

**The Application of
Reflective Teaching
Procedures in English
Language Classes**

**Dr. Hamidreza
Fatemipour
Department of English,
Panjab University
Chandigarh, India.**

Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to explore how English language teachers can become “reflective teachers” by investigating what they do in the classroom and improve their teaching accordingly. In this way, they are able to produce first hand research findings which are more related to the context in which they teach instead of being consumers of others’ research findings which do not suit their method of teaching and their students’ needs. In order to show the significance of reflecting on the process of teaching and learning, the author of the paper also conducted a study using a small sample of college students. The results of the study showed that the data obtained from the questionnaires completed by students and their teachers are in some aspects different and they are worthy of attention.

ملخص

إن هدف هذه الدراسة هو تشجيع أساتذة اللغة الانجليزية ليصبحوا أساتذة مفكرين بالبحث فيما يقومون به في القسم لتحسين أدائهم. بهذه الطريقة بإمكانهم المساهمة بنتائج أبحاث أصلية تكون أكثر تلاؤماً مع السياق الذي يدرسون فيه بدلا من أن يكونوا مجرد مستهلكين لنتائج أبحاث غيرهم التي لا تتوافق مع طريقتهم في التدريس و إحتياجات طلبتهم و بهدف إبراز أهمية التفكير في عملية التعليم والتعلم القائم على هذا البحث، قمنا بدراسة عينة صغيرة من تلاميذ المستوى المتوسط و قد أوضحت نتائج الدراسة أن البيانات/المعطيات المحصل عليها من الإستمارات المملوءة من طرف التلاميذ وأساتذتهم تختلف من جوانب متعددة ومن ثم تستحق الاهتمام.

Introduction

Reflective teaching has become one of the prominent models in teacher education in general and in foreign and second language teacher education in particular. Lockhart refers to Freeman, Lange, Pennington and Richards as teacher educators in the field of second or foreign language teaching who have recently “distinguished between teacher education as training and teacher education as development.” According to Lockhart, training is supposed to refer to special skills and knowledge which are essential for teachers to acquire in order to teach in a way that is satisfactory. From the training viewpoint, there are some specific techniques which can help teachers with effective teaching. Furthermore, “one can bestow these skills on current and prospective teachers through a teacher preparation program” (43). It is a “prescriptive” approach to teacher education which asks the educator to intervene directly in the process of teacher training.

The other approach to teacher education which is not prescriptive is teacher development. The emphasis of this developmental approach is on “the complexities of the classroom and of teaching. It sees teacher education as an on-going process, through which teachers can explore, define and clarify their own teaching practice. Its goal is to develop the attitudes and expand the awareness of teachers or prospective teachers.” So, the developmental approach is non-prescriptive and it changes the role of the educator from an intervener to a “facilitator and [a] consultant” (Lockhart 43).

Reflection, self-monitoring and action research are three different processes that the proponents of developmental approach suggest to prospective and current teachers to follow in order to “generate change through increasing or shifting awareness” (Freeman, qtd. in Lockhart 43). As the focus of the present study is on the first suggested process, that is reflection, the discussion continues elaborating on the terms: reflection, reflective thinking and reflective teaching.

Reflection, Reflective Thinking and Reflective Teaching

There are two phases of reflective thinking that teachers follow in the process of reflection. As Dewey mentions in *How We Think*, the first phase includes “a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental

difficulty, in which thinking originates” and the second phase involves “an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity” (12). Teachers sometimes face a puzzling situation regarding the subject that they teach, but they have some suggestions out of their experience to cope with the problem. In these cases, their thinking is not necessarily reflective because they are not “*critical*” enough about the solutions which come to their minds. Teachers may hastily conclude without considering the context in which the perplexity occurs. Being impatient or passive, some teachers may choose the first given solution. “One can think reflectively only when one is willing to endure suspense and to undergo the trouble of searching.” Many people avoid being doubtful in “judgment and intellectual search” and try to end it up when they are still involved. In addition, some may think that the situation in which they are uncertain about something and they can not judge at once is a sign of their “mental inferiority”. Elaborating on the difference between reflective thought and bad thinking, Dewey concludes, “to be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protect that state of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry, so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found” (16).

To optimize the teaching and learning of a language in EFL/ESL contexts, it may be useful to embrace the concept of the teacher as a learner and a professional. Rose believes that, “every teacher has a professional responsibility to be reflective and evaluative about their practice. As a result of this reflection teachers will be able to identify how to improve their professional activity in order to improve the quality of pupils' learning.” She states that reflection enables teachers to observe what is going on around the class. It persuades teachers to apply their thoughts and “promote changes in pupils' learning behavior.” The other area in which Rose considers reflection as an important factor is cooperation or collaboration among teachers. She believes that, “reflective partnerships between teachers are particularly effective. Peer mentoring partnerships will support individual teachers in reflecting on and describing their practice. As a result of these focused discussions a teacher is able to better understand practice and be able to take steps to improve practice” (1).

When teachers face problems in the process of teaching, they pose many questions to which they can not find answers. They mention that many “conventional approaches in teacher development rarely help them find answers which will give them practical help with their problems” (Richards and Lockhart 2). Even the courses that they pass or workshops that they participate in as student teachers do not have that long term effect to help them with their teaching problems.

Richards and Lockhart believe that teachers should “look objectively at teaching and observe critically” on what they find out. In this way, they will be able to examine their beliefs about teaching, and the efficiency of their activities around the class. They will also have “a better understanding of teaching and learning processes” (2). They will monitor and evaluate their own teaching which leads them to develop professionally.

Graves is another educator who is in favor of reflective teaching. She believes that “reflection is one of the most powerful tools teachers can use to explore, understand and redirect their practice. Reflection is about learning to see and to understand what is seen. It is not simply being able to identify problems and frame solutions, although both are crucial.” According to her, there are two potential pitfalls which teachers should be aware of when they observe their own teaching reflectively. The first potential danger is to follow reflective process but not to take any action based on the obtained data “—to hold up a mirror, acknowledge what is there and how one feels about it, but go no further” (Stanley, qtd. in Graves). The second possible danger is to merely consider reflection as a process through which an observed problem is solved. While it can be a part of reflective process, the main goal is to find the underlying reasons which have caused the observed problem. “When teachers are able to explore the root issues and beliefs, a shift occurs in their understanding and a wider range of effective, intelligent actions becomes possible” (20).

There are different definitions for reflection and reflective thought. Farrell cites Pennington’s definition for reflective teaching as “deliberating on experience and that of mirroring experience.” In addition, in an interview with Farrell, Richards refers to critical thinking as “an activity or process in which experience is recalled, considered and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose.” Richards also considers critical reflection as a reaction to a previous

incident which “involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action” (10).

To differentiate between reflective action and routine action, Zeichner and Liston state that “reflective action entails the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge. [While,] routine action is guided primarily by tradition, external authority and circumstances” (qtd. in Farrell 10).

Elaborating on compatibility of reflective teaching and academic skills instruction, Pickett states that “reflection compels teachers to look at the reasons and theories behind their practices and forces them to examine factors such as beliefs and assumptions about learning, students’ needs and the teachers’ relationship with the larger community” (5). While Pickett accepts that reflection is only one of students’ needs which should be included in academic skills instruction, she emphasizes on its inclusion because she believes that “it is especially important here because students are developing skills that they will need to use throughout their lifetime” (6).

Reflective Teaching Procedure

According to Richards and Lockhart, when teachers are involved in the process of teaching, some events may occur and which they can use to have a better understanding of their teaching. Sometimes they take these events for granted, and they fail to reflect on them; in fact, the events that occur around the classroom can provide the teachers with “the basis for critical reflection”. Richards and Lockhart suggest some procedures that can be used by teachers to investigate classroom teaching. Some of the proposed procedures are as follows: teacher diary, peer observation, recording lessons, and students’ feedback.

■ **Teacher diary:** The teacher writes about what has happened in the class after each lesson. S/he can note his/ her reactions and feelings and the observed behavior on the part of students. It can be done by answering some general questions that form a teaching diary (Tice 2).

■ **Peer observation:** In this procedure that Murphy labels it as “Peer Collaborations” (503), the teacher asks a colleague to attend his/her

class and collect information about the lesson. It can be done through note taking or “a simple observation task” (Tice 2).

■ **Recording lessons:** Video or audio recording of lessons is considered a suitable tool for obtaining data about reflective teaching. Tice believes that “you may do things in class you are not aware of or there may be things happening in the class as the teacher you do not normally see” (2). Recording of lessons can be useful in showing the teachers different aspects of their behavior.

■ **Students’ feedback:** That is a tool used for finding out the learners’ opinions and perceptions about the teaching process, and teachers’ efforts that “can add a different and valuable perspective” (Tice 3). The data can be obtained through questionnaires.

The Study

Richards and Lockhart 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 (1). Regarding different topics that can be explored by reflective teaching, the focus of the present study is on comparing and contrasting the data obtained from the questionnaires administered to college teachers and their students. The questionnaire consists of items related to the level of difficulty and appropriateness of the material and some aspects of the teaching process like: the quantity of the material taught in a session, the allotted time given to each activity, the application of error correction techniques, and the creation of a stimulating learning environment.

Procedure

In order to investigate the above-mentioned areas of interest, the researcher went through the following steps:

First, the researcher designed a questionnaire for obtaining data related to teaching process and the suitability of the assigned material. The items of the questionnaire are based on the suggestions made by experts like: Richards and Lockhart in *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*; Hillier in *Reflective Teaching in*

Further and Adult Education; and Tice in *Reflective Teaching: Exploring our own classroom Practice*.

Second, in order to pre-test the designed questionnaire, it was administered to a small sample of students. Furthermore, some experts in the field of English language teaching were asked to give their feedback on the questionnaire. Based on these two sources, the weak or ambiguous questions were modified or totally removed from the body of the questionnaire.

Third, two classes were chosen randomly from all English classes which were held in Government College for Girls (GCG), Chandigarh. The subjects were students of BA Third Year taking compulsory English course. The research sample comprised 98 girls assigned to two classes which were taught by a male and a female teacher, and the assigned material was "The Merchant of Venice".

Fourth, in a single session, the questionnaires were administered to the research subjects. In other words, when the teacher finished with the lesson, the students were asked to give feedback on the teaching process by completing their questionnaires. The teacher was the last subject who was asked to reflect on his or her teaching by completing the questionnaire.

Fifth, as the research was practical, and the researcher's purpose was to address as many as English language teachers with different backgrounds to benefit from the findings of the study, no statistical formula was used in the process of data analysis. So, comparing the frequency of the responses to different items provided by the teachers and students was the basis of the researcher judgment.

Findings and Discussion

In the following two tables, the data obtained from the questionnaires completed by students and teachers have been presented. Although the original questionnaire contained more items than the eleven items presented here, the researcher decided to discuss those items which were more related to the scope of the present study. The selected items from the students' questionnaire are as follows:

- 1 The lesson connected to what I already knew.
- 2 The lesson was easy for the class.
- 3 The presented information was enough for us.
- 4 I learned something that I really needed to know.
- 5 I had the vocabulary I needed to do the task.

- 6 The teacher did not teach too much. I had a chance to practise.
- 7 The teacher was successful in teaching the lesson.
- 8 The textbook (material) was appropriate and relevant to the program objectives.
- 9 The time given to each activity was enough.
- 10 The teacher used different error correction techniques.
- 11 The teacher provided an exciting learning environment.

Table 1. Data Obtained from the Students' Questionnaires

	Completely Agree	Agree	Have No Idea	Disagree	Completely Disagree
Item 1	16	43	16	16	7
Item 2	22	36	27	10	3
Item 3	31	40	7	11	9
Item 4	48	37	9	1	3
Item 5	15	49	20	9	5
Item 6	17	37	10	29	5
Item 7	61	23	10	4	0
Item 8	19	39	19	16	5
Item 9	27	41	12	12	6
Item 10	25	39	26	4	4
Item 11	35	41	11	7	4

Table 2. Data Obtained from the Teachers' Questionnaires

	Completely Agree	Agree	Have No Idea	Disagree	Completely Disagree
Item 1	2	0	0	0	0
Item 2	1	1	0	0	0
Item 3	2	0	0	0	0
Item 4	2	0	0	0	0
Item 5	1	1	0	0	0
Item 6	0	2	0	0	0
Item 7	0	2	0	0	0
Item 8	0	1	0	1	0
Item 9	0	0	0	2	0
Item 10	0	0	1	1	0
Item 11	0	2	0	0	0

The responses to item one show that both teachers completely agreed to the idea that “the lesson connected to what students already knew.” While this idea was accepted by 60% of students, 24% of students either disagree or completely disagree to the suggested idea. The reflective teachers can consider the implication of the given finding and think of some warm-up activities to involve those students who feel a gap between their background knowledge and the new material.

The responses to item two represent a trivial disagreement between the two teachers; one of them completely agreed and the other one just agreed that “the lesson was easy for the class.” Here again 59% of students agreed to the idea, while 28% of students preferred to “have no idea” and only 13 out of 98 (13%) students disagreed with the proposed idea. The results imply that 41% of students did not agree with the idea and probably had some problems in retaining the subject.

The idea suggested in item 3 was completely agreed upon by both teachers. Seventy three (74%) students either completely agreed or just agreed with this idea that “the presented information was enough for them. While it shows that the two teachers had a good planning for the quantity of presented material, it is worth reflecting on the problems of those students (20%) who felt that the presented information was not enough.

Item 4 focuses on students’ needs and both teachers completely agreed that the presented materials were what students really needed. Eighty seven percent of the students also accepted that they had learned something that they really needed. Less than five percent of students, which is negligible, disagreed with the idea. In these cases, the obtained data can ensure the reflective teacher that what s/he teaches satisfies the students’ needs.

Item 5 also concentrates on the students’ background knowledge, “the vocabulary needed for doing the tasks”. One of the teachers completely agreed that students knew the vocabulary, and the other one just agreed with the idea. On the other hand, as table 1 shows, 64 students (65%) accepted the idea, 20 students (20%) remained undecided, 14 students (14%) did not accept that they had the prerequisite knowledge for doing the tasks. Once again, the implication of the finding is that some of the students need warm-up activities to get familiar with the new words presented in the lesson.

Item 6 discusses the quantity of the presented material and a chance for students to practice in the class. Both teachers agreed that “they did not teach too much and students had a chance to practice.” Fifty five percent of the students had the same idea, but 32% of the students felt that they did not have a chance to practice the presented material. This feedback is valuable for the teachers to plan in such a way that more time is given to students’ practice.

Item 7 focuses on the degree that “teachers were successful in teaching the lesson.” Both teachers agreed on their success. Eighty six percent of the students completely agreed or just agreed with the teachers’ success, and only 4 %, which is negligible, disagreed. Students’ feedback on teachers’ capability of teaching is always worthy of reflecting.

The suitability of the textbook is stated in item 8, and the responses show that teachers exceptionally did not agree on the comment that “the textbook was appropriate and relevant to the program objectives.” While one teacher considered the textbook appropriate, the other one believed that it was not suitable and related to the program objectives. According to table two, 59% of the students were in favor and 21% were against the proposed comment. In these cases, the problem can be discussed in a reflective group including all those who teach the same subject.

The responses to item 9 show that both teachers disagreed that “they had enough time needed for each activity.” On the contrary, 70% of the students believed that the allotted time was enough and only 18% of the students noted that there was a lack of time for doing the activities. This controversy needs further investigation in order to find the reasons of disagreement.

Item 10 discusses the use of error correction techniques by the teachers. One teacher had no idea, and the other one accepted that s/he did not use error correction techniques. Meanwhile, 66% of students agreed that their teachers used different correction techniques, and only 8% of students disagreed with the comment. The implication may be that while the best sources for obtaining these kinds of data are teachers themselves, students tend to be somehow in favor of their teachers by agreeing to the comments. On the other hand, 27% of students remained undecided which may imply that they were not very clear on what the sentence meant.

Item 11 states that “the teacher provided an exciting learning environment.” The responses to this item show that both teachers agreed with the comment. Seventy six out of 98 (78%) students either completely agreed or just agreed that their teachers provided an exiting learning environment, and 11 out of 98 students (11%) disagreed to the comment. The high degree of students’ agreement with the comment gives teachers the feedback that they have been successful in providing an exciting learning environment.

Conclusion

Teachers should apply reflective techniques in the scope of the class and beyond it. In this way, they will be able to deal with the teaching and learning problems that they encounter in the class. Reflective teachers can also be effective in reviewing instructional goals, modifying teaching methods and materials and developing an appropriate curriculum based on the students’ needs. In *Reflection as the Foundation for E-Portfolios*, Levin and Camp state that “without the disposition to reflect on performance, teachers are less likely to improve their practice or to be able to see the links between theory and practice.” Although, they quote LaBoskey whose research shows that only 20% of teachers are naturally reflective, they believe that all prospective teachers should be taught in order to reflect on their performance. In sum, the purpose of the present paper was to encourage English language teachers to become “reflective teachers” by investigating what they do in the classroom and improve their teaching accordingly. Following the reflective teaching approach, teachers can produce first hand research findings which are more related to the context in which they teach instead of being consumers of others’ research findings which do not suit their method of teaching and their students’ needs.

Works Cited

- Dewey, John. *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. USA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1933.
- Farrell, Thomas. "Reflective Teaching: The Principles and Practices." *Forum* Vol. 36, No 4, October–December (1998). 22 May 2006 <[http://exchanges.state.gov/ Forum/ Vols/ Vol36/ No3/ p2.htm](http://exchanges.state.gov/Forum/Vols/Vol36/No3/p2.htm)>.
- Graves, Kathleen. "Developing a Reflective Practice Through Disciplined Collaboration." *The Language Teacher* 26-7 (2002): 19-21.
- Hillier, Yvonne. *Reflective Teaching in Future and Adult Education*. 2nd ed. UK: Continuum, 2005.
- Levin, Barbara B., and Jean S. Camp. "Reflection as the Foundation for E-Portfolios." *The University of North Carolina at Greensboro* 16 May 2006 <[http:// www.aace.org/ conf/ site/ pt3/ paper_3008_455.pdf](http://www.aace.org/conf/site/pt3/paper_3008_455.pdf)>.
- Murphy, John M. "Reflective Teaching in ELT." *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* Ed. Marianne Celce-Murcia. 3rd ed. Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 2001. 499-514.
- Pickett, Angel. "Reflective Teaching Practices and Academic Skills Instruction." 27 May 2004. *Indiana University* 22 July 2004 <[http:// www.indiana.edu/ 1506/ pickett.html](http://www.indiana.edu/1506/pickett.html)>.
- Richards, Jack C., and Charles Lockhart. *Reflective teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Rose, Mary. "The Reflective Practitioner." *European Center for Modern Languages*. 3 June 2004 <[http:// www.prosper.ro/ -project%20202.7.1/ index.htm](http://www.prosper.ro/-project%20202.7.1/index.htm)>.
- Tice, Julie. "Writing a Teacher Diary." *BBC British Council Teaching English*. 10 June 2004 <[http://www. teachingenglish.org.uk/ think/ methodology/ teaching_ diary.pdf](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/teaching_diary.pdf)>.