

Observation as a Reflective Model for Novice and Experienced Teachers to Enhance Effective Teaching

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Abstract:

Teaching is sometimes taken for granted and not a means for growing pedagogically in the field. EFL and ESL teachers, most definitely, bring to class personal styles, personal beliefs and even personal assumptions of how to undertake their teaching practices with a top-down process which is fuelled by an instructional methodology dish out by managers. Teacher education as an alternative blueprint; however, attempts to bring about pedagogical development through enhancing teachers' ability to observe, reflect upon and refine their own instructional methodology. As evidence indicates, this paper is to highlight the necessity for novice as well as experienced teachers to visualise through different eyes the picture of classroom environment and practices. Hereby, this awareness develops professional growth, which allows these teachers to make appropriate judgements and decisions. In this line of thought, peer observation as an investigative procedure, if sustained by the bases and principles of an approach of teaching, can trigger a more predictable and comprehensive formulation and enactment of teaching practices that can be undertaken by a teacher as a reflective practitioner. In down to earth terms, when the target of an observation, is viewed as an exploratory task meant for professional development, the observer who is a newly recruited teacher can broaden, or shape new ways of teaching which would enable him to reset and to refine emphatically his teaching practices and his principles of tackling the job of teaching with more commitment, diligence and devotion.

Key words: novice teachers, experienced teachers, observation as reflective model, effective teaching

Teacher Education Development Defined

The conception of TED as a reflective process is the one in which every aspect and stage of teacher education experience becomes open to critical examination and reconsideration. It asks teachers to observe themselves, collect data about their own classrooms and their roles, and to use the data as a basis for self-evaluation, and for change. In other words, TED encourages teachers to benefit from the procedures of classroom research and self-reflection to understand better themselves and what is happening in their own classrooms in order to gain a renewed sense of purpose and direction (Ourghi 2002).

Teachers who find it hard to carry on their routinised ways of teaching and would like to change thoroughly their teaching practices, by trying new ideas or changing the ways they use old ones, not only they improve their own performance, but also they learn more about teaching and about themselves. The concept of teacher education development can be introduced while teachers attend in-service training to both prospective and experienced teachers. Ely suggests that while in teacher training,

Teachers learn clearly defined skills and behaviours appropriate to second language instruction...teacher development is concerned with preparing teachers for the exigencies of unforeseen future teaching situation. It attempts to bring about pedagogical development through heightening teachers' ability to observe, reflect upon, and modify their own instructional patterns. (Ely 1994, 336)

Ely discusses the new language teaching/ learning paradigm in which teachers whether prospective or experienced can be involved and which entice them to change their assumptions

and their attitudes of teaching for better and for improvement.

Development for Prospective and Experienced Teachers

Teacher development can be a career-long process which may be undertaken by experienced teachers as well as prospective ones. If separated from training, development means something distinct and unusual, and that people who have little or no experience of teaching are not ready with the issues it raises. Yet, this is a misrepresentation of the nature of teacher development, which is a reflective way of approaching whatever it is that teachers are doing at whatever level of experience they are doing it. The focus of teacher education is extended from a narrowly based training model towards a broader approach in which developmental insights are learned alongside classroom teaching skills. Henceforth, it is the role of teacher educators to design and implement teacher education programmes both at pre-service and in-service levels. Pennington argues:

viewing teaching as a profession provides a motivation for continuous career growth, and that teacher educators have a responsibility to prepare teachers right from the start to adopt a development perspective. (Pennington 1990, 134)

This is to say that this developmental perspective aims at setting programmes which will have, as goals, the development of a set of classroom skills and knowledge. More importantly, to impel teachers to develop their own pedagogical belief system for both novice teachers at the level of university and, of course, for tenured and experienced teachers, who have worked for a given period of time as fulltime teachers at the level of a secondary school. Thus, teacher preparation moves beyond training in the narrow sense to enabling a teacher to reflect upon any situation rather than training for a specification.

Teacher Development Defined

The word Development is definitely related to the widely known term “training”; and both are complementary in the sense of achieving an efficient and effective level of skills and knowledge in the teaching of a language. Development means, “the empowerment of the teacher, in the sense of endowing him with the status of an autonomous professional” (Benmoussat 2003, 258) This implies that conception of Teacher Education Development is not one-off, but goes along and extend to the entire career of a teacher.

Development is a movement towards change and growth. It is also the process of becoming the best kind of teacher that a teacher can be (Underhill: 1986). Going through this process requires special motivation questions from the teacher such as:

- How can I become a better teacher?
- How can I enjoy my teaching more?
- How can I feel that I am helping learning?

Development, henceforth, has to be bottom-up, i.e. it is to be generated by the teacher himself not dished out by managers according to their own view of what development teachers need. A professional development wherein teachers’ decisions are primarily directed by impulse or by convention without coming to a conscious decision that they are the right things to do or, they are doing things that they have consciously decided they want to be doing, would probably lead to a routinised way of teaching. Contrariwise teacher education development is an important way for teachers of acknowledging their own inner needs and desires and of making their experiences more worthwhile. It is, in fact, about the inner world of responses that teachers make to the outer-world of the classroom. Underhill, quoted in Head and Taylor (1997, 5) defines TED as:

a process of becoming increasingly aware of the quality of the learning atmosphere we create, and as a result becoming more able to make creative moment by moment choices about how

we are affecting our learners through our personal behaviour. (1991, 2)

Likewise, Benmoussat (2003) argues

that development is shaped as a distinct concept in the teacher's thinking about learning. It is a helpful and insightful approach to explore the process involved in the teaching / learning mechanism in order to develop and improve the teacher's professional competence. (Benmoussat 2003, 229).

TED is also defined as a way of learning which complementary to training, and which is motivated by teacher's own questionings of who they are and what they do, rather than by any external training agenda. Head and Taylor posit that:

Teacher development draws on the teacher's own inner resource for change. It is centred on personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and of what influences the change process. It builds on the past, because recognizing how past experiences have not been developmental helps identify opportunities for change in the present and the future. It also draws on the present, in encouraging a fuller awareness of the kind of teacher you are known of other people's responses to you. It is a self-reflective process because it is through questioning old habit that alternative ways of being and doing are able to emerge. Head and Taylor(1997, 2).

Current definitions of teacher education development also highlight that it is a process whereby teachers refine and develop knowledge of their subject, enhance their skills in teaching it, and evolve a positive teaching style which is able to adapt as they judge changing circumstances and situations throughout their teaching career. (Tricia Hedge 1996).

Teacher development impels teachers to stir their competences such as skills, experience, knowledge and get from them an impetus that would change their views on teaching. This change is based upon past experiences and aims at

developing and improving their professional competence.

Reflection the Key Concept of TED

Teachers, who launch themselves in the trend of reflection, become aware of their behavioural ways of teaching. This will help them to connect their actions to their learners' by collecting data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and teaching practices, for self-evaluation and for change. By doing this, they can move beyond routinised responses to classroom situations and can also attain a higher level of awareness.

In this respect, the process of reflection denotes by assertion that teachers who get involved in this trend become aware of their jobs' ends and purposes relatively to the changes they generate in their teaching practices. This means that this can be considered as the process of understanding and improving one's own teaching experience. It can be also stated that this process of learning to teach continues throughout a teacher's entire career and whatever the implemented approach is, teachers learn how to formulate the purposes and ends of their work, examine their values and assumptions and therefore generate new knowledge about teaching. Writing in the same context Webb pointed out that:

“If we are to become more effective teachers, we need to become more reflective teachers. To be reflective we need to articulate out theories of learning, critically examine and them replace those parts which we suspect or, better still, can show do not work”. (1996, 30)

When teachers are engaged in reflection on teaching they become monitors of their teaching practices which they can alter whenever the change appears to be profitable for their learners. This involvement in reflective teaching provides teachers with data and with procedures which can shape or structure myriad of activities which, in turn, generally lead to

achievable objectives. Likewise, Pennington posits that

the term reflective teaching has come to signify a movement in teacher education, in which students teachers or working teachers analyze their own practice and its underlying basis, and then consider alternative means for achieving their ends. (1992, 48)

She goes on writing

The use of the term reflection in the context of instruction can be interpreted in the sense of (1) thoughtful consideration, as well as in the sense of (2) mirroring, symbolizing or representing (ibid).

Further, this approach is teacher initiated and directed, rather than imposed from elsewhere because it involves instructors observing themselves, collecting data for self-evaluation and for change and for professional growth. When teachers develop a reflective practice over a long period of time at different levels of action, observation, analysis and planning, they would be able to articulate their own practical theories, critically examine them, compare them with alternative theories and revise them. Griffiths and Tann (1992). However, what is worth noting, is that reflection can be exerted either during the performance of a lesson in the classroom setting, or outside of it. Hereby, many writers have emphatically theorised two distinctive temporal dimensions of reflection.

Reflection-in-action

Teachers who have attained a technical expertise in shaping and refining their practices, are mainly the ones who can reflect immediately and automatically while they are acting .Their actions are spontaneous, intuitive reactions to problems that may arise while a lesson is in progress. What they do, in fact, is to combine the skill of making on-the-spot decision with a reflective approach, to change the course of the lesson, to see

what influenced it and to set appropriate solutions. In this way, they engage themselves in a process of self-directed learning based on personal experience. Schon argues:

There is some puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further action. It is this entire process of reflection-in-action which is central to the art by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. (1983, 50)

According to Schon reflection in action questions the assumptions underlying the routine that has been disrupted: 'we think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may in the process, restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena or ways of framing problems' (Schon 1987, 28) This is to say that with the rising of the problem, the teacher recalls his past experience so as to set up alternative practices which can easily give way to a better involvement of learners.

Reflection on action

It is called mirroring experience. (Ur 1991) states that reflective teaching is a personal reflection. Self-inquiry and critical thinking can help teachers in re-considering how their teaching process is guided and re-evaluating their planning and their action sources. It helps raise awareness of what should be done later to avoid weaknesses. Thus, such practice can be attained by recalling own experiences in a collaborative way by meetings and discussions with a colleague or some colleagues to enlighten ambiguities through suggestions and providing solutions. This implies that this reflective dimension can happen at any time during or after the teacher's work day, as a

result, the existing plans may be reformulated or eventually, completely modified.

Investigative Procedures in Classroom Practice

When embracing the concept of reflective teaching, committed teachers do often internalize the skills to change their teaching and become better at teaching over time. This commitment enhances them to take a responsibility for their own professional development, which is the key note of the idea of the reflective teacher. Perhaps, the most convenient time for teachers to start being responsible is when they carry out this teaching with some developmental activities which underlie change towards betterment of the teaching / learning process.

To attain this level of education, Liston and Zeichner laid an emphasis on three key features of reflective teaching:

- A reflective teacher takes responsibility for his own professional development.
- A reflective teacher is aware of and questions the assumptions and values s/he brings to teaching.
- A reflective teacher examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice. (Liston & Zeichner 1991, 36)

The third key feature of reflective teaching is the one which consists of adapting developmental insights and translating them into practical developmental tools, making decision on the practice of each. These are, in fact, investigative procedures which the reflective teacher implements relying on himself feedback and on learner's feedback so as to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice. These procedures can be undertaken by teachers either individually or collaboratively. In Algeria, teachers at the level of secondary school can easily use these developmental activities to achieve a change and a professional growth. These include teaching journals, lesson reports, surveys and questionnaires, peer observation and action research.

Advocators and pedagogues insist on investigative procedures to be inserted in teaching practices and the opportunities for critical reflection to improve their teaching. Their works include a variety of checklists and self analysis sheets that allow teachers to observe their teaching in retrospect and make continuous progress. These pedagogues are: Nunan (1988, 1990), Allright and Bailey (1990, 1994); Richard and Lockhart (1996), Freeman and Richard (1996), and Head & Taylor (1997). Teachers who set off embracing the ongoing process of reflection start by identifying and exploring their own practices and underlying beliefs. To manage this, they should consider the following questions:

Journals Writing

Teachers collect all the events which occur within the classroom practices and mention them in a diary. The gathered events will serve the teacher to make reflection upon what change in classroom practices will appear. Keeping a journal helps the teachers achieve a better classroom management and brings in a deeper understanding of the teaching / learning process. Putting a journal can also be of great importance in collaborative teaching in the sense that it helps teachers meet, discuss and exchange ideas when they use one another journals. The advantages of collaborative journal are varied. It can provide access to covert variables influencing the customary ways of teaching, and it also helps to generate questions and hypotheses for eventual action.

Lesson Report

The main aspects of the lesson are generally gathered in the lesson report. It is, in fact, a structured inventory wherein the teacher describes all the features of his lesson. The aim of lesson report is to provide the teacher with the procedure which he will adopt in order to organize the features of the lesson for a later practice. Timing is an important aspect since the teacher

mentions the timing of each part of the lesson in the lesson report. Effectiveness is another feature of lesson report; it is a thorough description of what actually happened from the teacher's point of view. Contrariwise, a lesson plan gives a full description of each part of the lesson, the teacher will come across and wherein expected learners abilities are stated.

Doing Peer Observation

Peer observation is viewed as a collaborative non-judgemental process involving two or more peers who mutually benefit from the dialogue that takes place. "Teaching" is used in its broadest sense to encompass the design of curricula and the planning of assessment as well as all activities that happen in the classroom. It also includes pedagogic activities that make use of the virtual learning environment. The variety of our pedagogic practice requires a flexible approach to its observation and review, as much learning (both staff and student) happens in different spaces other than the traditional classroom setting. It is anticipated that staff will work reciprocally in pairs when engaging in POLT. A reciprocal approach means that each person takes his or her turn in observing and subsequently facilitating a dialogue about the area of pedagogic practice identified for observation and review. The intention is that within this dialogue questions are asked to stimulate reflection and discussion, and where appropriate, to provide each other with feedback. It is important to remember it is not just a one way process, often those who are observing learn just as much as the staff member who is being observed. Our process does not exclude the role of a developmental model of peer supported review, particularly for staff new to teaching. In a developmental model peers work together, but one is more experienced than the other and the intention is to develop the lesser experienced individual's teaching practice. It is anticipated that staff will work reciprocally in pairs when engaging in POLT.

Observation should not be seen as a replacement to student evaluation. Students can reliably comment on a number of aspects of course delivery, not only because they are the intended participants in the teaching learning process but they also are involved in all sections of the paper. Nevertheless, with careful preparation, colleagues can provide an alternative perspective to that given by students. Unfortunately, poor planning and the involvement of uninformed peers can cause reliability problems.

These guidelines are designed to assist university teachers to obtain systematic feedback from

A common element in the peer review process is the observation of teaching. Peer their colleague on aspects of their teaching. Peer observation is likely to be of greatest benefit if the arrangement is a reciprocal one. A key principle of peer observation is that the person who asks for and receives the feedback must remain in control of the process of peer observation. Constructive feedback at all stages is therefore paramount. Below are some suggestions for setting up a peer observation agreement. In addition, an organising framework is provided to assist with the observation.

The Observation

The observer should sit in an unobtrusive position but where they have a good view of everything that takes place. If agreed, the lecturer should introduce the observer but avoid further comment which may alter the behaviour of the students. A range of techniques are available for note making (e.g. a holistic approach followed by a narrative report, an analytical approach that uses a checklist or rating form, videotaping etc).

Whatever technique you use it is important to remain descriptive rather than judgmental. The following example illustrates how a judgmental observation can be rephrased in a way that is both descriptive and specific.

The Follow-Up Meeting:

A 'debriefing' meeting should take place as soon as possible after the class session. Ideally, this should take place somewhere neutral. It is important that this session is both enjoyable and constructive and allows plenty of input from the teacher. You may wish to begin by allocating time for the teacher to reflect on how the class went before the observer comments or makes suggestions. Appendix D provides some suggested questions to stimulate reflection. Ensure that the feedback is constructive

Move beyond comments about the legibility, audibility or complaints about students to deal with broader issues. Allow time (either in the follow-up meeting or subsequently) to plan improvements.

When providing feedback to the teacher, it is important to follow the principles of constructive criticism. Constructive criticism is descriptive and specific; it focuses on the behavior rather than on the person and it is directed toward behaviour that a person can change. Constructive criticism also is affirming in the sense that achievements and efforts toward change should be acknowledged, and suggestions for change should be made in a positive way. When giving constructive criticism one should always check to insure clear communication -- verify that the receiver understands exactly what you are talking about.

Peer observation form:

To increase the reliability of peer observations, observers must try to focus on the same elements of teaching. This form, based on generic dimensions of instruction, is intended to be used as a framework for the observation. The observers should discuss these categories prior to their classroom visits to insure that they are in agreement about the definitions and the meaning of the 'cue questions' under each category. This form is not intended to function as a checklist, but rather as an organizing

framework for the observation itself and the (jointly-written) report on the observation. The cueing questions are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive; depending upon the course and the teaching method, some questions may not apply or additional questions might be necessary. The observation team and the teacher being observed should decide if modifications are required. In practice, the observers should look for specific evidence of performance under each category, with the understanding that they may not be able to observe all of these elements in the two classes they visit. Some of these questions relate to course materials that the observations teams should obtain from the instructor.

In order to be most effective, teachers must know their students and be able to select from a broad repertoire of effective practices in order to design lessons that will meet their students' needs. In order to do this, teachers work together and use a variety of strategies to understand their students' strengths and challenges. Once firmly grounded in a deep knowledge of their students, collaboration provides a space for teachers to be active learners. They are able to examine and refine their practice continually by reading professional articles, observing their peers, discussing important questions of equity, and using evidence of student learning to reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction.

Effective teachers have a solid understanding of grade level standards and of literacy development—an understanding that includes a broader recognition of why and how these skills are important for all students. Based on this knowledge, teacher teams set clear goals for student learning and break those goals down into monthly and weekly objectives in order to ensure that every lesson and activity is connected to a larger purpose while still holding specific student outcomes in mind. They use a range of thoughtfully selected assessments to monitor student learning. In order to ensure that their high expectations are shared and concrete, teachers collectively

define a standard of rigor and work together to select or design common ways of checking to see whether students have mastered the skills and standards that they have taught. They then carefully examine those results in order to inform their own learning and use these results to guide long-term planning. In other words effective teaching is summarised in three points:

Look Back: Teachers examine student work and reflect on how their teaching helped or hindered students' mastery of a particular skill or standard.

Look Forward: Informed by their students' rate of progress toward goals, teachers look at what is coming up in their curriculum, adjust their long term plans, and select a focus for their work that week.

Plan: They work together to plan a lesson or series of lessons focused around a particular skill or standard, at times seeking to utilize key teaching strategies and practices that are the focus of the team's professional learning.

Conclusion

Language has been rightly cited as a principal tool for learning when the language of education is not the mother tongue, the role of the teacher as a facilitator of these learning demands that the teacher possesses specific foreign language teaching competencies, skills and a high sense of personal linguistic proficiency in the language of education. However, when language teachers are also learners of that language, and not native speakers, the responsibility placed on language teaching education programmes is to transform the process of language teacher preparation into a never-ending quest for quality. Thus, language teachers become alert to review their teaching techniques and take initiatives that trigger betterment in achieving pedagogical and learning objectives.

The professional meetings of teachers, such as

seminars, study days and the like can be of great prominence for both experienced and novice teachers. What is worthy with these professional meetings is that they can be thought-provoking, especially when the exchange of teaching practices techniques and methodologies is prevalent. In this respect, in workshops experienced teachers display their knowledge of content (techniques and methodologies of the teaching skills) and knowledge of pedagogy. However, novice teachers take profit from it and may be, change thoroughly, their attitudes and views on teaching accordingly. These facts can engender a significant diversion to teacher education development; the concept towards which many teachers around the world are moving by exploring new procedures and strategies and implement them in their teaching practices. In addition to this, the enhancement can be towards developing attitudes that would lead to open doors of a variety of teaching perspectives.

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