

Microteaching

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Many teachers believe themselves to be the authority figures and the ones in control in their classrooms. Very often, they try their best to do what they believe is best for their students, based on their own experience of schooling. In many cases, the opportunity to learn from more experienced teachers is limited to casual staffroom or corridor conversations, because in most schools the organizational structure makes little or no formal provision for team teaching or for peer evaluation of classroom enactment. In fact, many teachers are intimidated by having other teachers or supervisors present during their actual teaching sessions, and they are very defensive of peer critiques, no matter how constructive these may be.

Microteaching (invented in the mid-1960s at Stanford University by Dr. Dwight Allen) is one activity that can help in this regard. This technique was a common practice at the School of Education in the past, but recent experiences with our current students have convinced me of the need for practising teachers to revisit it in the context of the school environment.

Microteaching involves a teacher being videotaped in a practice teaching session with peers, followed by a review and analysis of the videotaped teaching performance. Teacher trainers have advocated the need for teachers engaged in professional development to conduct microteaching sessions in small subject-related peer groups. The videotaping process allows the teacher to capture him/herself on film and, subsequently, to view and listen to classroom instruction as students do. It therefore provides the teacher with the opportunity to scrutinise the reactions and responses of those seated on the other side of the desk to the teaching session. Analysing a videotape of the dynamics in the classroom allows the teacher to check the accuracy of his or her perceptions of how well he or she teaches, and to identify those techniques that work and those that need revisiting. Faculty members at all levels and in all disciplines have benefited from seeing videotapes of themselves, and teachers are encouraged to initiate, plan, and incorporate microteaching sessions on a regular basis into their practice.

In the local context, and certainly in some schools, the effort might be somewhat challenging at first, given possible infrastructural shortcomings, lack of competence in the use of media, and the general unavailability of support and resources. Therefore, getting started might be a difficult first step for some teachers to make. Microteaching is not an event that can be ventured into in a casual manner; it is comprised of distinct stages.

The microteaching cycle starts with planning. During this phase, the teacher identifies clearly the intended objectives of the session and the sequence of the lesson. This is followed by the set induction, which is used primarily to capture attention at the beginning of the lesson, and then a transition into the lesson's development. In the lesson development phase, the teacher is free to choose from among his or her repertoire of teaching/learning strategies and skills to deliver the content. The microteaching session ends with a closure that should be meaningful and relevant, establishing connections between the most recent learning and its application to future learning. [Ideally, the entire segment should not be more than 8-10 minutes. It can be thought of as a "slice" of the whole lesson; it is not meant to be a complete lesson nor is it expected to be a condensed version of a complete lesson.] Shortly after, the micro-lesson is viewed by the teacher along with his or her peers and supervisor, and subsequently discussed to generate feedback and provide suggestions to the teacher. It is extremely important during this session that due credit is given to the teacher for the positive aspects of the lesson, including those strategies that worked well and those activities that were used effectively to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

One of the obvious goals of microteaching sessions is to give teachers confidence, support, and feedback by allowing them to try out a short segment of their lesson. It provides the teacher with increased understanding of behaviours important in classroom teaching and enables the projection of model instructional skills. Microteaching allows for repeated practice without adverse consequences to the teacher or to the students. Most importantly, however, microteaching allows for self-reflection and introspection.

For new teachers, it is recommended that these sessions take place before the start of the term, and that the tapes be reviewed with an experienced teacher or mentor to promote and encourage opportunities for discussion, suggestions, and guidance.

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