Professional Development through Self-Appraisal-A Case Study

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Abstract

　　The principal aim of this study is to examine how reflective practice enables ESL teachers to make sense of their professional worlds as well as make significant and worthwhile change within themselves and in their teaching practices. This researcher gathered qualitative data about their reflective practices from multiple resources (namely, questionnaire survey, journal entries of the subjects, transcripts of video recordings of lessons and self-feedback entries, transcripts of peer observation of lessons, and post-reflection discussions). The data were subjected to content analysis. This paper examines the obstacles in the way of effective ESL teacher education in India and finds a possible way forward in the Reflective Approach. The post reflection discussion shows that the teacher believes in reflection as it provides an opportunity to observe classroom practices thoroughly and in turn modifies the teacher's performance. Reflective practice through journal writing is thus found to be an effective means for teacher's self – appraisal and learning.

Key Words: reflective practice, Journal writing, feed back, classroom practice, teacher –learning

Introduction
Journal Writing

　　A teaching journal is an ongoing written account of observations, reflections, and other thoughts about teaching, usually in the form of a notebook, or electronic mode, which serves as a source of discussion, reflection, or evaluation. The journal may be used as a record of incidents, problems, and insights that occurred during lessons; it may be an account of a class that the teacher would like to review or return to later. 'Writing a teaching journal provides an opportunity for teachers to use the process of writing to describe and explore their own teaching practices' (Ho & Richards, 1993, pp.8).

Case Analysis

　　Case studies are bounded systems (Smith, 1978) that allow the teacher to concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation. Even the famous 'case method' was originally grounded in the belief that the teaching of scientific principles should precede the development of skills in their application (Schon, 1983). The case study provides the teacher with "insight, discovery, and interpretation" (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). Because it is field-based, it allows the teacher to explore phenomena directly from the human experience. 'Teacher who evaluates the work seeks to interpret, explain the meanings of observed situations or events, put them in a context**,** assume potential sequences, and use the pedagogical knowledge and experience to account for the studied events" (Kremer-Hayon, 1993, p. 129). Case studies are of value in refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability" (Stake, 1994, p. 245).

Procedures adopted for data collection

　　This researcher has maintained separate files for participant teacher with her pseudonym. In the file allotted for each participant, the researcher kept a copy of the teacher's profile containing her personal details, designation, educational qualifications, years of experience, objective in choosing the teaching profession, and a copy of the transcript of the interview. The information was obtained through interviews on various emergent themes/strategies/patterns, which were considered important.

　　Before the subjects set about their exploratory practices, this researcher administered them with semi-structured questionnaire. The purpose was to make the teachers reflect on their own teaching and realize their strengths and weaknesses. The questions focused on the teachers' beliefs about ESL teaching-learning process, teaching strategies, opinion on reflective practice, and the use of bilingualism while teaching.

The participants were led into free discussions with this researcher about her research and about the possible means for improving their professional competence. Teacher decided to take up journal writing and decided to spend a minimum of five minutes to write about her experience and reflect on the problems encountered either by introspection or through discussion with a colleague. While writing an entry in the journal, each teacher was asked to reflect on the following:

- How was the class planned?
- Is there any deviation from the plan?
- What types of questions were asked by the teacher at the beginning, middle, and towards the end?
- What about the student-teacher, student-student interaction in class?
- Was the class a success or a failure?
- How can it be made more effective next time?
- How will the teacher plan for the next class based on the previous reflection?

The participant was also guided to make journal entries after each class, reflecting on her experiences and with suggestions for improvements for the next class. To encourage them, to make a start, a list of questions was distributed. The teacher participant was also asked to write a lesson plan for each lesson she was willing to teach. The entries, the teacher made in her journals were unguided, but the list of questions was only to motivate them for the purpose.

The journal entries made by the teacher participant was collected into her files , her way of progression qualitatively in day-to-day teaching practice was registered, and the new methods and materials devised because of regular reflection were determined. The improvement in their questioning pattern and classroom interaction, student involvement and learner evaluation techniques employed by the teacher were collected from the teacher's point of view. A small discussion on these entries was conducted separately with the teacher, to arrive at a better conclusion, which proves the effect of reflective practice in language teaching – learning process

The observer entered the class to be observed five minutes earlier and sat in the last row without disturbing the students. She observed the following in particular:

- How the teacher motivated the class
- Introduced the topic
- Continued with the lesson
- Interacted with the class
- Maintained interaction among the students
- Analyzed and corrected students' errors
- Used reinforcement techniques
- Spent time fruitfully
- Used question types
- Concluded the class

After the class, the researcher spent 10 minutes discussing her observation with the teacher, allowing the teacher to respond. While observing the class, the observer recorded her observations as descriptive passages in her notes.

At the end of the longitudinal research, which lasted for about one and a half year, the participants were made to respond to an informal post reflective interview, that focused on their perceptions about the effectiveness of reflective practice in ESL teachers' professional development.

Role of the researcher in the subjects' reflective practice

The researcher's role was that of an observer-cum-participant. She conducted a questionnaire survey of the subjects' beliefs, studied the records of the subject's reflective practice (such as journal entries), and took part in review discussions with each one of them about reflections. Whenever the participant gave her experiences and opinions, the researcher carefully documented them. She also made a time-to-time verification of the data through discussions with the participants.

Description of the teacher participant

Teacher T teaches English in an engineering college on the out- skirts of Vijayawada. She has 15 years of experience of teaching English at the undergraduate level. She is doing research in English language teaching. She has worked for some time as a communicative skills trainer as well.

When the researcher approached teacher T for taking her consent to participate in her research, she readily gave her acceptance as she felt it to be an opportunity to improve her teaching skills. Of all the strategies of reflection, the teacher opted for journal writing.

In the following section, the reflections of Teacher T are organized and analyzed as follows:

a. The teacher's beliefs about various aspects of ESL teaching, as ascertained by the researcher through an informal interview;

b. Her reflections through journal writing with an analysis of the reflections; and

c. An analysis of her post-reflection discussion with this researcher.

Findings through an informal interview

In an informal interview conducted by the researcher, the teacher expressed her personal opinions about various aspects of ESL teaching.

(a) *Reflective practice*

I came to know of it very lately. The professionals can express their capacity for expressing, analyzing, and renovating the knowledge they use in their work in an active process. As teacher of language, I could adopt the practice that is retrospective in nature to improvise our perception towards work. It would definitely assist us in identifying the ideas and theories actually implemented by teachers while teaching.

(b) *Teaching aids used*

As teacher of English, I think we can use a lot of material/equipment available around us to make students understand the mechanism of the language. As a teacher I had used very commonly available material-news papers, storybooks, novels comics, how to use manuals, advertisements, movies, T.V news, internet, various soft wares-at my discretion as teaching aid.

(c) *Teaching strategy used*

I was fortunate enough to work in a Degree college where I was not encountered by such things as syllabi, exams etc. The college laid a special emphasis on improving English proficiency and communication skills of the students. This programme was held in addition to regular syllabus. I was given the chance to come up with my own course material. I divided my programme into three levels, first for the first year, second level for the second year and third level for the final years. Here are some of the teaching strategies I had adopted at different levels.

I felt that the students need to have a strong base of reading in order to take comfortably without fumbling for words. However, the standard of the students was not very motivating. Therefore, I used comics as a teaching aid. I would make students read comics that helped them to pick the spoken form of the language. In addition, it helped them understand how they can get on with the language with the vocabulary they had. Another interesting aspect of comics is it helped them pick the paralanguage elements also. For e.g. ---shhhh- --, psst--, vow, hissss. Comics being a picture representation help the student visualize things easily. Of course, I used them for limited sessions, i.e 2-3 periods only. My purpose was to make them understand how they could adopt different strategies for evolving their language skills and speak without hesitation. Of course, I noticed that success was limited to those students who put into practice.

Some times students are unable to express themselves sensibly, as they lack a good choice of words. Here their word power acted as a limitation. In order to help them improve their word power, I used many methods. But, the initial method was making students read news papers. As this activity was of passive nature of students' interest used to be low. So, to gear them up, I used to instruct them to cut the headlines of their interest and stick them on a book. They could make use of it later also. Then, they extended this activity to small articles. One big advantage of this activity was, it could be done at home. Next day, the articles thus collected were used for reading purposes. Here, their pronunciation and intonation were corrected. This is one of the most fruitful exercises that helped students initiate into reading newspapers. Students who persisted with this habit later improved their proficiency of language and became confident speakers. In addition, this helped them to pick current language and thoughts.

One of the most difficult tasks for a language teacher is make students talk in the class. I adopted the simple method of maki8ng students (all) to speak a line or two in an attempt create a story. In this exercise of story- telling students created a story together. I would pick one student who is supposed to give start the story with a single sentence. Then he would pick another student of his choice.

This way, students just have to say one or two lines and create a story by linking their ideas. This exercise helped students to sub-consciously use correct tense forms in keeping with the situation. This strategy is not really a new one. I adopted it from the reference books. The participation in such activity was noted to be high. Verbs, tenses link words, syntax could also be explained through the same example sentences.

(d) Other strategies

Narrating stories for voice modulation

(Students could narrate stories, jokes for correct modulators of voice.)

Listening news for listening skills.

(Script could be downloaded and given to students prior to the activity)

Role play for making students learns about conversation skills.

Depending upon the topic, I used to device various strategies. Students slowly developed a passion for learning English as communicative subject aspect and began to appreciate it as a medium of communication. Of course, I had to fight initial boredom, rejection & reluctance. But, once the wall of resistance was down. It was very easy motivating them.

(e) Use of bilingualism

Use of mother tongue in language classroom helps to connect with students first, also, the students do not develop aversion for English. It definitely helps to break the ice and bridge the gap initially. Once students are initiated into actual learning of language, it can be avoided. However, I do not really believe a language can be learned in another medium.

(f) Types of questions used

Firstly, I prefer asking questions at low level to test students' comprehension. Next, these questions' standard can be raised to probe their analytical thinking. Questions like who, what are changed to why, how. Even closed ended questions can be used to elicit information (yes/no) from students.

(g) Strategies of feedback

I never went for any scientific form of feedback for my classes. I used to ask them personally about their opinion of the class. However, I always made sure to receive their feedback in a constructive way. A few students candidly expressed their inability to follow the lessons. Some students would give genuine suggestions on how to improve the classroom situation. Students often expressed their interest to learn in an interactive manner. In this experimental teaching experience, the feed back of the students was quite encouraging.

(h) Teacher's beliefs about ESL instruction

A belief inventory of the teacher was made by administering a questionnaire. The teacher identified the following as her beliefs:

   (i) Language can be thought of as meaningful communication and is learned subconsciously in non-academic, social situations.

   (ii) Usually it is more important for ESL students to focus on what they are trying to say and not how to say it.

   (iii) Language can be described as a set of behaviors, which are mastered through lots of drill and practice with the language patterns of native speakers.

   (iv) ESL students usually need to master some of the basic listening and speaking skills before they can begin to read and write.

   (v) Its not necessary to actually teach ESL students how to speak English, they usually begin speaking English on their own.

It is awakening of the learning already existent in the students. Unless the student is ready to receive it, no amount of teaching can initiate him/her into the learning process. Teaching may yield result if it is student centric.

Reflections through journal writing

Teacher T feels that reflective practice is an active process, which brings out teachers' capacity for expressing, analyzing and renovating the knowledge they use in their classrooms. She also says that this process is retrospective in nature and helps in improving our perception of our day-to-day work.

The teacher believes that language as a means of communication can be learnt not only through formal instruction but also unknowingly through social interactions. She also feels that accuracy in communication is very important. Like a conventional teacher, she too believes that drill and practice can bring in accuracy in language use. She is of the opinion that students should learn speaking and listening skills so that they can be efficient learners in reading and writing.

Eight extracts from her journal entries with an analysis of each extract are given below:

Extract I: *Students had learning difficulty regarding /s/, /z/, /dz/, /3/. They would be substituting one for another. But after a little practice, making them hear the sounds, they slowly caught the sound. Students were given an idea how phonetics play a role in daily communication. Relating to wrong usages leading to comical situations help students sustain their interest.*

After reflection, the teacher tries to make students learn effectively by knowing their problem and through giving them common usages. She makes her students realize their own mistakes while speaking. She helps them learn concepts in an entertaining way. It can be inferred from the extract that the teacher wants to motivate her students by making them use the language in class with due importance to pronunciation. Thus, the teacher has developed her methodological skill, and, through investigation, she could even improve her evaluation skills.

Extract II: *Telugu medium students have a difficulty in distinguishing /s/, /z/, and /dz/. On discussion with my colleague, I think it is better that they write in Telugu how the word is pronounced. This suggestion helped students overcome the difficulty of trying to memorize the symbol and sound.*

The teacher uses peer discussion to develop strategies for effective learning in her students, even those who have come from the vernacular medium of instruction. She taught sounds through correlating the same sound in students' mother tongue to help them gain accuracy in their learning of English sounds. Through reflection, she even finds alternative texts, which may suit her students' linguistic level.

Extract III: *I make them do uninterrupted reading for five minutes. After watching them getting bored, I then asked them to stop after five minutes. Now I asked them to count the number of words they have read roughly. Then simple questions based on the memory of the passage and comprehension was asked. Attentive readers easily answered them from the inference drawn from the text.*

The teacher's experience with her students' reading, made her realize that silent, unguided reading would not be profitable. Therefore, she motivated her students to read the passage by giving questions that would make them comprehend the passage.

Extract IV: *I use this hour, to get the feel of the writing style of Abdul Kalam whose language is precise and aptly suited for describing technical aspects. 20 minutes is given for reading the text. Then, they were asked to trace the early life to Abdul from their understanding. By finding the students silent, I thought of making the students think actively. In a way to make the students interact, I asked each selected student to give only one point. Thus they built the summary of the chapter. Students are then given another 5 minutes to summarize what they have read. This task helps them to recall words, expressions used in the text. On the whole, the class could be conducted as planned. But students from Telugu medium background are not forthcoming. This area is to be checked.*

While administering a reading exercise in her class, the teacher found it difficult to make the students summarize the text. Furthermore, she found the students getting bored. However, after reflection, she decided to ask each student to give a sentence on his or her own based on the text read. Thus, she was successful in making the students of her class summarize the text.

Extract V: *They can pick a passage of 800 words length approximately and try to read it within 7mts in the first seven days. Then, they can try to consciously reduce the time to 5mts in the next seven days. To help them remain in track and improve their memory skills – One more activity I introduced.*

In the teacher's journal, this entry comes after her reflection on ways of improving her students' reading speed. She gives tips to help her students read faster while gaining knowledge of watch phrases, expressions used, idea incorporated, etc. She becomes competent enough to device her own strategies for effective teaching

and, as she says elsewhere in her journal, she shares them with her colleagues. Thus, reflection has helped her play an expanded role as a mentor to her colleagues as well.

Extract VI: *I noticed that usually students don't know beyond Oxford Dictionary and their search is confined to only meanings of the words. On further probing, some students told about parts of speech. I wondered which dictionary I could recommend. Then I decided that I must ask them to use a learner's dictionary, whether it was Oxford or Cambridge or Longman or Macmillan. Next, they must begin to look for phonetic transcription, stress mark, synonyms, how they occur as various parts of speech etc., this kind of exercise was given for laboratory activity.*

Normally, English teachers ask their students to use a dictionary, and Oxford is often the inevitable choice. But this teacher wants her students to use the dictionary for different purposes, and the reflection on this helps her identify learner's dictionaries as most appropriate.

Extract VII: *I explain how one can improve one's word power by mentoring. I wanted to include an activity on the collective nouns but didn't do it. This can be carried out in one of the laboratory hours. Then I devote 5 mts to first explain how the students have to be alert for their objective online exam based on their textbook knowledge.*

The teacher reflects in action. Though she planned to take up vocabulary, since her students were not ready for it, she changed her mind and taught a lighter grammar exercise instead. She decided to give tips to her students for the forthcoming on-line examinations. This is an instance of the teacher's time management skill through reflection.

Extract VIII: *Here the students from vernacular medium of instruction need help while converting direct speech into reported speech. Once they are explained the enormity of their mistake, they correct themselves. This is not true with all the students present but it is true with students who are highly motivated. So, I decided to ask them to come and approach me during my free time. The students followed my advice. Their keen desire acted as a motivating factor for me.*

While teaching reported speech, the teacher found that the students from vernacular medium of instruction needed help. Since only a small minority of motivated students was able to learn from her corrections, she decided, on reflection, to ask them to meet her outside the classroom for help.

Post-reflection discussion

The researcher had a 15-minutes discussion with the participant teacher. When she was asked to respond on the importance of journal writing, she expressed her faith in this process for professional development.

The teacher feels confident of her classroom teaching after reflection. She says that she could understand where she stands in ESL teaching as she could study her performance thoroughly and strive to bring about improvement.

I know beforehand my target for the class and, after reflection, I know where I stand. This helps me study my performance and gives me scope to gain improvement, giving me a sense of achievement.

This gives us an opportunity to record our observations of the class and reflect upon them. This recording helps us to improvise on our performance. Also, over the years, it helps us to note and compare our performances at class level. ...English today is a means of earning job and not a subject of pleasure. High stakes make it essential for every teacher to be active and appraise their performance. Moreover, these methods are helpful in the absence of other methods, one helpful in the absence of other learned ones in the department and training programmes.

From the post-reflection discussion it is evident that the teacher believes that reflection provides opportunities to observe classroom practices thoroughly and enable the teacher to modify her plan such that there will be an improvement in the performance. She finds reflective practice as the best available means for teacher self-appraisal and teacher learning.

Teacher's initial and post-reflection perceptions about reflective practice

The teachers' initial perceptions of the usefulness of reflective practice in their professional development were interpreted through the analysis of the preliminary questionnaire and the pre-reflection informal interview. The initial perception of teachers was positive. The responses to the questionnaire and the interview indicated that the participant teacher was enthusiastic and interested in trying this practice in her day-to day teaching. Teacher T stated that she was optimistic about the usefulness of reflective practice for her professional development. The teacher participant, was however, mildly uneasy about the "experiment" because it was something new to her and was even unsure of what she might discover during the process.

Findings of the study

The findings that emerge from the detailed analysis made above (about the gains the teacher in the study made as a result of her reflective practice) are organized in this section as follows:

Decisions about timing through reflective practice

The reflective practice of the teacher in this study helped her to be sensitive to the time needed by the students to carry out an activity, and make adjustments in time allocation. It also helped her estimate the number of activities that could be set in a period. Furthermore, it helped the teacher identify and assess the attention span of the students.

Teacher T was found to plan her lesson dividing the duration of the class equally among all her students, thus finding the time to motivate her students to interact in English both with her and among themselves. Time became an important factor for making her students summarize and recall the words and expressions learned from the text, and she was able to manage it with ease.

Decisions about solving the students' problems through reflective practice

The teacher could also assess the kinds of problems that students had in understanding certain concepts and instructions. Though the classes differed slightly in 'personality' and 'perception', surprisingly, the kinds of problems that the students faced were rather similar.

The teacher could identify the students' problems, tried out different methods of explanation within the lesson series, and thus arrived at workable method of solving the students' problems.

Before the process of reflection, the teacher taught a 'poem' by merely explaining the meanings of the words literally. Constant reflection made her realize the difficulty of her students' in understanding. She decided on the contextual narration of poems.

The teacher realized the need for practice exercises and individual attention for teaching pronunciation. She found a way of helping the students who were finding it difficult to attempt writing exercises, by making them learn expressions suitable for formal and informal occasions.

Finding the prescribed textbook beyond the level of her students' comprehension, she used alternative materials to develop the habit of reading and to give the students a taste of success. While teaching grammar, the teacher resorted to the elicitation technique: she asked the students to describe their routine.

Through comical situations due to mispronounced words, Teacher C made her students realize the need for learning good pronunciation. One of the ways she employed for introducing interaction in her class was to select students at random and ask them to speak. Departing from her earlier practice, she began to teach texts by making her students 'listen and experiment', and by asking them to make a thought-wise summary. Through reflection, the teacher realized the need for drill-type exercises for teaching 'verb forms' and chose to make the students realize the 'enormity of their mistakes' that could enable them to be better learners.

Better decisions about the use of visual aids and inventing new strategies through reflective practice

The reflective practice of teacher indicates significant improvement in her classroom practice in terms of teaching strategies and teaching aids. Reflective Practice has evidently helped her think about alternative strategies and teaching aids to make their classroom teaching more effective and interesting.

Teacher T uses newspapers, storybooks, novels, comics, advertisements, movies, manuals, T.V. news, and the internet as her teaching aids.

Teacher T uses comics to teach language, and paralanguage, for enabling the students to visualize things easily. She uses newspapers to teach vocabulary and reading practice while learning pronunciation and intonation and thus initiates the students into newspaper reading. She uses stories and jokes for voice modulation, listening to news for listening skills, and role-plays for interaction and conversation skills. She likes to innovate. She says with confidence: *"I had to fight the initial boredom, rejection and reluctance. However, once the wall of resistance was down, it was very easy motivating them (students)."* She gives the utmost value to the students' feedback. She says, "*In this experimental teaching experience, the feedback of the students was quite encouraging.*"

Teacher T, in the post reflection period, used 'comical situations' and 'compact discs' to enable the students learn pronunciation. She used a 'dictionary' and a 'thesaurus' for enhancing dictionary skills among her students. She also made her students who were finding it difficult to learn good pronunciation to 'transliterate' English words into their mother tongue, so that it would be easy for them to understand the difference. By making use of a passage for teaching participles, infinitives and gerund forms, she made it easy for her students because, as they read the passage several times, understanding the content was not a problem.

Building on the familiar

A significant insight that all the teachers derived from their reflections was that, for better learning to emerge, they should attempt to build on what was already familiar to their learners.

While introducing the first lesson, 'Our Picture of Universe', Teacher T started enquiring about the students' earlier knowledge on the subject, such that they feel attracted and motivated towards the lesson.

Thus, reflection enabled each teacher participant to successfully utilize the students' earlier knowledge either to motivate them or to teach them a new concept.

Opportunities for active involvement

Data indicate that reflection enabled the teacher participants to realize the need for providing opportunities to their students to interact with the teacher, text or with their friends during the class.

Teacher T made her students realize the significance of good and appropriate pronunciation by relating to wrong usages leading to comical situations. She created time-based reading exercises, to retain student interest in and concentration on reading passages, thus helping them to develop a reading habit.

Teacher T used referential questions that called for the learners' opinions or interpretations, thus inculcating reasoning skills. While teaching 'The picture of the Universe', Teacher T enquired of the students' knowledge of the universe.

Taking advantage of wide variety of resources

The significant change that occurred due to reflection of the teacher participant is that she was motivated to think and prepare for the class in advance and to select teaching materials appropriate to the level of their students.

Teacher T referred to comical situations resulting from wrong pronunciation of English words as a starter for pronunciation class. She also used audio-video CDs for teaching speaking and listening exercises. She used the dictionary and the thesaurus as sources in her vocabulary classes.

Developing a sense of belonging with the classroom

Reflective practice enabled the teacher participants to realize that making students feel at home in the classroom would greatly facilitate learning. The data show the teachers attempting to make their students feel at ease in several ways, in particular, through the elicitation method. This developed in the students a sense of responsibility and belonging.

Teacher T prefers interaction as an ideal activity where students get an opportunity to express their opinions and ideas on the content taught. Teacher T taught reading comprehension through time-based reading exercises and by asking the students to summarize the passage read.

Sensitivity to learners' difficulties

The significant insight that the teacher derived from her own reflections was that, for effective teaching-learning to take place in the classroom, the teacher should be sensitive to the difficulties of the students in the learning process and that each lesson should be planned keeping the learners' difficulties in mind.

Teacher T realized the need for training her students for online examinations and allotted time for the purpose.

Seeking advice and outside support

The data collected indicate that the teacher realized the need for collaborative work, and sought advice from her senior colleagues to solve her classroom problems and for her self-evaluation.

Utilizing effective classroom management strategies

Reflection made the teacher realize the need for effective classroom management as a significant requisite for effective teaching.

The teacher participant was found to realize the significance of group activities for creating interaction among their students.

Teachers T realized the significance of activity – based teaching and the need for using additional resources in the classroom.

Maintaining flexibility and a positive attitude

Yet another significant outcome that the data analysis indicates is that the teacher understood the need to have a positive attitude towards her students and that she realized that flexibility in attitude and action in classroom would make the students learn better.

Teacher T was found to be highly interactive with her students, and was tolerant of their errors.

Promoting learner autonomy

Reflective practice helped the teacher realize both the need to give freedom to the students to choose the activity or the lesson to be taught and the necessity for creating a climate conducive to learning in the classroom.

Teacher T tried to offer counseling to students from the vernacular medium of instruction to help them overcome their problems in English.

Integrating language skills and resources

The teacher participant learned to integrate language skills while designing activities for her students. By means of group discussions and pair work among the students, the teacher participant learned to integrate listening, speaking and reading skills. Teacher T encouraged her students to use the internet to gather information for classroom activities.

After experimenting with reflective practice, the participant became confident about the usefulness of this process. This confidence was the direct outcome of the significant gains she had made in her personal and professional development. She perceived reflective practice as a process that would raise teacher's awareness of her practice as teacher, improve her teaching practice resulting in improved learner outcomes, and give them greater confidence in their own ability to organize their development.

However, she expressed some concerns also which need to be recorded here. One concern was the amount of time that the process of self-evaluation demanded, though she conceded that the gains far outweighed the demand.

(a) The reflections unmistakably point to changes taking place in the teacher's practices. She began to question her actions within the classes and became more critical and distanced towards her habitual practices. For instance, she found her usual way of lecturing in class ineffective and was moving towards the 'elicitation method'. She started using activities, different teaching materials, and the deductive method of teaching grammar. Diary writing made Teacher T, who was rather short-tempered, realize the need for being cordial with her students. In general, the subject realized the need to be sympathetic towards her learners.

(b) In the case under investigation in this study, the teacher's classroom decisions were informed ones because they were based on inquiry-derived understandings because of reflective practice. Even if the decisions (such as the one cited as an example in the earlier paragraph) do not find much support in theory and research and even if the results of the implementation of her decisions seem to be inadequate or unsatisfactory to an outsider, the decisions can be rationalized for their pedagogical value in the teachers' own contexts.

(c) The decisions the teacher made and the actions she took proved to be experiences of educational value for her. This happened because her reflection on, and inquiry into, her classroom practices took place not as a set of prescriptive skills but rather as a mindset which Dewey (1933) described as a set of attitudes consisting of open-mindedness (*seeking alternatives*), responsibility (*recognizing consequences*), and whole heartedness (*continual self-examination*).

(d) The case investigated in the study point to the role that reflection on, and inquiry into, classroom practices can play as a mechanism for change in teacher's classroom practices as well as a forum for professional development over time. Her reflective practices through journal writing created what Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 42) call "a new sense of meaning and significance" which brought a new sense of meaning and significance to her classroom work.

(e) The case also shows that the teacher constructed her own explanations of teaching derived from her own practices, and the explanations (or "knowledge") were socially negotiated and restructured within their classrooms. This is in keeping with both socio-cultural theories that emphasize the fundamentally social nature of learning (Neaman, Griffin, and Cole 1989; Vygotsky 1978) and theories of situated cognition that maintain that knowledge entails lived practices, not just accumulated information (Chaiklin and Lave 1996; Lave and Wenger 1991).

(f) It will not be wide of the mark to conclude from (e) above that the teacher's reflective practice involving the processes identified in the introductory paragraph of this chapter indicate her progress towards being producers of legitimate knowledge out of her own lived realities as professional who is capable of constructing and sustaining their own professional development over time.

(g) What stems from (f) above is significant. The reflective practice of the teachers' tend to add force to the emerging "new scholarship" (Anderson and Herr 1999) which promises to alter the traditional knowledge base of teacher education consisting of generalizable knowledge about good teaching and good teachers

produced by educational researchers who are outsiders to classroom life, and infuse it with "insider" knowledge.

(h) Lastly, the implications of this research for ESL teacher education need to be pointed out. It is evident from the foregoing that reflective practice has considerable potential for the ongoing professional development of teachers in general and ESL teachers in particular and that it is usable and effective factors which will be valued by academic staff education systems.

Recommendations

1. It is necessary for educational institutions to develop a climate conducive to reflection so that a large number of teachers feel motivated to carry out reflective practice on a voluntary basis.

2. Teachers' reflections through diaries or video-recordings can be safeguarded as documents for future reference. If they are kept open for public, they can even guide new entrants to the profession.

3. Teachers who are reflective practitioners may go beyond their individual practices and form reflective inquiry groups. The groups may take up for discussion issues which have emerged from their reflective practices. Such discussions will produce more light and advance the profession further.

4. The Academic Staff Colleges may consider the merits of reflective practice such as its value in the ongoing professional development of teachers and its cost-effectiveness and promote it by including it as an essential component of their refresher courses meant for college teachers of English. A strong plea for this has already been made at a seminar on 'Reflective Practice in the English classroom' (Ramanujam 2009:10).

5. Reflective practice as an effective means of teacher development may be advocated through seminars and workshops by higher educational institutions.

6. More research needs to be conducted in the area of reflective practice in order to "validate" it as a legitimate and reliable means of professional development for teachers in general and ESL teachers in particular.

Conclusion

The report by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (Carnegie Corporation 1986) recommended the use of teacher-generated case reports as a core source in teacher education. This research may well be regarded as a contribution to that emerging core source in second language teacher education. This researcher hopes that by bringing teachers' ways of knowing through reflective practice into scholarly discussion, this study will strengthen the struggle, waged since the 1980s, to gain validity for inquiry-derived knowledge through reflective practice in ways afforded to disciplinary or theoretical knowledge, which still remains foundational to second language teacher education.

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