

Reflective Practice through Video Recording and Journal Writing-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 paper presents analysis of the data gathered from the interviews, audio-video recordings, journal entries and post-reflection discussions. The data collected from the pre-reflection interviews indicate the subject's beliefs about the teaching of English as a second language in general and specific aspects such as the classroom strategies and teaching aids. The data gathered from the video recordings and journal writings have been subjected to analysis to find emerging patterns and themes relevant to the participant teacher's conceptualization of the use of reflective practice in his classroom.

Key Words: reflective practice; conceptualization; post-reflection; case study; pre-reflection

INTRODUCTION

ESL teacher education in India, as Ramanujam (2009, p. 9) points out, is 'largely an undefined affair'. At the college level, most teachers enter the profession without any training in teaching, as they are not required to be trained teachers at the entry level. After the entry, however, they may undergo in-service training of two kinds: conferences, seminars, and workshops organized in their colleges as well as other colleges; and the orientation course and/or the refresher course at the Academic Staff Colleges established by the University Grants Commission. The programmes of the former category are few and far between, and so not all teachers of English get opportunities to participate in them. The programmes of the Academic Staff Colleges are also beyond the reach of the majority of teachers, given the small number of Academic Staff Colleges.

In the ESL context, the reflective approach may mean teachers exploring their practices, examining their attitudes, beliefs, and principles, collecting data about their own classrooms and their roles within them, and using the data as a basis for self-evaluation and professional growth. 'Considering that this is a self-directed approach which can involve teachers in an on-going process of examining their teaching and developing strategies for improvement, it appears to be a reliable model of professional development' (Ramanujam 2009, p. 101).

Various procedures for carrying out reflective practice have been developed. Some of them are: classroom observation (observation of an experienced teacher by a novice/student teacher, peer observation, and self-observation in the form of audio/video recording), journal writing, forming teacher support groups, and action research. It is the individual teacher who must decide which technique or techniques will serve his or her purpose.

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). The case study aims at expanding the theory that is available on teacher self-evaluation by providing teachers' feedback on their experience.

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.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study, which attempted an investigation of the role of reflective practice in enhancing ESL teachers' awareness of his own classroom teaching contributing thereby to his professional development, adopted the case study approach for the purpose, as it was found best suited to the complexity and specificity of the real life phenomenon proposed to be investigated in the study. Since the concern of the study was with the process which alone would help determine the outcome or results, a naturalistic approach leading to inductive theorizing (i.e. making sense of what one finds after one has actually found it) rather than an outcome-oriented experimental procedure leading to deductive theorizing seemed appropriate. This longitudinal study, which was conducted over a period of one and a half years in undergraduate college in Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, investigated an ESL teacher, whom, after attending an insightful programme on the Reflective Approach, decided to use, as a means of his own professional development, one or more of the procedures available for reflective practice. This researcher gathered qualitative data about his reflective practice 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.

PROFILE OF THE SUBJECT

Teacher of present case (Teacher A) is an English teacher working in a degree college in the suburbs of Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, India. He has a Masters degree in English, and is interested in phonetics. He has not undergone any specific training for teaching English as a second language, but he has taught English for 29 years in an intermediate (10+2) and Degree College (undergraduate). He teaches mostly rural students, who are from vernacular medium of instruction. He has acted as a resource person at workshops on communication skills and English grammar for English teachers working in the suburbs of Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, India.. He has attended four refresher courses, one train-the-trainer programme, one career guidance-training programme and the Jawahar Knowledge Center (J.K.C.) Training programme. Currently, besides being a teacher of English, he is also working as a coordinator and trained mentor for J.K.C students.

When this researcher approached Teacher A for taking his consent to participate in her research, he readily gave his acceptance as he felt it to be an opportunity to improve his teaching skills. From among the strategies for reflection, he opted for audio-video recording and journal writing.

In the following section, the reflections of Teacher A are organized and analysed as follows:

- a) The teacher's beliefs about various aspects of ESL teaching, as ascertained by the researcher through an informal interview;
- b) His reflections through video recording with an analysis of the reflections;
- c) His reflections through journal writing with an analysis of the reflections; and
- d) An analysis of his post-reflection discussion with this researcher.

FINDINGS THROUGH AN INFORMAL INTERVIEW

In an informal interview conducted by the researcher, the teacher expressed his opinion on the need for reflective practice, use of bilingual teaching, his style of teaching, his impressions on teaching-learning process and ultimately expressed his willingness to adopt reflective practice in his day-to-day classroom teaching.

REFLECTIONS THROUGH VIDEO RECORDING

The teacher had one of his classes video recorded twice. It was a mixed class of 30 students, and the duration of the period was 50 minutes. Later, he played the cassette, viewed the recording twice, and reflected critically on his teaching. The teacher prepared a checklist through which he selected the aspects of teaching he wished to reflect upon while reviewing the recorded lesson.

During the first viewing of the video tape, the teacher took notes while observing his teaching on tape. He was able to identify the differences between what he had initially perceived his teaching to be on the day it was videotaped, and what he actually observed on the tape.

He made a systematic analysis of his teaching behaviour, sorted out the effective and ineffective teacher behaviour, and planned for a better classroom session for evaluation of the same aspect of teaching after a month.

The reflections indicate the teacher's perception of his gaining considerable improvement in his classroom performance. The teacher was able to make his class more interactive and student friendly. He could even learn to plan for the class systematically by giving supportive examples for the concept he taught, thus improving his subject presentation skills and time management skills. By proper use of the blackboard, he could even provide visual aid to his students. He feels that reflections through personal observation on video recording have helped him considerably in enhancing his professional competence.

REFLECTIONS THROUGH JOURNAL WRITING

Teacher A feels that reflective practice makes teachers think cautiously about their teaching process and helps them develop a scientific, realistic and result-oriented approach to teaching.

The teacher believes in using his students' mother tongue, though seldom, in his teaching. He believes in overt teaching of grammar and is tolerant towards errors in his students' speech and writing. He prefers e-learning to teacher fronted classrooms, and he believes that the internet is the best source of learning. The teacher shows interest in rule-based and function-based approach to teaching English which indicates that he still practices the conventional teacher-fronted classroom teaching.

It appears that, through video recording, the teacher has gained considerable improvement in his classroom performance. The teacher could make his class more interactive and student friendly, and thus could learn classroom management skill. He could

even learn to plan for the class systematically by giving supportive examples for the concept he taught; thus he could improve his subject presentation skills and time management skills. By proper use of the blackboard, he could provide better visual aid to his students. He is confident that reflecting through personal observation on video recording helps the teacher develop professionally.

POST-REFLECTION DISCUSSION

The researcher had a 15-minute discussion with Teacher A. When he was asked to respond on the importance of video recording, he expressed his satisfaction. He said that he would prefer video recording to journal writing, as the former helped not only in improving his teaching skills but also in assessing the learning capabilities of the students.

Video recording of classroom practice will help us a lot in improving our teaching skills.... We check whether there are lapses in the presentation, whether the topic is comprehensively covered. ... It helped me a lot in improving my presentation skills. Of the two means used; i.e., journal writing and video recording I think that video recording is more useful and feasible one for usage in our institutional setting because video recording will help us not only in improving our teaching skills but also in assessing the attention of the students. When the whole classroom activity is recorded we can watch later how the students are receiving and understanding our lesson; through their reactions and responses, their body language and expression we can understand to what extent they have received our teaching.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

USING VISUAL AIDS AND INVENTING NEW STRATEGIES

Reflective practice has led Teacher A to opt for skill-based teaching using the OHP, LCD, and VCD besides the traditional chalk and black. The teacher expressed a positive attitude towards the video recording of his classroom teaching. He feels that lessons on video provide holistic awareness about one's own teaching. He also says that, through recording, teachers can improve their teaching skills, which in turn helps in students' understanding:

Video recording of the classroom practice will help us a lot in improving our teaching skills. By seeing the recorded version we come to know how exactly we teach. ... Video recording can also help us in presentation skills.

The teacher feels that video recording is preferable to journal writing because the former will help teachers not only in improving their teaching skills but also in assessing the attention of the students: through their facial expressions, the teacher can assess the extent of learning taking place in his/ her classroom:

Of the two means used, i.e., journal writing and video recording I think that video recording is the more useful and feasible one for usage in our institutional setting because video recording will help us not only in improving our teaching skills but also in assessing the attention of the students. When the whole classroom activity is recorded we can watch later how the students are receiving and understanding our lesson; through their reactions and responses, their body language and expressions we can understand to what extent they have received our teaching.

Teacher A expressed his satisfaction adopting this new method of professional development and he wishes to use this method of video recording in future as well for making his classes more effective:

I would like to use these methods for professional development in future because I have the access and means to video record class room activities. We have every means to do it frequently. So, I would like to put this opportunity to good use.

After writing diaries for about one and a half year regularly after each class, he found that it is useful in improving the teacher's performance.

Journal writing indeed helps us. This gives us an opportunity to record our observations of the class and reflect upon. This recording helps us to improve on our performance. Also, over the years, it helps us to note and compare our performances at class level.

Analysis of the changes made in the lesson plans and the journal entries showed that reflective practice helped the teachers in this study make better decisions as regards their teaching, ways of dealing with the students' problems, visual presentations, the design of the activities and the way to record information on the lessons.

There has been an increasing interest in looking at teaching as making decisions and judgments to carry out intentions in a classroom. The teachers made changes in decisions only when they felt that the change would help to improve their teaching or enhance learning among students.

The data indicated that reflection enables the teachers to arrive at better decisions with regard to the use of visual aids and chalk out better strategies for their classroom teaching. For instance, reflection helped Teacher A realize that for teaching 'phrasal verbs' the conventional model of giving 'lists' and making the students form 'sentences on their own' would be more effective. Secondly, he learnt that teaching poetry should be done contextually along with discussing the place and period to which the poet belongs.

Furthermore, he was able to identify the shortcomings in his teaching and preparation: 'They would have done better had I given time indicators for each tense separately'. Through conscious reflection, he realized the significance of student-student and student- teacher interaction to make class more effective.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Teacher A's journal shows that, after an initial problem in a dialogue writing lesson, he introduced 'information-gap' exercises and allowed the students to discuss in pairs and fill in the gaps. While teaching communicative skills through group discussion, the teacher was found encouraging the team leaders to take care of the weak presenters in their respective teams, thus enabling his students to be active participants.

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF BELONGING WITH THE CLASSROOM

Reflective practice enabled the teacher participant to realize that making students feel at home in the classroom would greatly facilitate learning. The data show the teacher attempting to make his 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 A encouraged his students' active involvement in classroom activities by allowing them to respond freely and by asking them to frame their own sentences. Teacher A learned the importance of

interaction in the classroom through reflection, and used several activities. He asked simple content based declarative questions and made the students practice drill type exercises, thus creating a scope for student-teacher and student-student interaction.

SENSITIVITY TO LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES

The significant insight that the teacher derived from his 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. When his students found it difficult to distinguish between the phonemes of American and Indian varieties, teacher A realized the need to teach them the variants. Again, reflection enabled the teacher to realize the need to help his students understand the difference between 'pronunciation' and 'articulation'. While teaching grammar, Teacher A realized the difficulty of their students in learning through the inductive method and switched over to the well-accepted deductive method.

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 his students. Teacher A through video recording realized the need for using the blackboard properly so that it could serve the purpose better.

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 his students and that he realized that flexibility in attitude and action in classroom would make the students learn better. When the students could not grasp American and Indian phonemes, teacher A was found not to find fault with his students; he was positive towards his students and was trying to refine his own method of teaching.

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. The entries of Teacher A indicate that he made sincere attempts to create a learning environment where his students felt that they could experiment. For example, Teacher A gave, though within a conventional framework, assertive sentences and encouraged his students to think freely and frame other forms of sentences. Teacher A adopted inductive teaching of grammar and learned to avoid explicit descriptions, explanations, and technical terms.

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE SKILLS AND RESOURCES

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

TEACHERS' 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 teachers were enthusiastic and interested in trying this practice in their day-to day teaching. Teachers A stated that he was optimistic about the usefulness of reflective practice for his professional development. The Teacher participant was however, mildly uneasy about the "experiment" because it was something new to him and was even unsure of what they might discover during the process.

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 he had made in their personal and professional development. He perceived reflective practice as a process that would raise teachers' awareness of their practice as teachers, improve their teaching practice resulting in improved learner outcomes, and give him greater confidence in his own ability to organize their development.

However, he 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 he conceded that the gains far outweighed the demand. The second concern was with regard to the video-recording of teaching. Teacher A, who employed it, conceded that it was the "best method" of teacher development, but pointed out, at the same time, that it was too costly. Besides, the presence of the camera in the classroom, he pointed out, disturbed the teacher and the students. However, the participant found journal writing much less demanding and much more rewarding as it calls for transparency and sincerity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The reflections unmistakably point to changes taking place in the teacher's practices. He began to question his actions within the classes and became more critical and distanced towards his habitual practices. For instance, he found his usual way of lecturing in class ineffective and was moving towards the 'elicitation method'. He started using activities, different teaching materials, and the deductive method of teaching grammar. The impact of reflecting on his experiences varied among the teachers. This could be due either to personal differences in the perception and interpretation of what he had gained from the reflection or to their operating in different teaching contexts.

In this case under investigation, 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 his decisions seem to be inadequate or unsatisfactory to an outsider, the decisions can be rationalized for his pedagogical value in the teachers' own contexts.

The decisions the teacher made and the actions he took proved to be experiences of educational value for him. This happened because his reflection on, and inquiry into, his classroom practices took place not as a set of prescriptive skills but rather as a mind-set which Dewey (1933) described as a set of attitudes consisting of open-mindedness (*seeking*

alternatives), responsibility (*recognizing consequences*), and whole heartedness (*continual self-examination*).

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 the teacher's classroom practices as well as a forum for professional development over time. His reflective practices through journal writing or video recording created what Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 42) call "a new sense of meaning and significance" which brought a new sense of meaning and significance to his classroom works.

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

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

The reflective practice of the teacher tends to add force to the emerging "new scholarship" (Anderson & Herr 1999) which promises to alter the traditional knowledge base of teacher education consisting of generalizable knowledge about good teaching and good teacher produced by educational researchers who are outsiders to classroom life, and infuse it with "insider" knowledge.

Lastly, the implications of this research for ESL teacher education need to be pointed out. It is evident that reflective practice has considerable potential for the on-going professional development of teachers in general and ESL teachers in particular and that it is usable and will be valued by academic staff education systems.

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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