

Reflective teaching and teacher education contributions from teacher training

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ABSTRACT: The argument in this paper is that insights from teacher thinking have contributed a great deal to the notion of reflective teaching in teacher education. After clarifying some of the definitions of reflection as they are revealed in the literature, the area of teacher thinking is brought into the topic by highlighting the importance of understanding the way teachers think about their work. In the final section of the paper suggestions about some procedures that could foster teachers' reflection on their practices are presented.

RESUMO: As contribuições da área de conhecimento que se ocupa do pensamento do professor são relacionadas com o movimento que apregoa uma abordagem reflexiva na formação de futuros profissionais. Algumas definições de reflexão encontradas na literatura se encaixam com idéias oriundas de estudos sobre pensamento do professor, que enfatizam a necessidade de se considerar o modo como este vê o seu trabalho. Na parte final do trabalho são apresentadas sugestões de procedimentos que podem levar à reflexão.

KEYWORDS: Teacher thinking, English language teaching, professional development.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Pensamento do professor, ensino de inglês, desenvolvimento profissional .

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

This paper was originally conceived as a talk given to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers on the theme of *Teacher development: reflections about the learning process*. I confess I had to think carefully about how to interpret this title, given its ambiguity. It could either mean that as part of their development teachers could reflect on the language learning process (by focusing on their students or themselves), or it could mean that we would be invited to reflect on the learning process embedded in teacher development, that is, how teachers develop their expertise in the course of their experience as teachers. Considering that these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, I understood the organizers had left the ambiguity on purpose. Therefore, I decided to focus on the former, seeing it as a means to achieve the latter - arguing, as it were, that teacher development proceeds through reflection on language learning processes.

This paper is organized into three sections. First, I will discuss different understandings of 'reflection', then, I will bring in notions from teacher thinking which have given strength to the need to focus on reflection in teacher education, and mention how ELT has been incorporating these ideas. Finally, I will suggest some ideas of how ELT teachers can reflect more systematically, by focusing on the language learning process of their students or their own.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF REFLECTION

The 90's is the decade of reflection in teacher education. Nowadays nobody addressing the topic of teacher education can claim ignorance of this concept. However, the meanings of reflection are not clear-cut although, basically, reflection has been contrasted with routine. "Dewey (1933) characterizes reflection as a specialized form of thinking. It stems from doubt and perplexity felt in a directly experienced situation and leads to purposeful inquiry and problem resolution " (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988: 2).

Nevertheless, there is such a variety of uses for this word that it is imperative to specify what one really means when referring to

reflection. The term has been hijacked by different quarters, ranging from those who advocate it on grounds of moral responsibility to those who favour technical effectiveness, as Zeichner (1994) warns us in his paper.

In the ELT field it has been suggested that both pre-service and in-service courses should adopt reflective approaches (Wallace, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1994), although there have been doubts whether pre-service teachers can actually carry out reflection during the course of their "training", or even if "training" and reflection are compatible.

The fact is that researchers, teacher educators or writers in general areas have incorporated their own particular notions of reflection. Attempts to define reflection in teacher education have focused on the following dimensions:

a) the moment of reflection (before, during or after action)

Schön's (1983) notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action have been particularly influential in definitions that distinguish the moments of reflection. For teachers they correspond to interaction with students (reflection-in-action) and planning and post-lesson thoughts (reflection-on-action). The basic parameter here, as Court (1988) has addressed, is one of time. Reflection-on-action would occur after the fact. More difficult is to identify moments of reflection-in-action, which happen when people are "in the thick of things" and take a momentary "time out" to reflect on a problem.

b) the content of reflection

Authors in this area (e.g. van Manen, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) make distinctions between reflecting about teaching and reflecting about the social conditions which influence one's teaching. This probably refers more directly to the sociology of education, and is connected with the levels of reflection, which will be addressed shortly.

c) the mode of reflection

This refers to reflection as a private activity to be pursued in isolation by individual teachers and reflection as a social practice and

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

public activity involving communities of teachers. Teachers interested in reflecting more systematically on their teaching would have to consider whether they will do it individually or collectively. Authors sympathetic to this differentiation are Clandinin et al. (1993); Lucas (1988 (apud Zeichner, 1994).

d) depth and speed of reflection

This is a distinction made by Griffiths and Tann (1992, apud Zeichner, 1994), whose typology includes:

- rapid reflection — instinctive and immediate
- repair — habitual, pause for thought, fast, on the spot
- review — time out to reassess over hours and days
- research — systematic, sharply focused, over weeks or months
- re-theorising and reformulating — abstract, rigorous, clearly formulated, over months or years

e) levels of reflection

Following Habermas' theory of cognitive interests, three levels have been identified: technical, practical and critical. The technical level reveals a concern with efficiency and effectiveness of the means used to attain ends which are accepted as given; the practical reflection is concerned with the assessment of educational goals and how they are achieved by the learners, the critical reflection considers the worth of educational goals, how well they are being accomplished and who is benefiting from the successful accomplishment of those ends.

Zeichner (1994) wants us to consider whether we should take a neutral stance towards all these possibilities, or whether reflection should be a guided process, in which teachers are encouraged to consider not only the immediate context of the classroom but also analyze the implications of their teaching. In a paper in collaboration with Tabachnick (1991, p. 2) they say:

In some extreme cases, the impression is given that as long as teachers reflect about something, in some manner, whatever they decide to do is all right since they have reflected about it.

Despite the calls for moral deliberation about reflection, it seems that not all dimensions described above are taken into account by those who advocate a reflective approach to teaching. For instance, teacher education programs that embrace reflective practice usually have one of the following aims (cf. Calderhead & Gates, 1993:3), which reveal how reflection is in fact understood:

- to enable teachers to analyze, discuss, evaluate and change their own practice, adopting an analytical approach towards teaching;
- to foster teachers' appreciation of the social and political contexts in which they work, helping teachers to recognize that teaching is socially and politically situated and that the teacher's task involves an appreciation and analysis of that context;
- to enable teachers to appraise the moral and ethical issues implicit in classroom practices, including the critical examination of their own beliefs about good teaching;
- to encourage teachers to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth and to acquire some degree of professional autonomy;
- to facilitate teachers' development of their own theories of educational practice, understanding and developing a principled basis for their own classroom work;
- to empower teachers so that they may better influence future directions in education and take a more active role in educational decision-making.

Although the list above comprises the different levels postulated before, most of them refer to the technical and practical dimensions of reflection and not the critical one.

The need to consider the validity of these ideas to different contexts was pointed out by Zeichner (1994), who also provides us with an overview of the traditions of reflective practice in the U.S. with the cautionary note that "We need to be real careful about importing theories developed in one cultural context into another without

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

sensitivity to the cultural conditions in both situations”. (p. 15). He identified the following traditions:

- Academic tradition — reflection about subject matter and the representation and translation of that subject matter knowledge to promote student understanding.
- Social-efficiency tradition — reflection about how well teachers’ practice matches what research says they should be doing.
- Developmentalist tradition — reflection about students, their thinking and understandings, their interests and their developmental growth
- Social-reconstructionist tradition — reflection is viewed as a political act which either contributes toward or hinders the realization of a more just and humane society.
- Generic tradition — reflection on teaching in general, without much comment about what specifically this reflection should be focused on, the criteria that should be used to evaluate the quality of the reflection, or the degree to which teachers’ reflection should involve the problematization of the social and institutional contexts in which they work.

Considering that reflective practice is a concept increasingly advocated in our field, one question worth considering is: How did reflection become incorporated into teacher education? According to Zeichner (1994) the idea of incorporating reflection in teaching received the influence of many factors:

- the popularity of cognitive as opposed to behavioral psychologies,
- the birth of research on teacher thinking,
- views of educational research that have given greater access to teachers’ voices and perspectives on their work,
- the growing democratization of the research process in which teachers have become less willing to submit to participation in research which seeks only to portray their behaviors,

- the recognition that top-down educational reforms that used teachers as passive implementors of ideas conceived elsewhere were doomed to failure (Zeichner, 1994:11)

In summary, this means the growing recognition that we need to pay greater attention to what teachers do and think about their work if we want to improve teaching, and consequently, teacher education. In the prologue of their recent book Freeman & Richards (1996, p.5) make the same point:

... understanding teachers' conceptualizations of teaching, their beliefs, thinking, and decision-making can help us better understand the nature of language teacher education and hence better prepare us for our roles as teacher educators.

TEACHER THINKING

As already suggested by Zeichner (1994) I would like to highlight that one of the major forces that influenced the notion of reflection in teaching was research on teacher thinking. Teacher thinking has been defined as research that has a “concern with the ways in which knowledge is actively acquired and used by teachers and the circumstances that affect its acquisition and employment” (Calderhead, 1987, p. 137).

As an area that is interested in working with teacher's minds and actions, teacher thinking has already produced a substantial body of research. The bulk of this work has been published in journals such as *Teaching & Teacher Education*, and books containing conference papers such as the ones edited by Day, Pope & Denicolo (1990), Carlgren et al (1994), to mention the most recent ones. This type of research has focused on the planning phases of teaching, the teachers' interactive decision-making in the classroom, and the theories and beliefs that guide their action. This kind of research has shown the complexity of teachers' work and how much thinking underlies their actions in classrooms.

Researchers in ELT who have had an interest in language learning/teaching from the point of view of teachers have also started to investigate the way teachers plan their lessons and interact with their students. These studies vary from a concern with the content of

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

teacher's thoughts, to the cognitive processes underlying their decisions (e.g. Nunan, 1992; Woods, 1993). While these studies shared many of the features of studies in other areas of knowledge, they have been too scarce to produce a sound knowledge of the nature of EFL teachers' thoughts. What they have pointed out, however, is the importance of teacher's beliefs to the way these professionals act in classrooms.

The predominant field of knowledge for these studies has been psychology and the researcher's interest was to uncover the cognitive processes underlying teacher's practices. With the more recent calls for greater consideration of context, it would be helpful to have more research carried out in particular contexts, with the purpose of finding out why teachers do what they do in classrooms. If we can gain understanding about these issues, we might be closer to helping teachers develop professionally.

Reflective teaching is therefore a notion that recognizes the thoughtful nature of teachers' work. Research on teacher thinking has boosted reflective teaching since it seeks to understand this nature of teaching. The focus is on how teachers think about their work and what they think about. Teacher thinking has shown that teachers consciously monitor their teaching before, during and after the lesson.

One of the main assumptions of initial research on teacher thinking was the recognition that teaching shares many aspects of other professions. According to this view, teachers have a body of specialized knowledge acquired through training and experience, they are goal-oriented, they make judgements and decisions when faced with complex and ambiguous information, and they construct knowledge through repeated practice and reflection on that practice (Calderhead, 1987).

If, on the one hand, research on teacher thinking highlighted the thoughtful nature of teacher's work, in other quarters there was a belief that teachers routinized many aspects of teaching, and for this reason, in order to become better teachers, they would have to reflect on their practices. However, according to findings from teacher thinking research, teachers do think about their work, perhaps they do not do it systematically, or they do things that externally appear to have been routinized.

The notion that teachers act following routines can be found, for instance, in Prabhu (1993). In that paper he argues that routine that is

not motivated and sustained by conceptual exploration by the teachers themselves is bound to be unproductive of learning. He claims that:

For classroom activities to be more than protective routines, it is minimally necessary for teachers to be operating with their own beliefs about the pedagogic value of those activities— with their own notions or theories of how learning comes about and how the teaching that is being done is bringing it about. (p. 237)

What we see with such recognition is a conceptual move to face lessons as instantiations of teachers' own theories and the need to encourage a systematic exploration into those theories.

Because teachers do think about their work, the assumption underlying recommendations for reflective practice is therefore that teachers are not reflecting *systematically* (and I would like to emphasize this word) on what goes on in their classrooms. So, what we mean when we talk about reflective teaching is in fact a systematic way of looking at our own actions in the classroom and what effects these actions are bringing about in terms of language learning.

ADOPTING A REFLECTIVE APPROACH

I have argued that teachers have been thinking about their work all the time, as shown by research on teacher thinking, which implies that what we mean by reflective practice is in fact a more systematic approach to aspects of teaching. What is implied then is a call for an approach that gives teachers more power to direct and control their process of reflection.

In this section I intend to discuss some practical ways in which reflection can be carried out more systematically, with a particular focus on the learning process.

What kind of reflection should teachers engage in?

There has been little consensus as to what teachers should reflect on. As I have indicated in the beginning of the paper, teachers can reflect on many aspects of teaching. According to Zeichner (1994) all

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

the three levels of reflection are important, and shouldn't be seen as hierarchical steps. Therefore, the suggestion is that teachers should reflect not only on the effectiveness of the tools they are using to achieve the educational goals, but also who is benefiting from such choices. The first step then is to decide which dimension(s) of reflection will be focused on.

How can they do it?

Many procedures have already been suggested by educators interested in fostering a reflective approach in teaching. I will mention some of these suggestions, all of them concerned with generation of knowledge from experience.

a) by participating in language learning experiences

One of the most common strategies employed has been putting teachers in learners' shoes, by asking them to experience again the process of learning another language. By reflecting on what happens to them during the task, teachers can re-think about issues they had forgotten about and make explicit their own beliefs about language learning. Waters et al (1990) report on such an experience. Similarly Breen (1990) conducted a study with language teachers and identified their beliefs by asking them to keep records of that experience. In this experience teachers are forced to think about how they themselves learn and therefore, to consider how their learners might prefer to learn.

b) by remembering past experiences

Because teachers in the past were learners, they may be asked to re-live those experiences and be more specific about the factors that seem to them important to consider in their own teaching. As more and more we come to recognize that teachers are socialized through their various educational experiences, reflection on these experiences can uncover implicit beliefs about teaching and learning foreign languages. My own study tried to address this aspect (Gimenez, 1994).

Studies about teachers have increasingly incorporated biographies as part of their research methods (see, for instance, Bailey

et al. 1996). According to this paradigm, the very act of having to re-tell lived experiences will lead to reflection on practice and therefore lead to growing awareness of the learning process. Reflection involves looking back as well as looking forward. In this mode of reflection, it would be important to have an interlocutor to whom teachers would have to tell their stories about language learning. Alternatively, teachers could start writing their autobiographies as language learners and teachers. By analyzing their own personal histories teachers can start to realize what their own beliefs about language learning are.

Table 1 — Action research versus exploratory teaching

Action research	Exploratory teaching
1. Problem identification - A teacher identifies a problem in her classroom - <i>My students aren't using the target language. (German)</i>	1. Identify a puzzle area 2. Refine your thinking about that puzzle area 3. Select a particular topic to focus upon
2. Preliminary observation - What's going on? Recording and observing class over several days	4. Find appropriate classroom procedures to explore it 5. (e.g. group work discussions, pair work discussions, surveys, interviews, simulations, role-plays, diaries, projects, poster sessions, learner to learner correspondence)
3. Hypothesis - Teacher uses too much English. The important stuff is done in English.	6. Adapt them to the particular puzzle you want to explore
4. Plan intervention - Teacher increases target language use. Teacher uses German for classroom management, etc.	7. Use them in class
5. Outcome - Dramatic increase in use of German by students	8. Interpret the outcomes
6. Reporting - Article in teachers' newsletter	9. Decide on their implications and plan accordingly

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

c) by carrying out action research/exploratory teaching

As Prabhu (1993) and others suggested, one of the ways teachers can gain understanding about the learning process is to reflect systematically on what goes on in classrooms. Teacher research can therefore help teachers gain understanding about the language learning process.

In our field there are two approaches as to what should constitute the object and the methods of this exploration. Nunan (1993) works with the idea of action research as problem-solving, whereas Allwright (1993) advocates exploratory teaching as pedagogy-oriented and concerned with understanding rather than problem-solving.

A contrast between these two approaches is presented in Table 1.

Placed side by side, these two suggestions reveal many differences which underlie their approaches. What they have in common is that following their suggested procedures would lead teachers to think again about what they have already experienced and to project forward. In other words, these procedures suggest that teachers do more systematically what they have already been doing on an ad-hoc basis.

While in the previous suggestions teachers were asked to reflect on their own experiences as learners, according to this suggestion, teachers will reflect on their practice as language teachers.

Is there a role for collaboration?

Whilst reflection is considered intrinsically a “good thing” because it places development in the hands of teachers themselves, it would also involve the question as to whether it is possible to initiate and sustain this process alone. Clearly teachers ordinarily think about their work, but how can they make sure that the different levels of reflection are being addressed or even decide which ones will be favored, i.e. what the content of reflection will be?

I would like to think that reflection is better carried out in collaboration, but it is also necessary to be aware of the limitations of this type of work in schools. Institutions would have an important role in fostering reflection by enabling collective reflection to take place. Professional associations have an important role to play in fostering this

TELMA GIMENEZ

approach. Collective reflection may lead more easily to the contemplation of alternatives, which is an important aspect in our projecting teaching forward. Which brings me to the last issue, that is, what relationship this understanding will have in relation to accumulated knowledge available through classroom research?

What is the role of academic research?

Research on teacher thinking has shown that teachers generate knowledge from their experience. The relationship between this experienced knowledge and knowledge generated outside the teacher's realm (but concerned with the same topics) is one issue that deserves some thought. My view is that results from research carried out elsewhere and insights generated by other researchers who share the same goal can serve as alternative interpretations that may illuminate our process of reflection. By becoming aware of their own insights, and confronting it with alternative views as represented by research reports, teachers may generate more informed judgement about the language learning process. The process is not unidirectional in the sense that teachers should apply knowledge generated by research, but rather a dialectical one, in which one can inform the other.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I discussed that teacher thinking has contributed to the notion of reflection and the need for teachers to think more systematically about their work, and specifically to make their own beliefs about language learning more explicit, at the levels mentioned above (institutional and societal)

In the final section I discussed some alternatives for teachers interested in developing a reflective approach to their own teaching. I added the need to consider what conditions may favor reflection and the need to consider the role of academic research. Teachers' own understanding about the language learning process could derive from a dialectical relationship between knowledge generated by personal experience and by research conducted externally.

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

If reflection can help our understanding of how learning takes place, then it can also help teachers guide their own development. By focusing on what they are achieving in terms of professional pedagogical knowledge as derived from the reflective approach they adopted, teachers can guide and change the direction of this process more easily. That is what I hope has become clear from the ambiguity of the title of the conference mentioned in the beginning of this paper.

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REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION