

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATOR SELF-REFLECTION IN HEALTH SCIENCES EDUCATION

Abstract:

Educator self-reflection is a process that empowers professors to understand what works and what doesn't work within the classroom, with a central focus on improving student education. Educator self-reflection can also lead students to engage in self-reflection, by role modeling its use and perceived value. Competence in self-reflection would be beneficial to other professional tasks amongst peers, managers, and institutions. This could improve interpretation of student evals amount to peers, lead to more productive feedback with managers, and drive institutional change. Ultimately, educator self-reflection prompts educators to ask questions of themselves in order to reflect on how they grow in order to ensure that students learn in an effective and lasting way.

KEYWORDS: self-reflection, medical education, professors

INTRODUCTION

Health science students are often asked to self-reflect by educators (including professors, teachers, instructors, mentors, etc). Self-reflection, as part of this reflection, helps facilitate a deep understanding of their performance with students and promotes the development of reflective teachers, improving their role in the teaching-learning process of students¹⁻³. However, little is known about the concept of self-reflection for educators themselves. During the Harvard Medical School Training to Teach in Medicine 2022 course, our team focused on educator self-reflection within health sciences education. This article discusses educator self-reflection, and it's important role in critical thinking and clinical reasoning^{4,5}. This is also a crucial skill for educators to master in order to allow students to reach their full potential^{6,7}. However, very little is published about educator self-reflection. Given the likely underrecognized importance of this skill, we seek to advance this topic for the benefit of both educators and students. The aim of this article is to promote educator self-reflection as a learning tool for educators and students to raise their standards of best practice and reach their full human and professional potential.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper was developed based on a team assignment within the Training to Teach in Medicine 2022 Program at Harvard Medical School. A literature review was conducted on the topic of **educator and self-reflection** in the *PubMed* and *Science Direct* databases, using the search strategy "self-reflection" AND "educators" and "self-reflection" AND "educators AND health sciences" with no set time criteria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The original concept of self-reflection was initially proposed by John Dewey⁸ who defined it as an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or ... knowledge". This concept was further developed by Moon (1999)⁹ and Lew and Schmidt (2011)¹⁰ who viewed self-reflection as a mental process of the learning experiences to achieve deeper understanding of what is taught and what is subsequently learned. This emphasizes purposeful critical analysis of knowledge and experience to achieve deeper meaning and understanding.

A review of the research on reflection revealed three different dimensions involving the patterns of knowledge that are evident in self-reflection. Self-awareness, which focuses on personal knowledge structures; self-reference, which concerns the self in relation to others; and self-inquiry, which involves questioning one's own actions, assumptions and underlying prejudices^{11,12}.

Reflective thinking, assessment and learning are actions based on the processes of reflecting, observing, planning and acting. This cyclical process allows teachers to develop their skills in a more efficient and quality way with students, by promoting transformative learning. This positive experience of change triggered by the teacher's self-reflection is challenging for the student, as it also promotes maturation that alters their attitudes, values and behaviors, providing acceptance, collective gain and deep learning on the part of teachers and students^{13,14}.

The gaps identified in the health sciences curricula is the failure of educators to engage in self-reflection. In relation to departments, self-evaluation is not included in the design or evaluation of the curriculum. For educational institutions it is not a prerequisite for institutional promotion or used in other formal evaluations. Exacerbating this issue, is that there is no formal training for educators on self-reflection. Furthermore, with regard to

accrediting bodies - such as health, welfare, and social organizations - there is no requirement for educators to demonstrate and document this competency in any accreditation or certification processes^{15,16}.

The educator's deficiency in self-reflection proves to be a serious item regarding awareness and teaching practices. Without effective self-reflection many educational efforts are compromised, which can easily lead to teacher demotivation and academic stagnation for students. For example, if an educator shows lack of preparation during educational activities, without reflection they may continue this pattern. This pattern triggers multiple adverse effects, both repeatedly delivering underprepared material, but also role modeling to students that self-reflection is not a useful tool "If their leader does not do it, then why should they do it?" For institutions an unprepared management triggers the absence of requirements, i.e. deficiency in faculty development. The reasons for poor faculty development in this area are numerous, such as financial constraints, time constraints, and poor infrastructure^{17,18}.

The proposals for solutions to reduce the gap in educators' self-reflection must focus on awareness & knowledge. It is important to inform all educators and institutions about the value of self-reflection and its significance in advancing personal and academic educational efforts. Therefore, we suggest: increasing research/publication in this area, developing a self-reflection tool kit (with instructional videos), workshops, proposing that self-reflection becomes an institutional mandate in annual faculty review/reappointment, and a best practice required by accrediting and certifying bodies. To determine the success of these interventions, pre- and post-intervention data should be collected regarding the educator and the student trends, i.e., performance.

On an individual level there are multiple barriers that increase educators resistance to adopting self-evaluation. Two large attitudinal barriers are, resistance to additional work/training, and resistance to change typified by expressions like: "I've been doing it this way for years and no one has ever complained!"

On an institutional level, there is a perceived lack of knowledge regarding the importance of this practice for educators. There is no institutional training or capacity building either because the relevance of self-evaluation is not known or because of financial, administrative or structural deficiencies.

To break these paradigms it is important to highlight the benefits of self-reflection for both the professional and personal lives of educators in order to continually elevate their level of performance. Educational institutions are encouraged to recognize training and self-reflection activities in the annual review or promotion package. Suggestions include creating an institutional support policy to develop, maintain, and sustain this initiative, such as strategic

awareness campaigns; implementing "how-to" workshops; developing brief and concise instructional videos; and creating faculty self-reflection peer groups to better comprehend and address the barriers to developing and encouraging educator self-evaluation¹⁹.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in order for the motivation for professor self-reflection to be established in a higher education institution and maintain its long-term sustainability, it is necessary for professors to have institutional support, knowledge of the importance of self-reflection for their activities and awareness of the improvement in professor and student performance. It is suggested that further studies be carried out on the importance of this initiative with health professors and that this topic be discussed through workshops, the development of short, concise instructional videos and the creation of study and discussion groups on self-reflection by teaching staff. The development of a proposal to motivate self-reflection through these pillars gives professors the security and acceptance to review their work plan, supported by coordinators and directors. The teacher matures, the student is motivated and the institution improves the quality of the teaching-learning process.

POINTS OF PRACTICE

It is important to raise some points as a proposal to motivate teachers and institutions about the relevance of self-evaluation for the quality of education. Some suggestions include, producing more scientific material on this theme related to health educators, developing training and recycling modules for teachers, creating an annual self-evaluation program, and annually evaluating the curriculum for continuous improvement of self-reflection training. These suggestions provide a greater understanding of how important a role teachers' self-reflection plays in student performance.

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