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REFLECTIVE TEACHING

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This paper explores the handling of reflective teaching within social theory perspective. It makes argument for critical reflection in teaching which engages all participants in the process of educational change. It moves away from hermeneutics and partially approximates critical social science.

Key words: reflective teaching, hermeneutics, critical social science

In *Knowledge and Human Interests* Habermas (1972) develops a new kind of critical theorem, *critical reflection*, which he elucidates as a systematic exploration by the knowing and acting subject of one's formation as a person, and of the social history within which the formation takes place. For Habermas the understanding of society and the state of knowledge can only be provided by critical reason. Knowledge generated by the instrumental reason cannot ensure rational guidance in ethical-political issues. In other words, we have to move away from the 'how' questions and proceed to the 'why' questions. On the one hand hermeneutic knowledge (that stresses the relationship between self-understanding of the teacher and everything that addresses and influences understanding) can provide rational understanding of meaning, it can establish meaning of relationships and actions in a culture (teaching in our context), and it can restore an ethical dimension to our actions. But on the other hand what it cannot do is give a form of knowledge that allows us to proceed in developing and changing our culture, our teaching. Hermeneutic reason criticises culture (teaching in our context) by accepting the priority of one culture over another, or by changing something within the culture. We should thus move beyond hermeneutics which is grounded in subjective interpretations of teaching and approximate *critical reflection* as the basis of critical reason and understanding of knowledge that integrates both instrumental (the 'how' questions) and hermeneutic reason (the 'why' questions), but also transcends them both (the 'how well' questions).

The ideal speech situation, posited by Habermas, provides the foundation required by the idea of the *reflective teacher* to underpin the kind of critical practice necessary for emancipation. It is a dialogical context and vital environment for critical and reflective activities. It is characterised by an absence of all constraints but the 'force of the better argument' (Habermas, 1984). *The ideal speech situation* functions as an impetus, as a drive in the *reflective teaching* advocated by Carr and Kemmis (1991). Habermas





enunciates that 'the ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor simply a construct, but a reciprocal supposition unavoidable in discourse ... it is a critical standard against which every actually realized consensus can be called into question and tested.' (Habermas, 1976 pp. xvii-xviii). And Carr and Kemmis (1991 p. 146) espouse:

The political theory of critical social science is democratic and rests on Habermas's theory of communicative competence, and, in particular, on the idea of rational communication in which decision-making is guided, not by considerations of power but by rationality of arguments for different courses of action.

I would, however, argue Carr's and Kemmis's concept of democracy. In their emancipatory action research, teachers, as a *group*, are engaged in *reflection* and discourse among themselves and with critical educational theorists. Still, they entirely depend on the critical social scientist who provides explanation on how their self-understanding misrepresents teaching. It appears that Carr and Kemmis deny the possibility that the *individual* teacher's self-understanding of his or her practice can constitute a source of critical self-reflection and theory. Elliott (1991), however, asserts that it *is* possible and he substantiates it by the two-tier model of teacher appraisal central to action research. The first-tier (self and peer-appraisal) represent professional self-development, while the second-tier acknowledges the institution-led appraisal. I described elsewhere (Knežević, 2003) the differences between hermeneutic and critical theory approaches to action research.

As much as action research engages teachers in *reflection* and an open collaborative discourse, positivism, on the other hand, is restricted by a range of discourse, and by the concept of reality – if something is real and true it must be possible to quantify it. It is the language of science where facts are the only possible content of a true statement. Value is definable only as a function of a means-ends relation. When the end is some social situation (personal or institutional), the value of an individual is an instrumental value to reaching the end. Rationality is the route to the desired end, and *rational teaching* is the application of systematic quantitative methods. This instrumental form of action enables a teacher to monitor his or her performance, but it *does not* result in a conscious, systematic and critical reflection, a 'talk back' (Schön, 1983), a 'reflexivity in which teachers evaluate their actions as manifestations of 'self' in the light of the educational values they profess.' (Elliott, 1991 p. 108)

Ends and values entail personal beliefs and interpretations of social context. Different ends and values will experience an ensuing change in the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness, and Parker (1997) asserts that the 'failure to recognise the strength of the link between the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness and the particular ends/values context within which they are employed will result in the misapplication of the standards appropriate to one context to the practices of another.'

It is the reflective teacher who ties ends and values and brings them within the realm of reason.

Accordingly, Parker reiterates (1997 p. 34) that the *reflective teacher*:

... will not take ends as given, as outside the scope of reason, but will raise her or his critical horizon beyond the narrow concerns of curriculum-delivery techniques to interrogate the global context within which technical notions of efficiency and effectiveness get their meaning.

A reflective teacher will not separate ends from values, he or she will be involved in a joint reflection on means and ends, on educational values as ends (students' cognitive development, for example) and the means (opportunity to make choice, students' participation in discussion) of realising them.



Schön (1983 pp. 68-69) further enunciates:

When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique; but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing (*italics B. K.*), ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. Thus reflection-in-action can proceed, even in situations of uncertainty or uniqueness, because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality.

Reflective teaching does not foster an 'anything goes' position. Its pluralism represents a variety of theories and methods of research, it advocates the hermeneutic stance that in order to understand a situation it is not enough to apply a ready made criteria from a different context. It is the context that stipulates what is appropriate to do. The three kinds of knowledge (empirical/analytical, hermeneutical and critical) have different approaches to theory and practice. The *positivist* approach sets down action (knowledge is only attainable through the objective, experimental, inductive methods), the *hermeneutic (interpretative)* approach informs practitioners about the nature of actions, and requires that practitioners decide how to act, and the *critical* approach develops understanding, and requires collaborative action and development of theories through *action* and *reflection*. Critical social science is a process of *reflection* where participants become researchers. Positivist and interpretive (hermeneutic) social science researchers may help in self-reflection, but according to Carr and Kemmis, they see only the exterior of the action. Carr and Kemmis (1991 pp. 149-150) write that critical social science:

- rejects the positivistic notion of rationality, objectivity and truth, seeing truth as historically and socially embedded, not as standing above or outside history and the concerns of participants in real social situations,
- depends upon the meanings and interpretations of practitioners,
- institutes critical processes of self-reflection (the organisation of enlightenment) whose purpose is to distinguish ideas and interpretations which are ideological or systematically distorted from those which are not, and distorted self-understandings from those which are undistorted,



- is practical, being directed towards helping practitioners inform themselves about the actions they need to take to overcome their problems and eliminate their frustrations.

To conclude, however different perceptions of a *reflective teacher* and *reflection* are, a *reflective teacher* is not the one who merely monitors her or his practice, but who has wider issues of education, goals, social and personal implications, and ethics. Monitoring and reflection of practice should not be confused. A *reflective teacher* is the one who is involved in what Giddens (1984) calls 'discursive consciousness' or the ability to describe what and why one is doing to others. 'Discursive consciousness' implies a capacity for discourse with others about one's teaching. It is the capacity that is best developed through action research, where teachers are involved in a professional dialogue and are accountable to each other. As Elliott (1991 p. 108) stresses 'such accountability is expressed in the production of records which document changes in practice and the process of deliberation/reflection through which they were brought about'. I strongly believe that through reflexivity and the development of 'discursive consciousness' professional culture of teachers and institutions can be changed.

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REFLEKSIVNO UČENJE

Sažetak

U članku se razmatra Carr i Kemmisovo određenje pojma “reflective teaching” (poučavanje s promišljanjem) temeljeno na Habermasovom pojmu “critical reflection” (kritičko promišljanje) i određenja idealne govorne situacije. Citira se Parkerova definicija “reflective teacher” (nastavnik koji promišlja proces svoga rada) i Carr i Kemmisova definicija “critical social science” (kritičke društvene znanosti) u kojima osnovnu ulogu igra sudionik – istraživač. U zaključku se uvodi pojam “action research” (aktivno istraživanje) i povezuje se s pojmom “reflective teaching”.

Ključne riječi: refleksivno poučavanje, hermeneutika, kritičke društvene znanosti.



