

Toward Equity-Centered Teaching Practice in Singapore: The Role of Reflection

Research Overview

Reflection is integral to teaching; however, criticism persists about its practice and value in enhancing teaching. Most studies focus on curriculum design and pedagogies that develop preservice teachers' reflective practice. Few examine in-service teachers' reflective practice and how the nature of reflection contributes to the enactment of equity-centered teaching.

Purpose of Study

This study aims to understand the nature of reflective practice among teachers in Singapore and how it shapes their varying levels of enacting equity-centered practice in the classroom. The research questions are: (1) Is there a relationship between teachers' reflective practice—the extent to which they reflect and what they reflect on—and their divergence in enacting equity-centered practice? (2) How does teachers' reflective practice influence their levels of enacting equity-centered practice?

Research Methods

This study uses a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For the quantitative strand, 58 Singaporean secondary teachers completed a survey comprising (1) a 10-item Teaching Equity Enactment Scenario (TEES) Scale (Chang, 2023) measuring participants' varying levels of enacting equity-centered practice, (2) a 17-item instrument capturing the frequency of engaging with each of the four types of reflective practices, i.e., non-reflection, technical reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection, guided by Larrivee's framework (2008), and (3) five questions on demographic and teaching backgrounds. Summary raw scores from the TEES Scale and each of the four

reflective practice sub-scales were used for conducting the linear regression analysis in SPSS (Version 29). Higher TEES scores mean that participants were likely to enact a higher level of equity-centered practice; higher scores for each reflection sub-scale suggest participants' more frequent engagement with different types of reflection. The subsequent qualitative case study approach involved pre- and post-observation interviews with five survey participants and three classroom observations to understand how participants' reflective practices inform and influence their pedagogical practices.

Results and Discussion

The quantitative findings suggest that what participants reflect matters to their pedagogical practices. First, when teachers rarely reflect, they are more likely to enact lower-level equity-centered practice ($r = -0.493$), functioning as technicians to deliver the official curriculum and teach to meet standardized, predetermined outcome matrices. Second, teachers' engagement in technical reflection was not significantly associated with their levels of enacting equity-centered practice ($r = 0.169$). Importantly, teachers' frequent engagement in pedagogical and critical reflection was positively correlated with their TEES scores ($r = 0.496$ and 0.351 , respectively), suggesting that when teachers reflect on the underlying goals and values of their practices and examine the social conditions of schooling that shape teaching and learning, they are more likely to enact practices that recognize learners' cultural and linguistic experiences and seek ways to challenge inequitable norms and rules. Lastly, regression analysis results suggest that each type of reflection explains a unique portion of teachers' TEES scores, confirming the need for conceptual clarity and differentiating the types of reflection. Moreover, when pedagogical and critical reflection were added to the model, they appeared to subsume or account for the more

basic level of reflective practice, such as technical reflection.

Qualitative findings suggest that when teachers merely react to classroom situations or focus primarily on the efficiency of instructional activities, they implicitly or explicitly reinforce predetermined, state-mandated curriculum goals, metrics, and content without critically examining the taken-for-granted norms and practices that produce inequity and marginalization. While these types of reflective practices improve the management of classroom routines, they further solidify pedagogical instrumentality and prevent educators from fully realizing their pedagogical ideals, such as promoting greater student agency in the learning process. Ultimately, these teachers run a teacher-controlled, scripted classroom, aimed either at ensuring all students meet the same goals or at differentiating support based on varying abilities, without challenging or seeking ways to address the inequitable norms and practices that produce marginalization in the first place.

Conversely, when teachers encounter and inquire deeply about the dissonance between their experiences (e.g., home background, racialized experience) and the dominant educational structure/system, they tend to be less compliant, resist systemic constraints, and allow greater uncertainty in the teaching and learning process. This stance affords students a greater and more authentic space to exercise their self-determination in the learning process, and, in turn, students' voices contribute to teachers' orientation and ability to reflect on and continuously innovate their pedagogy. That is, teachers' critical and pedagogical reflection enables them to see students' cultures and to include students' lived experiences in the learning process.

Overall, findings suggest that teachers' reflective practices are connected to their different interpretations of equity and varying levels of enacting equity-centered practice. This study contributes to research and practice aimed at supporting teachers'

understanding and implementation of equity-centered teaching based on teachers' reflection, both in Singapore and internationally.

Keywords

Teacher reflection, equity, diversity, teaching, and teacher education