, 1990). In some cases it worked very well, but more often it meant only that teachers prepared students for examinations. Reflection has been restricted to the very basic level of compulsory demands of student achievement.

In Finland, where evaluation of student achievement has not had a strong position, some schools have been able to concentrate on active learning methods, such as cooperative theme or project study, and to them it has meant a real change. At least it has given new enthusiasm to the teachers and students as well, and avoided the stagnation of routines in teaching methods. The teachers' cooperative reflective thinking reached a higher order level. With the aid of supportive inservice education and permanent discussion groups the process could have been kept viable for several years.

If a researcher can find time to work with the teachers of a school and systematically support the process of change for some years, for example three to five years, the results can be quite promising. In my own project (Leino, 1991) we first organized the small group work of seven to12 teachers, then asked the groups to plan the inservice education for promoting the part-project the following year. By repeating the process for five years we succeeded in making change in the schools.

We have tried to use the expriences we got in our school improvement project in inservice courses for teachers and principals of other schools. Participants do the work in order to widen their perspectives. They have been encouraged to organize school development projects in their schools, and for this purpose to establish discussion and working groups. To types of discussion groups have been found to be beneficial: groups for grade-specific issues, and groups for subject-specific

issues. At junior and senior schools, the subject areas have been mathematical subjects, foreign languages, general subjects, and practical subjects. The representatives of these groups have then formed grade-specific groups. Each group has annually nominated one member as to be the group leader. Often they have got extra pay for the work. Our schools are, in general, quite small, consisting usually of three parallel teaching groups (classes). Thus the number of each group is about seven to11. The division of work between the two types of groups has depended on the tasks and duties as follows: the grade-specific groups have planned the on-going issues of how to organize the themes and other collaborative work of the following week, etc., while the subject-specific groups have taken care of curriculum planning for the following year. The principals have been encouraged to give new ideas or problems encountered to the teachers groups to be discussed and prepared for the meeting of all the teachers.

During the inservice courses, one efficient tool for widening the participants' perspectives has been the technique of conceptual or mind mapping (see Novak & Gowin, 1984). We have first taught the technique which has seemed to be new to most of the participants and then asked them in small goups to plan a map of different topics, such as a new school-development project with background factors, pedagogical leadership, etc. Each group presented its product to be discussed in a positive way. The technique has been adopted without difficulties and through the maps we have had good discussions in terms of widening perspectives. I gave two examples of the mind maps of pedagogical leadership drawn from the data of the Finnish principals at the end of the inservice course of the second year.

Both maps comprehensively describe the ideas of school development and also the way Finnish principals typically consider their work: they create good relationshlps, organize goal discussions, but do not personally participate in the instructional developments. The principal is used to organizing and taking care of administrational work but remains distant from instructional questions. Another technique which we have successfully used in order to widen the teachers' perspectives is shadowing. In our country, teachers and principals very seldom visit other teachers' classrooms. Teachers usually do everythlng independently. Though most teachers say that they like their work and that the climate in school is good, conflicts are usually silenced and discussions are very seldom pedagogical. Teachers do not know how their colleagues carry out their teaching practice; these issues are not dealt with in discussions. When asked to shadow their colleague as part of their inservice education, the first reaction was defensive. But when the rules became clear and shadowing was understood (at the first stage) only as a means to one's own learning in the meaning of "what can I learn from my colleague's doings?" the task was accepted. It is important to form a friendly climate in shadowing. The open discussions are then in the first cycle quite rewarding, even exaggerated and almost without any criticism, since the purpose is to start with "a soft landing." During the following cycles the shadower is supposed to ask some

questions why something was done in the way it appeared to be and could it be done in another way, too. The technique of shadowing has produced open discussions and many integrated projects later on.

When the teachers of a school start their discussion to plan the curriculum of their school, we (as consultants) usually advise them first to list those viewpoints which are good and worthy of preserving in their school and those which should be improved. The perspective of the first discussion is usually very basic and practical: "we do our job well," "we have good relationships with each other," and "we appreciate each other" are on one list, and "we have cliques," "we do not speak about problems," "our facilities are poor," and "information does not reach us" are on the other. It is not a suprise that when the same questions are presented to the students, the level of the answers is the same. Where are the reflective professionals? It takes a lot of dlscussions before the hidden professionality comes into view. Small developmental projects, theme days, etc., are powerful means in this process. Nevertheless, the level of a wider perspective can be found and that is the level of personal satisfaction.

Discussion

We have presented some ideas of the ways in which the perspective of teacher reflection can be widened. Teaching may easily become a routine, stagnated by the obvious facts and basic objectives. If so, the school organization is "dead." However, teaching can also be very creative and rewarding with teachers hoping this and being, in fact, willing to work for the purpose. It was also found that it is the routine, not creative work, which makes teachers tired. I have noticed how rewarding it is to work with teachers in the inservice courses, when they find again their old capabilities to reflect creatively, the feature which was influential when they chose the profession. It has also been rewarding to notice how willing the teachers have been to work for this reflectivity.

In order to keep the reflective attitude alive, permanent discussion groups are needed within a school. We have offered a model for the purpose and found our model to be very influential. Of course, there are a great many practical problems, such as scheduling all the meetings, etc., but when the system has proved to be rewarding, the problems have, so far, been solved in the schools which have experimented it. For this reason, I can recommend our model of school development and some techniques which seem to widen teachers' perspectives.

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