International Teacher Education: Promising Pedagogies (Part A)

Teacher Researcher: An Epistemic Pedagogy for Reconstructing Teacher Professional Identity in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Teacher researcher pedagogy (TRP) is a national-based pedagogy in Iran. This pedagogy has been introduced and adopted to Iran's teacher education system from 1996. In line with this pedagogy, we studied the narratives of the teachers who were already involved in TRP to understand how it helped them reconstruct their professional identity. We found this pedagogy helped teachers improve their professional consciousness. The teachers with good manners and methods could take obviously significant advantage of TRP and involve in reflective practical research. As a consequence, an epistemological shift happened in the professional life of such caring teachers where they no longer only use the

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knowledge of a third-party person. Such conditions recovered teachers' professional identity and put them in power position.

Keywords: Teacher reflection; teacher practical knowledge; action research; teacher researcher pedagogy; Iran teacher education; contextual epistemology

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, an analysis of teacher researcher pedagogy (TRP) as a new paradigm in Iran's teacher education system. The main target of TRP is to develop reflective skills and thinking of teachers. We claim that TRP is a promising pedagogy for developing teacher professional identity by providing an epistemological platform for teachers. Iran's Ministry of Education introduced TRP into teacher education system in 1996. Then after, Iran's educational policy called for, and supported, an advanced and a new paradigm in which in-service and preservice teachers were provided with an opportunity to engage in reflective and research-based practice and pedagogy. In line with TRP, in-service teachers took the necessary training so as they could involve in educational action research. Even, some limited financial and organizational reinforcements were given to the teachers who engaged in TRP and provided good reports in line with their reflection. Nowadays, TRP has its own formal organization in charge of developing this pedagogy in the whole country. In general, TRP is a significant and particular type of "reflection" in Iran's teacher education system.

The primary focus of TRP was in-service teacher education; however, we argue that TRP should be introduced into preservice teacher education. The reasons for this argument are twofold. First, the "reflection" is an ambiguous and complex term and teacher educators need to have particular pedagogy (and not technique) to help students learn reflective skills and practices. Second, the reflection discourse should be integrated in, and begun from, in-service teacher education since it has been shown as one of the most significant pedagogies to help teachers fill in gap between theory and practice (Kleinfeld, 1992; Liston & Zeichner, 1987). Regarding the first issue, there are good examples of how teacher reflection may be taught in preservice education programs. At the University of Washington, for example, reflective practice is integrated into the University's preservice teacher education program in the form of coursework and weekly seminars where students have opportunity to work together and understand reflective

practice and its implication for teaching (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Regarding the second issue raised here, our experience and empirical findings with in-service teachers who engaged in TRP, showed that they could significantly apply theories in practice as a result of their reflection rooted in TRP. We believe that in addition to coursework on TRP and weekly seminars, the preservice students should engage in practical phases of TRP in collaboration with in-service teachers.

WHAT IS TEACHER RESEARCHER PEDAGOGY?

As an educational practice, TRP is theoretically in line with reflective practice. As a practical action in the classroom, it is done in the form of an action research by teachers. It encourages teachers to think about their own classroom problems and develop knowledge about it. TRP has several basic organizational and pedagogical steps and tasks. Organizational steps and tasks are conducted by the Institute for Educational Research (IER). IER is the official and governing body of educational research within Iran's Ministry of Education, which was established in 1996. This institute has a central organization in Ministry of Education and local branches in all provinces in the country. Classroom teachers are involved in doing pedagogical and educational tasks of TRP.

In general TRP is conducted in following phases each year:

(1) *Declaration and training phase*: The central and local branches of IER submit the formal and educational regulations and instruction of TRP to all educational administration and schools every year. Even though the main goal is to encourage teachers to conduct an "action research" in line with their own classroom problems, the new and updated ideas are highlighted in the yearly declaration and instruction. Following declaration, there are training plans, workshops, and other possible supports for interested teachers. In this phase, more experienced teachers and experts provide training plans in order to help classroom teachers on "how to conduct an action research." In addition, the necessary materials and books are provided for teachers in line with the pedagogy.
(2) *Research phase*: Conducting action research by classroom teachers is the core mission of TRP. In this phase, classroom teachers should identify a real and practical research problem in line with their own challenges embedded in the classrooms or schools in which they teach.

Teachers then need to collect the necessary data on the problem with the help of other colleagues, parents, and students. While reflecting on the data, teachers should propose some ideas or practical solutions to cope with the problem or challenge. Teachers should put the solutions in practice in order to see how they may work. They should afterward evaluate the action and collect the new data in order to see how the solutions were effective and practical. Considering the new data, teachers may revise the actions and put them in practice for the second time. At the end, they must provide a written report on the action research for further use. It should be pointed out not all teachers go through these steps.

(3) *Documentation phase*: In this phase, teachers submit their written reports to local branches of IER in each province. The main goal here is to evaluate the reports by educational experts in order to select the high qualified "research reports" for further use in educational context. The excellent and selected reports are then submitted to the central organization of IER. In the central branch of IER, the selected research reports are again evaluated on a national level. The output of this phase is to select the final excellent research reports.

(4) *Feedback and organizational support*: In this point, IER provides financial and organizational support for selected local and national research reports. The nominated teachers are provided written formal endorsement by local and national official authorities that can be used for organizational purposes, such as promotion. There would also be some feedback for teachers in line with their reports.

LITERATURE BACKDROP

Bruner (1985, p. 97) identified two distinguished modes of knowing and argued that:

> [There are] irreducible modes of cognitive functioning, or more simply two modes of thought, each meriting the status of a "natural kind," meaning that each one can be recognized by common sense, and involves operating principles and criteria of its own of well-formedness: the "paradigmatic" or logic-scientific and "narrative" modes of knowing.

The paradigmatic mode of knowing gets its epistemic weight from presuppositions embedded in *theoria* or so-called technical rationality; a narrative mode of knowing, however, originates from *phronesis* or practical

rationality. Technical rationality, which is closely related to modern science "puts a premium on 'objectivity' and detachment, suppressing the context-dependence of first-person experience in favor of a third-person perspective, which yields generalized findings in accordance with clearly formulated, publicly agreed procedures" (Dunne, 2005, p. 373). Knowledge in this sense is about some objects distinct from the knowing subject (Schwandt, 2005). Practical rationality, however, is "an action-orientating form of knowledge … with the ability to engage in the kind of deliberative process that can yield concrete, context-sensitive judgment" (Dunne, 2005, p. 376). From this perspective, there is no "neat separation between the steps of having knowledge and applying knowledge. Rather … knowledge is always embodied, a kind of confidence-in-knowing-in action" (Schwandt, 2005, p. 323).

In teaching contexts, such understanding reflects a significant epistemological shift from "foundational" and "positivistic" epistemology (Eisner, 2002; Van Goor, Heyting, & Vreeke, 2004) to what we call "contextual epistemology." This epistemological ramification "is about changes in the way we think about knowledge and the kinds of knowledge teachers need to teach well [and it is] the shift from episteme to *phronesis* and from *phronesis* to artistry" (Eisner, 2002, p. 375). According to this kind of epistemology, the "good knowing and knowledge" about teaching are embedded in the situational character of the classroom settings in which teachers and students interact and thus teachers are considered "reflective practitioners" (Schön, 1983) who produce practical knowledge to deal with the practical demands of their classrooms. The advocates of this epistemology argue that foundational epistemology is based on what Schön called as "technical rationality" (Schön, 1983), which supports "theory-into-practice" model (the "application model") in teacher education. Four decades ago, Schwab (1969, p. 1), one of the key figures in American curriculum studies, presented his "practical thesis" and harshly criticized "inveterate and unexamined reliance on theory" in teaching. He remarked that in the classroom situations, "there are thousands of ingenious ways in which commands on what, and how to teach can, will and must be modified and circumstanced in the actual moments of teaching" (Schwab, 1983, p. 245; see also Hlebowitsh, 2012). Other researchers also argue that this traditional paradigm of teaching does not seem to work very well, and thus, preservice teachers graduating from teacher education programs have experienced significant challenges in applying the scientific theories passed down to them in their teacher training programs (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Thus, according to contextual

epistemology, as Carr (1995) has stressed, teaching practice is not the application of a "time-and-place" independent educational theory. Consequently, teachers are not passive users of abstract, technical knowledge produced by others (Carr, 2005; Kemmis, 2005; Rönnerman, 2005; Saugstad, 2005). As a result of this new paradigm, teachers are empowered to develop their professional identities, "protect their personal autonomy, regain their voice[s] in the workplace and (very important to this work) demand a role in the production of the knowledge on which the modern state and its experts ground their authority" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 23).

This new paradigm in teaching has been reflected in rigorous discussions on such topics as warranted assertibility (Boyles, 2006) reflection-in-and-on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987), "practical" curriculum (Schwab, 1969, 1983), personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985), and teacher practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981, 1991). The core idea in these studies is to position teachers and their knowledge in epistemic territory. Boyles (2006) states that "teachers are in positions of power that they may not fully understand … Teachers can engage actively in epistemological discourse, questioning the views of knowledge implicit in current curricula and classroom practices" (p. 67). For Eisner (2002, p. 381):

> Teachers are not regarded now as those who implement the prescriptions of others but as those most intimate with life in classrooms; partnerships with professors are possible, but the professor is no longer the boss. Teachers are collaborators in knowledge construction and bring to the table of deliberation a kind of insider knowledge, say, of the second grade that most professors do not possess.

Similarly, Walkington (2005) argued that the professional identities of preservice teachers will develop productively if they have an opportunity to be actively engaged in making pedagogical decisions in their teaching contexts The knowledge claims in teaching and education embedded in contextual epistemology, however, have been subjected to epistemological scrutiny (Fenstermacher, 1994; Gholami & Husu, 2010). Fenstermacher, for example, argued:

> Both teacher formal knowledge and teacher practical knowledge are subject to evidentiary scrutiny if they are to count as knowledge in any useful sense of the term …. That we claim to have practical knowledge does not relieve us of the obligation to show how it is objectively reasonable to believe what they are contending. (1994, pp. 27–28)

On a different note, Eisner (2002) argued if we consider *phronesis* as the logic of knowledge claims in teaching, then "how does one learn to become a *phronimos*?" (p. 382). One possible answer is to argue that

"contextual epistemology" is not a naïve and blind understanding of knowledge in which we totally reject the application of "formal knowledge" (Fenstermacher, 1994) in teaching. Both formal knowledge (i.e., theoretical and scientific knowledge produced by external researchers) and "local knowledge" (knowledge produced by teachers) are useful forms of knowledge that can improve teaching and learning environments. Teachers may use formal knowledge as an "inspiring epistemic platform" on which to develop their practice in a "context of discovery." According to Eisner (2002, p. 382) "a part of the answer is through deliberation with others …. Deliberation is a way of exploring meta-cognitively those possibilities and their likely consequences." Deliberation, of course, was something that Eisner's teacher, Joseph Schwab (1969), also argued for in "the practical."

Thus, "teacher as researcher pedagogies" in in-service and preservice teaching education is a possible way to deal with epistemological challenges of the new knowledge claims in teaching. The teacher as research approach is a form of systematic reflection in which teachers develop knowing and knowledge of their perceived problems in the distinctive contexts in which they teach. The "teacher as researcher" stance finds at its root contextual epistemology. In general, "the notion that teachers should engage in critically grounded social inquiry rests on a democratic social theory which assumes that social research is not the province of a small elite minority" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 25). Action research uses the teacher as researcher stance, but so do other methodologies (i.e., ethnographies, self-studies, narrative inquiries, etc.).

In sum, *phronesis* or practical wisdom is concerned with human action or *praxis*, and its rationality in dealing with humans' conducts differs from scientific knowledge and technical skills: "prudence [*phronesis*] is a truth attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good for human beings" (Aristotle, 1934, pp. 337–339). According to Eisner (2002, p. 381) "*phronesis* is a kind of morally pervaded practical wisdom {that} [can] be acquired by a phronimos … through experience. *Phronesis* addresses the particularity of things and situations; it addresses their distinctive conditions so that someone could decide how to move in a morally framed direction." To conclude, the supporters of contextual epistemology and teacher as researcher stances in in-service and preservice education argue that "generating knowledge about good teaching is not the exclusive property of university researchers, and it recognizes that teachers also have theories that can contribute to a codified knowledge base for teaching" (Zeichner, 1994, p. 10).

In this chapter, therefore, we argue that Iran's national-scale project of TRP is in line with underlying assumptions behind "contextual epistemology" and thus can be considered as a significant "epistemic discourse" in its preservice and in-service teacher education system. "Teacher classroom research is a paradigm, which places the major responsibility on the shoulders of classroom teachers by inspiring them to come up with solutions to the perceived problems of their classroom settings" (Mehrmohammadi, 2004, p. 133). Relying on this assumption, we particularly address the following research questions regarding the TRP in Iran:

(1) What is the nature of TRP as a reflective practice and how do teachers put it in practice in their own classroom?
(2) What is the epistemic consequence of TRP for classroom teachers and how it helps them to reconstruct their professional identity?

TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION IN IRAN

Basic education is compulsory for 12 years in Iran, and it is highly centralized and thus governed by the Ministry of Education. It has three different levels of schooling, primary, middle, and high school. Primary school (*Dabestan*) starts at the age of six for a duration of 5 years and its main goals is to nurture students' creativity and develop their physical and bodily skills; in addition individual and group health education, writing, reading, counting, and enhancing their social relationships are addressed in primary level. Middle school (*Rahnamayi*) has a duration of 3 years after primary school and its main mission is to improve mental and moral skills, general experiences, and knowledge of students and particularly to identify their individual capabilities in order to guide them toward further education. High school (*Dabirestan*) is divided between theoretical (science, mathematics, and humanities) and vocational/technical, each program with its own specialties; in theoretical section, the students go through one year studying as preuniversity course (Cheng & Beigi, 2012).

In line with its educational system, teacher education in Iran is also centralized in terms of its structure and curriculum. In the past, there used to be particular teacher education centers responsible to prepare teachers for K-12 education. At the moment, teacher education universities (Daneshgah Farhangian) with their own curriculum and structure are engaged in preparing teachers throughout the country. Each province has generally two separate postsecondary institutions, one for women and one for men,

which deal with teacher education. For primary and middle schools, teachers must generally have a post-diploma (associate degree, i.e., two years further education after graduating from high school); high school teachers must have a bachelor's degree in different subject matters (Samiei, 2011). Primary teachers mainly receive pedagogical education to deal with basic subject areas such as science, mathematics, reading, writing, religion, and Persian literature. In order to teach in middle and high schools, teachers, however, must complete both pedagogical and subject-specific education in different subject matters they are supposed to teach.

Background of TRP in Iran

One of the main missions of IER is to exercise "a more pluralistic perception of legitimate research, knowledge and knowing within the field of education" (Mehrmohammadi, 2004, p. 138). Consistent with this goal, a "teacher researcher" program was introduced and adopted as a major pedagogy to deal with the new knowledge paradigm acknowledged by IER. The pedagogy was put into action on a national scale in 1997. The country's practicing K-12 teachers were then exposed to the idea and were encouraged to share and submit their classroom research, by preparing a report based on a standard format supplied by IER. This can be called "documentation" phase of the pedagogy in which policy-makers may use helpful and effective understanding and experiences of classroom teachers (Chaichi, Goya, Mehrabani, & Saki, 2006). In addition to documentation phase, there has been training programs for motivated and interested teachers in the country in order to enhance the quality of pedagogy (Mehrmohammadi, 2004). The training part of the program has been conducted by experts focusing on theoretical and practical aspects of action and classroom research. Since administration of pedagogy in 1997, there has been increasing numbers of research reports to IER each year. For example, there were 914 reports in the first year (i.e., 1997), which increased to 42,779 within 10 years in 2006 (Chaichi et al., 2006).

Since the implementation of the TRP, there has been analysis, meta-analysis, and empirical studies to evaluate the quality of the program. Mahmoud Mehrmohammadi, one of the key figures in Iran's curriculum studies and the current director of the Central Organization of Teacher Education Universities in the country, argued that "the relative success of TRP notwithstanding, the outcome did not match the expectation … [and] also the quality of reports presumably representing the reflective action of

classroom teachers, did not seem to satisfy criteria such as thoughtfulness, ingenuity and creativity" (Mehrmohammadi, 2004, p. 139). As a consequence of such challenges, IER's executive council conducted an evaluative study on the TRP. The findings showed a centralized system of education where teachers are almost entirely excluded from the decision-making process, burdened with excessive teaching loads, and subjected to the bureaucratic character of education system. These were discouraging factors that prohibited teachers from conducting solid teacher as researcher studies (Mehrmohammadi, 2004). Other empirical studies also showed that TRP faced with administrative and content challenges. Matin (2004) and Ghasemipuya (2004) found that the lack of clear plan for TRP in many provinces of the country, the poor quality of education for teachers concerning research methodologies, the isolation of teacher as researcher pedagogies from teachers' normal and regular activities, the lack of necessary human and capital sources for developing such pedagogies, the lack of support from schools principals for conducting teacher as researcher pedagogies, and the absence of constructive feedback for teachers engaged in TRP, were constraining factors in improving pedagogy and integrating it in the regular pedagogical activities of teachers.

As mentioned TRP was mainly coined in order to develop in-service teachers' reflection. Along with this, there is still a more important task for Iran's teacher education system to integrate TRP into preservice teacher education. Reflection plays a central role in the preparation of many new teachers. Its epistemic and professional value has been accepted "for teaching preservice teachers to reflect in many ways teaching them to 'think like a teacher'" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 73). It is traditionally argued that authentic knowledge about teaching can be produced by university experts; thus, teachers are only consumers of it. This positivistic paradigm tries to find the "best rules of practice" and thus it is not sensitive to context of teaching. It leads to hegemony of "technical rationality" (Schön, 1983) in teaching, which is somehow a favorite one for many policy-makers. However, reflective practice paradigm introduces a new world to preservice teachers where they have possibility to develop their professional identity in different ways. It helps them to develop a more appropriate image of teaching. Our experiences with teachers who engaged in TRP have also suggested that their professional identity was featured with good characteristics. They were caring, passionate, self-motivated, and active practitioners since they could find themselves in an epistemological position. Professional consciousness and confidence were strongly evident in their discourse and practice.

As such, we claim that TRP plays two roles. First, it gives teachers professional rights where their voices can be heard in the school community so that they can decide about their local challenges. Second, it put professional responsibilities on the shoulders of teachers where they should care about the future of the students. In line with this, there have been new initiatives in Iran's teacher education curriculum, organization, and structure to incorporate "reflection paradigm" in preservice teacher education program.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL BEARING AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, we have argued thus far for the epistemic claim that TRP is a promising pedagogy that may help teachers reconstruct their professional identity, moving from being consumer of knowledge to producer of knowledge. To gain insight into this claim, in addition to reviewing the existing background of TRP, we conducted an empirical research in order to collect data from the real context. Relying on qualitative approach, we had particular emphasis on studying the "lived experiences and meaning" of teachers who had involved in the pedagogy. At the same time, semi-structured interview was the main technique for collecting data from the participants. In the interview, we wanted to examine the participants' personal beliefs on teaching, their experiences and understanding on TRP, the relevance and significance of TRP for improving their professional and pedagogical competency, and the challenges they had experienced during conducting an educational action research. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by researchers in order to analyze and interpret them.

Participants

The participating teachers in this study were from the province of Kurdistan, in Iran. In order to choose participants, we went to Kurdistan branch of IER. Searching in the records of the past 10 years of reports submitted to the office, we selected eight teachers who had submitted good research during most recent years. We made such decision since we supposed the practice of these teachers is more likely close to the mission

of TRP. On contacting these teachers, four of them agreed to participate in the study. All teachers granted permission for us to use their real name in the research and use their interview if needed. We have provided a brief introduction of each participant subsequently.

Participant A is a high school female teacher with 18 years of experience of teaching in different schools of Kurdistan, particularly vocational schools. As a teacher, she believed that "the core of education and teaching is to reflect on students' individual differences." For her "innovation and bringing creative changes to the typical ways of teaching" are critical to deal with students' individual differences. Participant B (female) had 15 years of experience of teaching in special education working with students having different learning problems. We found her very kind, peaceful, and calm when we met her in the classroom. She opened her interview with this sentence: "I feel particular peace when I teach these kids." She mentioned that her immediate responsibility requires daily refection and continuous research in different ways. Participant C (male) had 5 years of teaching and 24 years of administrative experience in Kurdistan Organization of Education (KOE). During his professional career, in addition to teaching and holding top administrative positions in KOE, he has been in charge of Kurdistan branch of IER from 2010. Recalling his own teaching experiences, he accepts as true that "teaching must be teachers' love and if you have no passion as a teacher, you cannot continue … if you have passion in teaching, you can bring significant changes in your students." Participant D (female, 18 years of experience) was teaching in elementary schools at the time of the interview. Her first systematic engagement in TRP was working on a student who was not able to recognize letters. She believes "teaching is a very tough profession as the classroom situations are unpredictable and you as a teacher must be always prepared for dealing with changes in the classroom."

FINDINGS

In this section, we mainly report the findings in line with research questions posed in introduction; however, the findings related to research questions are combined in order to develop a promising conceptual framework reflecting the main task of this chapter.

Practical Reflective Teachers versus Prescriptive Teachers

Drawing on interviews with participating teachers, we found two main research approaches among teachers who engaged in TRP in Kurdistan: "practical reflective teachers" and "prescriptive teachers." Practical reflective teachers conducted educational research considering the ethical bearing of teaching and in order to provide a practical solution to deal with situational and real challenges of "their own classroom." Prescriptive teachers acted as a third-person participant to conduct a research without particular and clear relevancy to real problems of "their own classroom" and in order to provide general and "prescriptive solutions" for classroom. In this chapter, we will mainly focus on practical reflective teachers and explain it according to the "teachers manner and method" (Fallona, 2000; Fenstermacher, 2001; Richardson & Fallona, 2001) in conducting a classroom action.

Manner of Practical Reflective Teachers

By manner in teaching, we are referring to a teacher's virtuous conduct or traits of character as played out or revealed within a classroom context (Fenstermacher, 2001). Practical reflective teachers were caring teachers in terms of manner. We found caring teachers with three significant "background virtuosos." These virtuosos were somehow idiosyncratic aspects of teachers' manner that would provoke them from deeper layers of their heart to conduct a good classroom research. The main professional representation of background virtuosos was "teachers' internal motivation" to put step in TRP.

The first dimension of the teachers' manner was the teachers' "sophisticated personal beliefs" about different aspects of their job, particularly about students. Engaging in conducting a research to develop creativity in students, Participant A believed "it is not necessary to be born as a creative person; I always tell my students that they can be creative in line with their learning capacity." Participant B also argued that "for us as teachers it is important to appreciate small changes and learning in students, since it keeps our motivation and hope alive."

"Moral persona" was another factor that we found as a significant background virtuous for teachers to engage in practical reflective classroom research. We found that the teachers' moral persona was reflected in their "engaged mind" where they were continuously concerned about the "well-being" of the students: "you know, it is difficult for me to

forget about my students even when I am at home. My mind is usually involved about the problems of these kids and when I see a new problem in the classroom, I start working on how to deal with it. It is my personal promising character and I cannot escape from such sensitive responsibility" (Participant B). Participant A also stated that "every classroom has ethical character as our daily activities involves with the future of the students, and I usually reflect and think about the consequences of my actions and try to make them better with involving in possible and necessary action research." Such reflection is in line with the concept of "ethical sensitivity" developed by Narvaez (Narvaez & Endicott, 2009; Narvaez, 2006, 2011) that has been found as an important teachers' competency for conducting moral action (Gholami & Tirri, 2012a, 2012b).

The other background competency linked with conducting a practical reflective action research was the teachers' "personal emotions." These teachers were found to have passion, enthusiasm, and were very hopeful and optimistic in their daily activates, including a classroom research. For Participant B, the hope and feeling of happiness are important issues that teachers should never forget when they conduct a research in the classroom: "I know engaging in TRP needs a lot of energy and time, and I know and have experienced that I may not receive good and necessary support from authorities; however, I am really hopeful and optimistic about the results of my action. You know, without hope I cannot continue when I see many challenges in my job." Armed with such good personal background traits, we found that the participated teachers would engage in what we call as a practical reflective research. This showed caring persona of teachers rooted in moral foundation of teaching, and was a necessary professional competency for teachers to be engaged in good educational action research in line with TRP.

Methods of Practical Reflective Teachers

Practical reflective teachers were found to be involved in TRP in three different but relevant stages: "ongoing engagement," "initial preparation," and "systematic action research." These stages were not simply static but they included intertwined and integrated pedagogical actions directed toward solving everyday's classroom problems.

Ongoing engagement was rooted in changing and demanding learning environment. Teachers believed that we are always facing new demands and challenges that must be dealt with to help classroom run in a good shape. "Teachers' continuous concern" was at the heart of this stage and it showed that the teachers were continuously thinking about different

challenges that may happen in their classrooms. Participant D stated that "every day I see and observe the new challenging stories and incidents in my classroom and such condition would always engage my mind toward how to fix them. Sometimes I reflect on a single problem for hours and even days." We found that these challenges included different issues such as pedagogical or instructional problem, students behavioral and learning problems, new pedagogical demands, teachers' personal interests, and coping with students individual differences. Among these, students' individual differences, and behavioral and learning problems were the main grounds for teachers' ongoing engagement and concerns.

Ongoing engagement was a kind of mental reflection encouraging the teachers move toward practical actions to cope with their classroom problems. "Initial preparation" was a significant consequence of ongoing engagement where the teachers involved in clear and necessary activities to deal with a particular problem. In this case, establishing close and friendly relationship with students and their parents, analyzing and personal reflection on the problem in hand, studying more relevant readings to understand the problem, and sharing their ideas with others were main activities that help teachers be prepared to conduct a good educational action research. In the case of Participant A, she was mainly interested in students' relationship and their individual differences as two important elements for engaging in more systematic reflection: "if students feel that I am their friend, I know them better and thus I can conduct my research in a better way." It can be said that ongoing engagement and "initial precreation" are necessary reflection-in-action competencies that help teachers involve in more systematic reflective action research.

In the third stage, the teachers tried to conduct a systematic action research to deal with their perceived problems identified in the previous stages. Systematic action research included different actions. First, the teachers identified and analyzed a problem that they reflected on in the previous stages. In such cases, identifying a problem does not necessary mean to solve a hard pedagogical situation such as how to deal with inactive students. Even the classroom events run in normal situation; the teachers sometimes wanted to improve the learning environment. In addition, the teachers tried to analyze different aspects of the problem with the help of colleagues or other relevant experts and people. For example, in the case of Participant B, she tried to counsel with her spouse as an expert to gain right insights into the problem. In this stage, the teachers wanted to make sure that they have a right understanding about the problem. In addition to other people, they were found to rely on relevant theories to help

understand and analyze the theoretical background of the problems. For example, in Participant A's case, she used multiple intelligence theory to deal with individual differences of the students. And another source of analyzing problem was found to be the teachers' personal professional experiences.

After understanding different aspects of the problem, in the second action, the teachers posed a practical pedagogical plan to deal with the problem. In this step, the teachers put their plan into action in the real situation of the classroom. For example, Participant B administrated a pedagogical plan to deal with students with hyperactivity disorder. This plan was somehow the practical design of action research to deal with problem. In the systematic cycle, and in the third step, the teachers were found to detect and evaluate the effects of their practical pedagogical plan. The teachers stated that they examined the results of their plan in the classroom to see how it helped them solve the addressed problem. The observation in this stage would also help the teachers to reconsider their practical action to follow ongoing conditions of the classroom. We call such important activities as "evaluative and following" actions. These actions show that an educational action research is a "normative and practical practice." It means, it usually moves toward a better situation than the existing one, and it also provides practical solutions to meet the situational demands of life in the classroom. At the end and in line with TRP, we found that the participated teachers provided a written report covering all stages and pedagogical actions in their systematic reflation and submitted for IER.

In addition to practical reflective teachers, we found that many teachers conduct a kind of "prescriptive educational research." In terms of manner, these teachers were found to have shortcut mentality looking for easy and naïve actions, competitive and soulless pedagogical mood, and instrumental thinking toward developing their professional tasks. Participant C, Director of Kurdistan branch of IER, argued that "during these years, I have unfortunately seen many teachers who see TRP as a competition and as a tool to get some organizational points for promotion. At the end, we find their research very irrelevant to their own classroom." Considering the teachers' manner in conducting an action research, prescriptive teachers choose a general topic that is not usually rooted in their own classrooms' problems. These teachers used typical research in which the action was not put in practice to see how it improved the classroom situations. However, the results of these reports could provide "prescriptive insights" for teachers. The teachers mainly used online and other similar sources to provide research reports. These teachers were primarily found to seek

organizational affirmation instead of thinking about improving their teaching and learning environment.

Professional Outcomes of TRP for Practical Reflective Teachers

We found that TRP had good professional consequences for teachers, students, and other fellow colleagues. In the first place, TRP provided a significant ground for teachers' "professional empowerment." Historically, teachers are ignored in relation to knowledge discourse. The hegemony of university-based and theoretical research in the context educational practice has been a strong source of "power relationship" where teachers are deprived from epistemological position. Considering such picture in Iran's context, our empirical findings showed that TRP can help teachers participate in epistemological discourse and thus produce practical knowledge to deal with their own local problems. Participant A stated that "The most enjoyable thing for me is to come up with a practical solution to help my students in different ways." According to Participant B, TRP helps teachers "do wise action with open eyes." More importantly, the teachers believed that TRP helps them move from "fault self-consciousness" to a healthy understanding of their professional identity since TRP improves their personal self-confidence and self-esteem. Teachers traditionally have the misperception that they are only responsible for teaching through knowledge they received from other third parties. Participant A showed us that "many teachers, particularly elementary teachers, have low self-confidence and do not believe in their capability … but when they engage in doing a research, they say, oh yes! I can do a research as well … believe me it (TRP) even improve the way the teachers are talking, walking and communicating with others." This can be considered as "professional emancipation" as teachers show higher degree of self-esteem, stronger epistemic position in relationship to other authorities. In Participant B's words "TRP give meaning to her personal and professional lives."

The participating teachers stated that TRP has also good function for students. According to the teachers, TRP could provide a context in which students enhance their learning mood and become more energetic and enthusiastic about school. The students also trust and believe in teachers as they see consistency between the "saying" and the "practice" of teachers. It was also found, according to teachers, that TRP enhances the teachers' personal belief system when they gain scientific and sophisticated vision about students, learning, and pedagogy. In addition, the teachers believed that

engaging in TRP provides a platform where they can share their understanding and solutions with each other. In other words, it could be a good basis for developing learning community in the schools. Participant A explained that during her professional career, it has been a helpful experience for her to use the results of other colleagues in her classroom.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we claimed that TRP is a promising practice in Iran's teacher education system. Relying on our empirical data, we found this national-scale pedagogy can help teachers improve their professional consciousness through participating in epistemological discourse of educational context. Fig. 1 shows the conceptual map that describes the epistemic value of TRP. According to the figure, teachers with good manners and methods take obviously significant advantage of TRP and involve in reflective practical research. As a consequence, an epistemological shift happens in the professional life of such caring teachers where they no longer only use the knowledge of a third-party person. Such conditions recover their teachers' professional identity and put them in power position.

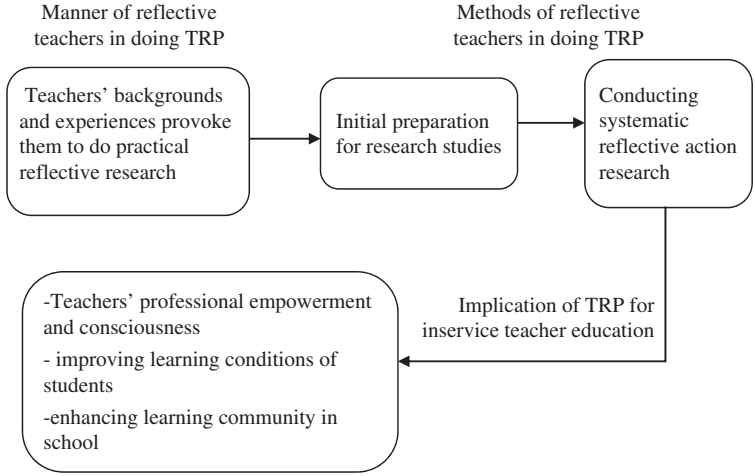

Fig. 1. Nature of TRP and its Epistemic Outcomes for Reflective Practical Teachers.

As such, and in line with the findings of our project portrayed in Fig. 1, preservice teachers should capture specific competencies and skills in their training programs in order to become a "practical reflective teacher." The first dimension is to improve "good manner" in teachers. A central competency here is "ethical sensitivity," meaning teachers should be reflective about every bit of their own actions and associated students' reaction in the classroom. Reflective teachers should always care about the well-being of the students. This can be considered as moral foundation of teacher reflection and TRP. Ethical sensitivity enhances teacher reflection and prepares them to engage in TRP that leads to dynamic teaching and learning atmosphere. The second dimension of TRP is to develop reflective skills and methods of preservice teachers. "Problematization" is the first significant competency that teachers should absorb in their training in order to develop their reflective methods. It means teachers should critically examine their teaching and learning context and construct new and meaningful questions for reflection. In this procedure, teachers can open the new missions and vision that promote their professional identify as critical practitioners. This is a significant action helping teachers move from descriptive to normative thinking. Another competency of a featured reflective researcher teacher is to use different systematic strategies to deal with the problems identified in the first step. Different methods of inquiry such as ethnography, narratives, phenomenology, and action research may be used in order to address the problems. In this way, preservice teachers should be exposed to these methods in their teacher education program. And the other feature, and in fact the implication of TRP in preservice teacher education, is to craft an advanced, healthy, empowered, and self-directed professional identify for new teachers. It breaks down the hegemony of positivistic pedagogy in teachers' lives.

In line with TRP, the new preservice program has incorporated a cluster of courses referred to as performance competencies, which are an addition to content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PKC) introduced by Schulman. Student teachers' action research, lesson study, and extensive student teaching are the components that comprise this programmatic cluster. Fig. 2 shows the outline of preservice teacher education curriculum and how TRP will be implemented into preservice teacher education.

Our experiences with in-service teachers show that the new cluster can help preservice teachers develop their own knowledge and practical solutions to deal with the pedagogical challenges of their classroom. In addition to formal knowledge (CK, PCK, PK) embedded in the preservice teacher

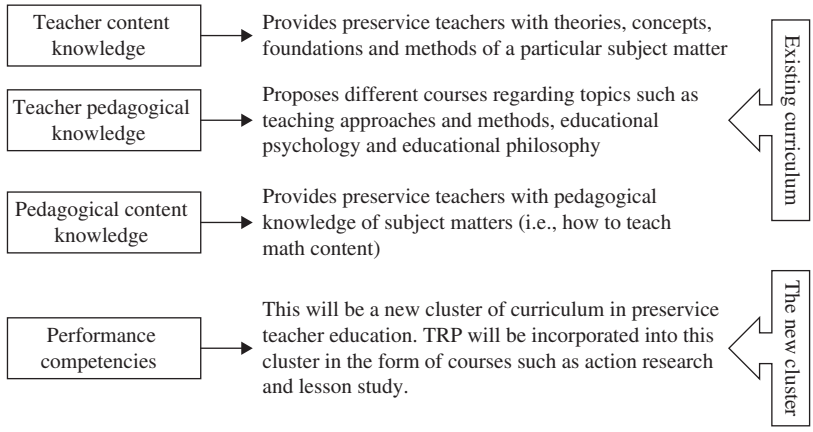

Fig. 2. The Outline of Preservice Teacher Education Curriculum in Iran.

education curriculum, students enhance their reflective capability as they are engaged in TRP with introducing the new cluster. We, however, need to argue that introducing TRP into preservice teacher program should be integrated with the TRP conducted by in-service teachers. In other words, in-service teachers should provide preservice teachers with what they have learned during conducting different action research in line with TRP. This idea must be supported by local administration of education and other relevant authorities. In line with this, the role of local branches of IER is essential. IER is a formal organization in charge of TRP collecting the previous experiences of in-service teachers with TRP. IER should provide complementary materials and possible training for preservice teachers. It can also provide high qualified reports on TRP to help preservice teachers link between practice and theory.

Challenge of TRP and Implication for Teacher Education

Considering TRP has organizational and formal procedure, it makes a significant contribution to teachers' systematic reflection. Many teacher educators and educational researcher are interested in improving teacher reflection, and it is argued that without particular preservice teacher training and programs, future teachers may not deeply engage in reflective practice. IER as the formal organization responsible for developing action

research in Iran's educational contexts, has engaged many teachers to participate in TRP with which they produce local knowledge for their own classrooms. With different training programs for teachers, IER has integrated research and systematic reflection as a part of teachers' professionalism. However, based on our empirical data and observation, we found that TRP had not significantly penetrated into teachers' daily activities since it is conducted once a year. We observed that it is sometimes seen as an organizational mandate or competition and not as a professional responsibility by teachers. In order to cope with this barrier, TRP should be organized and conducted in school or at least smaller educational district level where schools are responsible for encouraging, training, conducting, and evaluating action research.

In general, we believe that improving teachers' reflection is an essential part of their professional tasks. In our experience, we found that conducting action research in the form of TRP has significantly improved teachers' systematic reflection to deal with their situational problems. In a particular way, it has put teachers in epistemological position where they can ease the power relationship in educational context. Thus, we think TRP organized by IER could be a good experience to integrate research discourse particularly action research into teachers' daily practice, particularly when there is an organization or department in school level to run the TRP.

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