

A Study on the Reflective Teaching in English Language Teaching

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〈ABSTRACT〉

The purpose of this study is to show an introduction to reflective teaching. The purposes of reflective teaching are three-fold: (1) to expand one's understanding of the teaching-learning process; (2) to expand one's repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher; and (3) to enhance the quality of learning opportunities one is able to provide in language classrooms. Some general topic areas reflective teachers often explore are: (1) communication patterns in the classroom; (2) teacher decision making; (3) ways in which learners apply knowledge; (4) the affective climate of the classroom, (5) the instructional environment; and (6) a teacher's self-assessment of growth and development as a professional. In this paper I will show you four tools that should be useful to teachers interested in processes and procedures of reflective teaching: five-minute papers, formative teacher assessment surveys, retrospective field notes, and formative feedback from peers.

Key words: reflective teaching, communication patterns, teacher decision making, ways in which learners apply knowledge, the affective climate of the classroom, instructional environment, teacher's self-assessment

I. Introduction

Gaining teaching experience, participating in teacher-development courses, thinking about and discussing published scholarship, attending conferences, consulting colleagues, and getting to know students better are but some of the many ways that English language teachers can grow as professionals. This paper adds to these resources by introducing ways for teachers to look inward, both within themselves and within the courses they offer, to access information and inspiration about their

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efforts in language classrooms. This paper's purpose is to serve as an introduction to reflective teaching in the field of English language teaching.

II. Reflective teaching

1. Purposes of reflective teaching

The purposes of reflective teaching are three-fold: (1) to expand one's understanding of the teaching-learning process; (2) to expand one's repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher; and (3) to enhance the quality of learning opportunities one is able to provide in language classrooms. To these ends, those interested in reflective teaching take steps to deepen awareness of teaching and learning behaviors by working to improve their abilities to:

- Gather information on whatever is taking place within a language course
- Examine such information closely in an effort to better understand what they collect
- Identify anything puzzling about the teaching-learning process
- Build awareness and deepen understanding of current teaching and learning behaviors
- Locate and collaborate with others interested in processes of reflective teaching
- Pose and refine questions tied to one's teaching that are worth further exploration
- Locate resources that may help to clarify whatever questions are being posed
- Make informed changes in teaching, even if only modest changes
- Document changes in teaching-learning behaviors and responses
- Continue such efforts over time and share emerging insights with others

Richards and Lockhart(1994) define reflective teaching as an approach to second language(L2) classroom instruction in which current and prospective teachers “collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection” about their efforts in language courses.

2. Some topics explored by reflective teachers

Some general topic areas reflective teachers often explore are: (1) communication patterns in the classroom; (2) teacher decision making; (3) ways in which learners apply knowledge; (4) the affective climate of the classroom, (5) the instructional environment; and (6) a teacher's self-assessment of growth and development as a professional.

1) Communication patterns in the classroom

Teachers who are interested in patterns of communication in language classrooms often explore classroom management issues such as, Who is doing what during lessons? As the teacher, am I the sole source of power and control? Do learners sometimes have an impact on what takes place? Classroom communication patterns is one of the more common topics explored by reflective teachers. Most of us are interested in better understanding how communications between everyone present in the classroom may influence teaching and learning processes. For example, a teacher might examine recurring features within the instructional routine to better understand students' learning preferences. A teacher interested in communication patterns might ask if lessons usually begin and end in the same way. With video support, it is possible to divide a language lesson into a series of manageable segments for analysis. Multiple viewing reveals how lessons begin (openings which tend to be broadly focused), introductions to specific activities (setting things up, giving directions, clarifying, providing support for what is to follow), core lesson segments (individual activities that tend to reflect preplanned teaching decisions), ways in which the teacher and the class move from one activity to another (transitions between lesson segments), how lesson segments are sequenced (pre-, core-, and post-activity phases), how students respond to teacher feed- back, and the teacher's way of drawing a lesson to a close (calling for attention, assigning homework, previewing upcoming events). Most language lessons feature identifiable segments straddled by transitions from one segment to another. An interesting way to increase understanding of current ways of teaching is to gather information on how you structure, pace, and sequence lesson segments. By generating an audio or video recording of their teaching, for example, and then moving between macro and micro level examinations of whole lessons, reflective teachers can begin to better understand such features.

Close review of their ways of teaching leads many teachers to then consider ways of manipulating lesson segments, and some of the features embedded with them, to increased effect.

2) Lesson participant interactions

Another helpful topic to explore is to examine more specific patterns of learner-to-learner and teacher-to-learner(s) interactions in the classroom. Who speaks to whom, how often, in what sequence, and for how long? How are speaking turns distributed? Is the teacher the only one who controls their distribution? How are topics and shifts in topic development introduced? What are some of the ways in which learners take the floor as speakers in the midst of classroom communications? Are there learners who are relatively more or less participatory during particular lesson phases? Do patterns of communication in the classroom provide opportunities for learners to take the initiative?

3) Teacher decision making

This area for exploration includes a vast, and as yet poorly understood, dimension of language teaching. Acts of language teaching spring from sources within us that include our cognitive and emotional responses to external classroom events. Because all of us depend upon knowledge, values, and beliefs about teaching and learning in order to function as teachers in the classroom, our internal understandings and expectations contribute to our teaching decisions and behaviors. Specialists sketch an intriguing territory of teacher decision making which Richards and Lockhart(1994) divide into pre-, during-, and post-lesson decisions. In the case of during-lesson decisions, teachers have very little time to follow through on what they decide to do since the process unfolds in collaboration with-and in front of-a group of learners. At such moments, a teacher's decisions may seem nearly instantaneous although they are informed by the teacher's background and previous experiences.

Communication patterns in classrooms, lesson participant interactions, and teacher decision making are just a few of the topics often explored by reflective teachers. A more complete listing would include learning to identify and explore:

- The teacher's ways of giving instructions, responding to students' errors, providing feedback, using language, introducing new teaching strategies, encouraging

language use beyond the classroom, identifying and attending to learners' needs, working with reluctant learners, responding to students' errors

- Learners' ways of requesting clarifications, responding to feedback, applying knowledge, using language, interacting with their peers, responding to changes in teaching, using learning strategies

- Even more general topics such as the affective climate of the classroom, debilitating and facilitative anxiety, cultural considerations, the instructional environment, the physical setup of the classroom, textbooks and other resources, student-generated materials, resources beyond the classroom.

3. Some tools for reflective teaching and gathering information

As there are many topics to be explored by reflective teachers, there are also many different ways to gather information. I refer to ways of gathering information included in this section as tools in a positive sense since these are the "tools of the trade" that growing numbers of reflective teachers depend upon to explore the teaching-learning process. Teachers use different tools to access different sorts of information. By combining two or more tools over the span of an entire course, a teacher gains access to alternative vantage points. I discuss four tools that should be especially useful to teachers interested in becoming more involved in processes and procedures of reflective teaching. These tools are: five-minute papers, formative teacher assessment surveys, retrospective field notes, and formative feedback from peers.

1) Five-minute papers

Regular use of five-minute papers is a direct way of finding out how learners are perceiving and responding to our efforts as teachers. A few minutes before the end of the lesson, the teacher asks everyone to take out a sheet of paper and to write responses to one or two open-ended prompts such as: (1) What is the one thing you are likely to remember from today's class? (2) What was the most confusing concept we covered? (3) Is there anything you would like to know more about? (4) Is there anything you think I should be doing differently? Learner responses to such questions are especially useful if the teacher emphasizes that their purpose is to provide formative feedback on how the course is going. In ELT courses teachers are able to

ask students to compose five-minute papers in English. In settings where it is possible, students might be given the option of writing five-minute papers in their first language(s). Though five-minute papers take time away from the regular part of a lesson, using them at the end of class can better inform a teacher's post-lesson decisions. When introducing them for the first time, I explain to students that:

- Their names should not appear on their papers (their writings will be kept in confidence).
- When reading the papers I will not be looking at things like grammar, spelling, or vocabulary choice but only for the ideas they convey.
- As their teacher I will be reading for the purpose of improving my teaching in the course and not to evaluate their progress.

2) Formative teacher assessment surveys

A complement to five-minute papers is to schedule several surveys of students' perceptions of how well the course is going. These might be included in the course syllabus on the first day of class so students will know from the start that their impressions will be valued, when their impressions will be solicited, and what the survey will include. Some advantages of formative assessment surveys are that they can be clearly structured in advance, it is easy to keep students' comments anonymous, a lot of information can be gathered at one time, and the procedure may be carried out at regular intervals. One option is to implement such surveys three times during the span of an entire course. For example, I work in an ESL setting where the length of courses I teach is 15 weeks. I gather formative assessment information through student surveys after the third, eighth, and thirteenth weeks of class. A survey early in the course serves as a window into students' initial responses to the course. By the eighth week their impressions are even better informed since learners are beyond the midpoint and have had ample opportunities to develop understandings and impressions of both the course and my role as their teacher. These first two surveys are the ones that directly impact on my teaching decisions in the section of the course students are taking. Though I also find a student survey in the thirteenth week to be useful, at this point the course is coming to a close and students' comments will have more of an impact on future iterations of the course. When using formative teacher assessment surveys, a practical strategy is to place at

the very end of the course syllabus a copy of the first survey sheet to be collected. By positioning it at the end, students only have to detach the first survey sheet on the appropriate day to complete it and hand it in. I arrange the second survey sheet (eighth week) as the second-to-last page in the syllabus, with the third one(thirteenth week) immediately before the second.

3) Retrospective field notes

A less intrusive way to gather information on teaching is to document your understandings and explanations of what you are doing in the course through retrospective field notes. The word retrospective signals that such field notes are not generated during lessons but only after a lesson has finished. Since acts of teaching are complex and keep teachers incredibly busy, a teacher's field notes ideally should be generated immediately following the lesson. The idea is to find a private place to write after the lesson is over. It takes discipline to compose retrospective field notes on a regular basis and it is important to start writing soon after the end of a class (for example, within 30-60 minutes). If too much time elapses, our memories of classroom events quickly fade. The activity is similar to keeping a personal journal or diary, with the difference that retrospective field notes focus on course-related events. To produce them, the teacher writes about whatever is fresh in his or her memory. General guidelines are to try to keep track of classroom issues that seem relevant to the lesson recently completed and to treat field notes as an ethnographer treats raw data. Reflective teachers using this procedure save their notes over time, review them on a regular basis, and look for what their notes may reveal about recurring patterns. After you have reworked your notes by deleting or modifying anything that might be personally uncomfortable, a colleague might be invited to read them and discuss whatever concerns you about a course. Retrospective field notes can become a valuable source of information about one's understandings and a richly textured record of one's explanations of teaching over time. Some general ways to frame field notes are to respond to questions about yourself as a teacher, the teaching process, students in the class, the learning process, or anything tied to the dynamics of the lesson itself. A way to get started with retrospective field notes, and a useful task to return to whenever you have too little to write about, is to spend time generating a list of questions you might be able to use as writing prompts in the future.

4) Formative feedback from peers

There are many ways in which a teacher may collaborate with others to gain a deeper understanding and awareness of the teaching-learning process. I have previously mentioned that colleagues may be consulted when examining materials such as five-minute papers, retrospective field notes, or survey responses. A classic way of gaining access to formative feedback is to invite a peer, for example, another language teacher whose opinion you respect, to visit one or more of your classes. For purposes of reflective teaching, such visits should be planned to be different from the kinds of observations carried out by supervisors(Murphy, 1992).

In setting up a peer's non-supervisory visit to the classroom, it is important to discuss and clarify the visitor's purpose in advance. Any potential visitor will have preconceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about what constitutes legitimate purposes for visiting another teacher's class. Some of these attitudes and beliefs may be compatible with your own, and others may not be. Along with many other educators, Fanselow(1988) points out that the primary purpose for observing another person teaching is to gather descriptive information on what takes place during the lesson. This purpose is crucially important. Afterward, any information gathered may be examined, analyzed, discussed, or even ignored, but if some sort of record of what took place is never produced, meaningful discussions of teaching are less likely. A starting point to prepare for a classroom visit from a peer is for both parties to be aware of the importance of staying attentive, interested in the lesson, and open-minded. Though some visitors may be able to gather useful information by merely observing what takes place, visitor's recollections are more reliable and tend to be more helpful as starting points for discussion once the lesson is over if the visitor has written things down. When clarifying the purpose for a peer visit, I emphasize any interest in engaging in discussions of teaching that are tied to descriptive information the visitor is able to gather during the lesson.

4. Two underlying concerns

It is important to acknowledge two fundamental challenges facing those interested in processes of reflective teaching: the search for multiple perspectives, and the question of learner involvement.

1) The search for multiple perspectives

To become more involved in processes of reflective teaching, a language teacher needs to ask a question of how I can begin to see and examine my classroom efforts so that others might be able to see and examine them? Access to multiple perspectives makes it more likely that we will attain deeper understanding of our work. The search for multiple perspectives relates to two essential stages of reflective teaching: gathering information (the data collection stage) and making sense of what we find (the interpretation stage). In the first stage, reflective teachers find ways of gathering information on teaching and learning that include outsider perspectives. As a result of our immersion within the process of language teaching, we are often too close to recognize our strengths and weaknesses. By way of illustration, most of us are somewhat surprised the first time we view a video recording of our teaching. In response to a video recording, we might notice ourselves thinking such things as: “Oh, my voice sounds terrible! That’s not what I sound like.” “Is that what I really look like?” “Why am I walking around so much(or so little)?” “No wonder students are having trouble following my directions;I really wasn’t very clear.” A video recording of teaching-in-action brings to the fore evidence of how others may view us. Recordings sometimes surprise us because they are serving as an estrangement device. An estrangement device is any tool we might use to gain an outsider’s perspective on what we may be doing in the classroom. Anthropologists refer to such a vantage point as an *etic* perspective.

To complement the inclusion of etic perspectives within the reflective teaching process, it is useful to gather information from course participants as well. Because learners are participants in the process, their vantage points represent *emic* perspectives. Just as an anthropologist might search for ways to learn about the perceptions and understandings of the members of another culture, reflective teachers depend upon learners’ perceptions and understandings. Freeman(1998) explains the importance of the search for multiple perspectives succinctly: etic perspectives provide us with information on “what outsiders see” while emic perspectives provide information on “what insiders know”.

The need for multiple perspectives challenges reflective teachers to find ways of gathering information on teaching-learning processes not only through their own perceptions and understandings, but also through those of learners who are participating in the course, and through colleagues’ perceptions.

2) The question of learner involvement

In connection with emic perspectives, a second set of questions for reflective teachers to ask is, Do I want to involve learners in my efforts as a reflective teacher, and if so, to what degree? There are many ways to collect information about what goes on within courses we teach. A distinction we can make is between ways that are “less intrusive” as opposed to those that are relatively “more intrusive” with respect to their potential impacts on learners’ classroom experiences. Less intrusive means of gathering information depend upon little or no involvement from learners. Teachers interested in less intrusive means do their best to avoid direct impact on inside-the-classroom events. For instance, a teacher might gather information about teaching on a daily basis but only after the completion of individual lessons. To do so, some teachers keep private teaching journals of which learners remain unaware. Other non-intrusive options are, after a lesson has ended, to compose field notes of what happened inside the classroom only, or to look back on completed lessons through other retrospective procedures such as “lesson reporting.” (A lesson report is similar to a lesson plan but with the following twist: lesson reports are generated following, not preceding, a lesson. By composing, saving, and reviewing them over time, a teacher is able to produce a substantive record of teaching that can be shared and discussed with others.) Through adoption of such non intrusive procedures it is possible for teachers to gain considerable information about the teaching process without involving learners.

Even with less intrusive procedures, reflective teachers are able to incorporate multiple perspectives into their efforts by inviting colleagues whose opinions they respect to review and discuss whatever information the teacher is able to gather from the classroom. Two or more teachers might collaborate to review a video or audio recording of teaching, transcripts of lesson segments, journal entries, samples of student work, or students’ responses to a survey questionnaire on how the course is going. Some of these options feature learner participation to some degree. A teacher might, for example, arrange for a lesson to be videotaped for later review. If a video camera is in the room, the teacher has already taken a step in the direction of involving learners. The presence of any recording device in a classroom inevitably has some impact on lesson events. Of course, as a classroom teacher, you can lessen such impacts by taking steps ahead of time to familiarize students with whatever

might be the procedure you would like to follow. You can: (1) discuss what you are planning to do, (2) ask for learners' permissions, (3) take time at an earlier point in the course to introduce whatever the procedure or recording device might be, and/or (4) include it as a part of normal classroom routine. In the example of video cameras, some suggestions are to work with as small a camera as possible, position it in the back of the room-or at least out of students' direct lines of vision-and involve one or more members of the class in its operation. There are many approaches to second language instruction that already feature recording devices as a standard part of the teaching routine. In such classrooms, learners may perceive a teacher's use of recording equipment as perfectly normal and part of what they have already come to anticipate from the course. The point is to be aware of the potential impacts of such procedures and to make informed decisions on what you, your colleagues, and your students might consider to be (un)acceptable levels of learner involvement in reflective teaching procedures.

III. Conclusion

The purposes of reflective teaching are three-fold: (1) to expand one's understanding of the teaching-learning process; (2) to expand one's repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher; and (3) to enhance the quality of learning opportunities one is able to provide in language classrooms.

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영어교육에서 탐구적 교수학습에 관한 연구

이 혜 경

공주교육대학교

본 연구의 목적은 영어를 가르치는 교사로서 전문적 발전을 위한 다양한 활동중 탐구적인 교수학습 활동에 대해 살펴보는 것이다. 탐구적 교수학습의 목적은 가르치고 배우는 과정을 더 잘 이해하고, 영어교사로서의 전략 방법 종류를 넓히며, 영어 교실에서 제공되는 배움의 질을 향상시키는 것인데, 이러한 탐구적 교수학습 활동의 일반적 주제는 교실에서의 의사소통 유형, 교사의 결정, 학습자가 지식을 적용시키는 방법, 교실에 영향을 주는 분위기, 교육적인 분위기, 그리고 교사가 전문가로서 개발하고 성장하려는 스스로의 평가 등이다. 또한 탐구적인 교수학습을 위한 도구와 정보수집 방법에는 5분쪽지, 교사 평가 조사서, 현장회고 메모, 동료로부터의 피드백 등이 있다.

주제어: 탐구적 교수학습, 의사소통 유형, 교사의 결정, 학습자의 지식 적용 방법, 교실 분위기, 교육적 분위기, 교사 자신의 평가