

SELF-REFLECTION AMONG STUDENTS AND TEACHERS: FEEDBACK WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

SEBAREFLEXIA MEDZI ŠTUDENTMI A UČITEĽMI:
SPÄTNÁ VÄZBA V RÁMCI VZDELÁVACIEHO PROCESU

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Abstract

This paper deals with the need to change current educational methods used by universities. Traditional methods seem not to be satisfactory to teach students to evaluate data, make decisions, take responsibility and develop their critical thinking. Therefore, a new form of teaching and new approaches to teaching may help students to develop the above-mentioned skills. This kind of teaching also requires development and improvement of university teachers' educational competencies because the traditional teacher-student relationship also changes, as do their roles in the education process.

Keywords: assessment process, self-assessment, reflection, self-reflection, learning process, teaching process, roles of teachers, roles of students, diary, teaching innovation, critical thinking, the teaching model of specialized translation.

Abstrakt

Štúdia sa zaoberá problematikou zmeny súčasných vzdelávacích metód, ktoré využívajú vysokoškolskí učitelia. Zdá sa, že tradičné metódy nie sú dostatočné na to, aby naučili študentov hodnotiť a spracovávať prijímané informácie, robiť rozhodnutia, prevziať zodpovednosť a rozvíjať svoje kritické myslenie. Nové formy výučby a nové prístupy k výučbe môžu študentom pomôcť rozvíjať vyššie uvedené zručnosti. Tento druh výučby si vyžaduje aj rozvoj a zdokonaľovanie vzdelávacích schopností vysokoškolských učiteľov, pretože sa mení aj tradičný vzťah medzi učiteľmi a študentmi, ako aj ich úlohy vo vzdelávacom procese.

Kľúčové slová: sebahodnotenie, sebareflexia, vyučovací proces, roly učiteľa, roly študentov, kritické myslenie, výučba prekladu odborných textov.

Introduction

Today's constant barrage of varied information, not all of it being true and some of it often subject to contradictory interpretations by various sources (also known as fake news), is difficult to navigate and look at critically, even for today's students. The current generation of students finds new information online, more specifically from social media and other types of communication technology, their primary means of communicating with the rest of the world. In general, they tend to think less and express themselves in an abbreviated style, which is subsequently reflected in their way of thinking. Students are also losing their ability to express their opinion using coherent, complex sentences. Anonymity and unnatural conditions for communication on social media harm their ability to speak in public and present their own opinion (e.g. in front of a group of peers). They tremble at the thought of failure, of not achieving perfection and becoming a mockery in their classmates' eyes. Unfortunately, the current mindset exclusively prioritizes perfection (which is often shallow). This leads not only to the inability to express one's opinion and to think critically, but also the inability to self-reflect and be self-aware, which may cause the destruction of one's personality, inability to develop critical thinking and inability to progress in learning process.

For this very reason, among others, it is vital to pay attention to the development of students' abilities of self-reflection and self-awareness at all levels of education, which can also encourage the development of critical thinking.

For university students, the lack of the abilities mentioned above can lead to the following problems:

- ∅ the inability to assess one's own skills, strengths and weaknesses,
- ∅ the inability to set goals,
- ∅ poor time management,
- ∅ the inability to use appropriate strategies,
- ∅ the inability to self-evaluate,
- ∅ poor information use,
- ∅ the inability to seek help,
- ∅ poor self-motivation.

These problems should be also considered in connection with students' inability to self-regulate. All the above statements are confirmed by research which has revealed that students are unable to regulate learning processes (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001).

Reflection and self-reflection in the teaching process

Based on the aforementioned, today's educational paradigm is gradually changing, with a growing emphasis on self-awareness and self-reflection. This surely concerns not only learners, but also teachers themselves. In fact, it concerns everyone involved in the education process, though each of them have different motivation and goals.

According to Jenny Moon, "*Reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to gain a better understanding of relatively complicated or unstructured ideas and is largely based on the reprocessing of knowledge, understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess*" (Moon, 2005, p. 1). Reflection also helps to develop emotional intelligence, as long as we are aware of emotions in the reflection process. It is necessary to realize that reflection is only a starting point, the beginning of the long-term process of development of the student and the teacher. The prerequisite for reflection is the ability to realize its necessity for our further progress, but also the willingness to implement it. The process of reflection (especially at its outset) can also be unpleasant, because it forces us to be honest with ourselves, to get to know ourselves, to acknowledge our weaknesses and failures, as well as aspects and areas we need to improve. Reflection forces students to take responsibility for their learning and their progress, but it also forces teachers to take responsibility for the way they teach. With the ability to self-reflect, we become our own observers and critics. If we realize that the reflection process is a mental process, we will succeed. If we do not realize this, the entire process of reflection will be rendered unnecessary and meaningless. Therefore, self-reflection must be seen as an active and conscious process, one that may also present obstacles for the individual in the beginning (e.g. student self-reflection, experience with previous teaching methods, experience with previous teacher(s) or groups of peers), but can ultimately help the student to change their way of thinking, change their position in the group or deepen their understanding. John Dewey emphasizes the positive role of self-reflection in developing students' critical thinking, which should also be a goal of the teaching process at universities (Dewey, 1991).

It is also thanks to self-reflection that we learn how to teach ourselves. It is a way of learning from one's own experience without needing someone to guide us or speak to us. Self-reflection facilitates not only self-knowledge, thus improving the quality of the teaching process, but it helps to adapt students' changing goals and objectives through their active engagement in the education process; it can even change the goals of the educational process itself and the teacher's choice of teaching methods and approaches.

If we are to use the term self-reflection, we intend to denote and describe an active, focused thinking process. Through this activity, one relives past experiences and re-evaluates them. This is a natural way of thinking, one we all use, whether we realize and consciously control it or not. Of course, there are many perspectives on the reflection process.

According to Dawson (2016), the process includes three steps:

1. “Returning to experience – that is to say recalling or detailing salient events.
2. Connecting with feelings – this has two aspects: using helpful feelings and removing or containing obstructive ones.
3. Evaluating experience – this involves re-examining experience in the light of one’s aims and knowledge. It also entails integrating this new knowledge into one’s conceptual framework.”

To sum up: self-reflection is not only a mental ability or a partial academic skill, but also a process through which mental skills are transformed into academic skills.

Student self-reflection

We view learning as an activity that students do for their own sake; such learning should, of course, be proactive. When students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they take a proactive learning approach, thanks to which it is possible to reach their goals. Thus, students can observe what is happening to them as they reach their goals with increased efficiency. This increases their confidence, self-satisfaction and motivation to continue their studies. Students who also have the ability to self-regulate are undoubtedly more successful in their studies, and they are also more optimistic about their future.

A teacher who leads students towards self-reflection must know what contemplation really means. Of course, self-reflection in the teaching process goes beyond contemplation. It is a critical and self-regulating factor that motivates the teacher to monitor their students’ performance and assess their progress based on specific pre-established criteria. Through self-reflection, students can identify their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to develop strategies for improving their overall performance.

It is beneficial for students to evaluate their own performance, helping them to form images of themselves and allowing them to evaluate their progress and achievement, for example, of the goals they set at the beginning of the semester. This also allows them to evaluate each other, thus learning to accept constructive criticism from their peers and teachers. Based on their teaching experience, teachers are certainly able to see the difference between students’ perception and evaluation of their own abilities and their actual abilities. This is among the reasons why teachers must teach students self-reflection. Self-reflective learning ought to be integrated into the education process, not just left as an independent extracurricular activity. Once students open up and begin to describe their way of thinking, teachers can better understand them, which can help teachers to further develop their students’ self-reflective abilities.

In summary, we maintain that through self-reflection and self-assessment, students learn:

- Û to plan and direct their learning,
- Û to evaluate their own work and results,
- Û to analyse the learning process,
- Û to evaluate their peers,
- Û self-motivation.

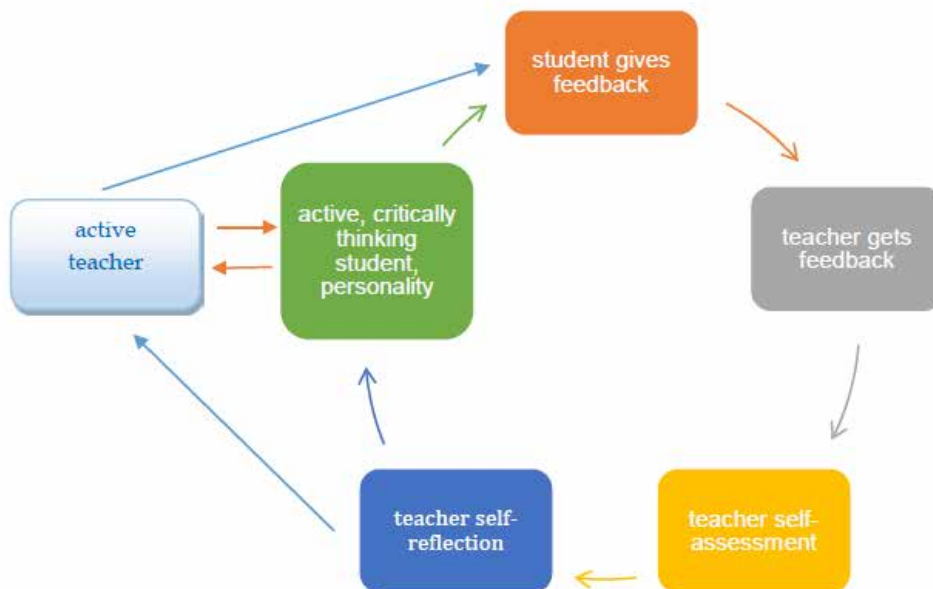


Figure 1. The process of developing teacher self-assessment and self-reflection based upon the student's feedback and student-teacher interaction.

Self-assessment as a teacher's motive of self-reflection

"Reflection begins in a state of doubt or perplexity which, for teachers, is most likely to be encountered when working with learners, particularly new or unfamiliar learners. When we are faced with difficulties and uncertainties in practise, when things don't go according to plan or don't fit with the theory, we may feel powerless and unable to resolve the situation" (Dewey, 1991, p. 64). This we view as the key aspect of the teaching process. By solving problems, we dispel the doubts and confusion that inevitably appear in the teaching process and which it is thus crucial to learn from. When talking about self-reflection, we should also take teacher self-assessment into account. Generally, self-assessment is a powerful tool to help improve ourselves. The self-assessment process helps teachers to empathize with their students. If the teacher does not devote time to assessing students' understanding of the subject matter, then their time and efforts are wasted. To my way of thinking, getting/giving feedback is a tool through which we can learn what impression we make on other people, as well as vice-versa, whether it be words themselves, tone of voice, attitude, gestures, etc. – simply put, the entirety of one's behaviour. Feedback refers to information about the results of previous activities (Gabura, 2015), it should be given in gradual doses, and one should not change their behaviour according to others' expectations (Griffin, 1991).

Teacher self-assessment is necessary to establishing relationships with one's students. When students see that teachers are also learners with their own strengths and weaknesses, that they can also be imperfect, frustrated or disappointed, that they can succeed as well as fail, it will improve the teacher-student relationship, allowing students to open up to their teachers. Therefore, the teacher should listen patiently to students' questions and encourage them, even when they make mistakes, emphasizing that mistakes can also lead to improvement in learning. As far as I am concerned self-assessment is of primary importance for teachers to develop the habit of self-reflection. A teacher who does not think about self-reflection has no intention to develop professionally, and certainly does not ask students for feedback.

Self-reflection helps teachers to monitor their own personal development from beginners to experienced educators. However, teachers' development can also be hampered by their fears of poor classroom time management and information technology in the education process.

Length and breadth of teaching experience are not enough to make a truly experienced teacher unless accompanied by self-reflection. Rollett characterizes an experienced and good teacher as follows: *“Experts rely on a large repertoire of strategies and skills that they can call on automatically, leaving them free to deal with unique or unexpected events. The wealth of knowledge and routines that they employ, in fact, is so automatic that they often do not realise why they preferred a certain plan of action over another. However, when questioned, they are able to reconstruct the reason for their decisions and behaviour”* (Rollet, 2001, p. 27).

Therefore, the teacher should give students the opportunity to be a part of the assessment process, thus encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers' assessments should be based on faith in the student's abilities and their capacity to mentally develop. If the teacher does everything in their power to help students improve their performance, students will trust them. Thanks to self-reflection, students can improve and push their limits. However, the teacher supports students with feedback in gradual doses, as students must also form their own impression of their progress, potential and limits.

The teaching process mentioned above also requires particular focus on teaching materials. Dewey (1991) states that teaching materials should correspond with the lives of students and emphasizes active participation in learning activities, where they should not simply learn educational content mechanically; the class should function as a community, able to prepare students for functioning in society at large and various social communities. Some teachers take this for granted, but implementing Dewey's suggestions in practice may not be as easy as it may seem.

Self-reflection leads teachers to understand the people they teach, their needs and abilities. Every learner is different, and therefore each of them has a different interpretation of how teachers teach, what teachers say and how they say it. Each of them starts the learning process with a different level of knowledge and experience with different types of teachers. Every individual student represents a different, individual world. Every group of students is its own, unique world that differs from other groups. The work and position of the teacher will be different in every group.

Self-reflection and self-assessment on the teacher's part boosts students' sense of responsibility for their own progress by encouraging them to reflect on their own study. Indeed, students can also evaluate teachers' teaching methods through self-reflection, as can those who, unfortunately, may not necessarily be familiar with the context in which the methods were used, and whose evaluation, therefore, may not necessarily be objective.

Furthermore, self-reflection is one of the most effective ways for educators to realize that their teaching methods can be improved.

In summary, thanks to self-assessment and self-reflection, the teacher learns:

- Û to aim their teaching toward clearly defined goals,
- Û to cooperate with students in the process of teaching,
- Û to assess and interpret students' progress,
- Û to get to know their students better.

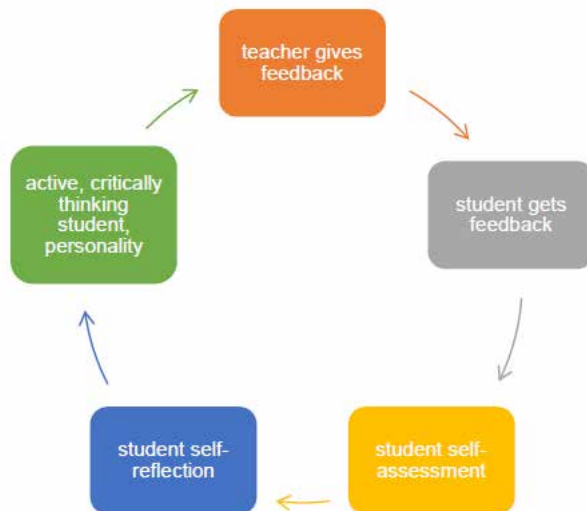


Figure 2. The process of developing student self-assessment and self-reflection based upon the teacher's feedback.

Diaries in the teaching process as a tool of self-reflection

Many teachers who consciously include self-reflection in their classrooms record the results of self-reflection in diaries. They write down their feelings, experiences, plans and new teaching methods. This information tends to be general, but they consider it important to record crucial moments of the learning/teaching process that can lead to professional progress. The diary entries are indeed subjective, recording an internal dialogue of sorts. One of the many benefits of writing a diary is that it assists us in identifying everything that helps us progress and facilitates the planning process. It is most definitely advisable to read one's diary regularly, because it may reveal topics or problems that we dealt with in the past, as well as solutions or ways we responded. Some teachers summarize the notes at the end of each class or at the end of the semester.

Such a summary can have two functions:

- ü We see what progress we have made since we started using reflection in the teaching process.
- ü Our further professional progress can be based on such a summary.

Keeping a diary is an effective way to grasp, organize, evaluate, and learn from experience. Writing a diary can also be considered as creative writing. Some researchers state (Hatie, 2009, Mezirow, 1997, Wright, 1987) that creative writing is also a form of therapy, allowing people to solve problems and find solutions. Such therapy allows people to recognize and write down examples of misconceptions and to imagine something positive; in other words, it consists in reflection, analysis, evaluation and change. That can also be regarded as one of goals of writing a diary. When deciding to start writing, the teacher should not think about it too much. Just let the thoughts you write down flow and try to record experiences and critical moments. As soon as we recall events or critical moments, we begin to learn from them. Writing a diary makes sense only if done on a regular basis. With its help, the teacher can also observe the progress of groups and thus compare them. We should write freely and spontaneously. Diaries can be idiosyncratic, even weird.

Roles

Student self-reflection and teacher self-reflection can likewise lead to shifts in the educational process. The shifts can result in the change of traditional teacher–student relationship

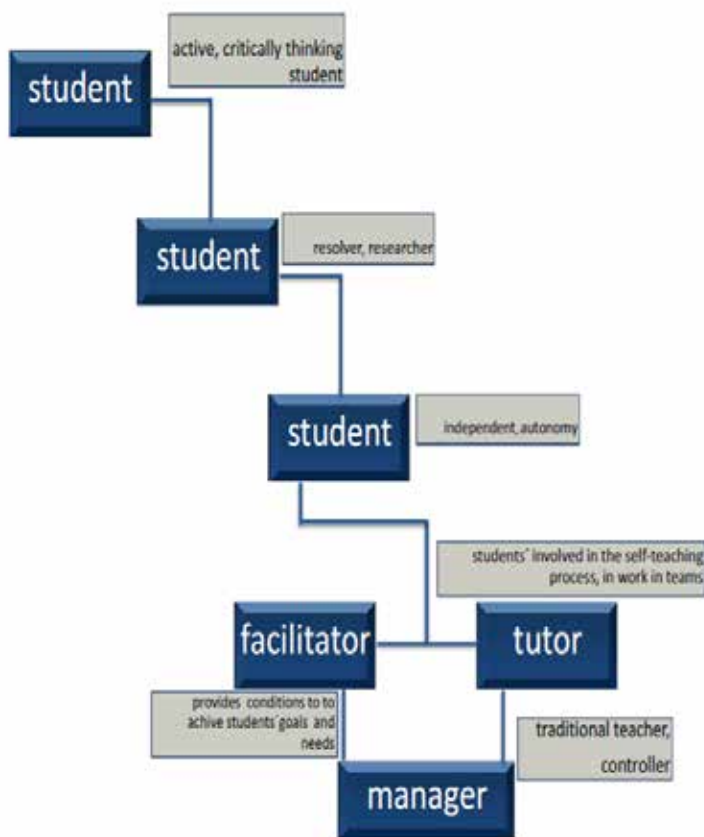


Figure 3. The teacher-student relationship on the basis of Homolová's classification of students' roles (2004, p. 47). The process of developing the particular roles also promote the formation of an active, critically thinking personality.

is no longer a controller standing in the front of the classroom controlling the teaching process; he does not test their acquired knowledge and skills. The teacher is a sort of guide for the learning process. He is a facilitator, manager, prompter and tutor in one. As a facilitator, the teacher takes students' goals and individual needs and abilities into account and creates the conditions conducive to achieving such goals; he also provides students with motivation. In this role, the teacher leads students toward independence, autonomy and critical thinking. The role of the teacher as an organizer/manager is possibly their most important as well as most difficult role. To achieve the goals and objectives of a lesson is only possible by means of effective organization. In other words, students should be perfectly aware of what is expected of them. If the teacher takes the role of a tutor, students are deeply involved in the self-teaching process or work in teams. On the basis of Homolová's classification of students' roles, students in these courses can be designated as student–resolvers or student–discoverers (Homolová, 2004, p. 47).

and vice versa. The change of roles is influenced by multiple factors; while it depends mainly on personality characteristics, the teacher's pedagogical philosophy, internal principles and teaching style all contribute to their preference for and interpretation of a given role. The most important factor in student roles are the teacher themselves and the student–teacher relationship (Wright, 1987). Here, the role of the teacher differs from the traditional teaching role in a conventional class. Changing of traditional student–teacher roles disrupts the conventional relationship between teacher and students, as well as their roles in the teaching process. In this kind of teaching, the teacher

Experience with the changes in the teaching process

The change of traditional teacher –student relationship and vice versa, reflection and self-reflection in the teaching process are successfully employed in the teaching model of specialized translation introduced at Matej Bel University (see Biloveský, Laš, 2018). Implementing the model of specialized translation on the ground of changing roles, reflection and self-reflection in the teaching process, critical thinking has been a successful experience, and it has improved the didactical process. The aforementioned model of changes in the teaching process at university provides us with a chance to shape future graduates as independently thinking beings, able to think creatively and critically and highly capable of working in a team.

Conclusion

Communication is one of the ways by which we can make contact with others, understand them as well as understand ourselves. The process of effective communication is conditioned by several factors, and it is therefore necessary to understand how messages are sent and received, both in verbal and non-verbal form. Feedback, which is closely related to various forms of communication (verbal, non-verbal), provides us with information on how we interact with our surroundings. Providing adequate feedback is very challenging, and it is therefore of consequence to pay attention to developing this ability in the learning and teaching process. It is also essential to teach students how to accept or reject feedback, as well as the rules for rejecting feedback. The ability to reflect what we do, how we do it, and why we do it, along with the ability to adjust and adapt, develops our skills throughout our lives. Self-reflection is also the key to improving teachers' learning. While most of us spend a great deal of time thinking and thinking about what we do, how we do it, and our impact on others, we do not always take this process further by acting, thinking and doing things differently with the help of self-assessment and self-reflection. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to developing student skills of giving feedback, receiving feedback, skills of self-assessment and self-reflection. If the teacher is conscious of self-reflection, this helps students to develop reflective skills as well. Development of these skills will help students to become independent, critically thinking personalities. The process of developing those skills leads to shifts in the educational process and the change of current educational paradigm. This can result in the changes to the traditional teacher–student relationship. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned changes in the educational process, the teacher is still the one who shapes learners, the core in the development of the student's personality, the roadmap in the learner's life.

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