

Reflective Teaching and Teacher Development

George Wilcox, English Language Officer with the Office of English Language Programs, U.S. Department of State in Washington, DC.¹

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After English (EFL) teachers have gone through pre-service training courses or even as part of such courses, they can and should be introduced to the concept of reflective teaching. The concept is concerned primarily with encouraging teachers to engage in a systematic program of reflecting on their own teaching as a way to bring about their own continuous development as teachers, i.e., to ensure that they will always strive toward improving their teaching, and more importantly, their students' learning.

Reflective teaching asks teachers to put themselves in their students' places, to see themselves as their students see them, and then make the necessary changes in their teaching which will result in increased student learning. The first step in this reflective process should begin with teachers asking themselves the following interrelated questions:

1. What is it like to be taught by you? In general? In specific instances? What is your "personal atmosphere"?
2. How can you find out what students get out of a specific lesson? Your whole class? What effect do you have on the class? On individual students?
3. What can you do to ensure improved learning? Where do you want to be with your teaching? How do you get there?
4. How does what you do affect students and how do you know this?
5. Why do you plan to do one activity as opposed to another? What is the objec-

¹This author can be reached at: gkwsp@ps.state.gov

tive of the activity and why will it accomplish the objective better than possible alternative activities?

In order to help answer some of these questions, teachers need ways (or modes) of collecting data about how they are teaching, that is, of observing their own teaching and their students' learning. Richards and Lockhart, in their first chapter, suggest the following, among others, as modes of data collection:

1. Peer observation. Invite colleagues/fellow teachers to visit your class and share their thoughts afterwards on your teaching and your students' learning.
2. Team teaching. Invite a colleague to teach your class with you, thoughtfully sharing all aspects of planning, teaching and remediation.
3. Video taping the class. This will allow you to see yourself and/or your students through the camera's eyes.
4. Audio taping the class. If you did this for no more than ten minutes a class, twice a week over several weeks, then you could begin to hear your teaching as your students hear it.
5. Keep a daily journal/diary of your teaching. Periodically you can ask your students at the end of the class to take five-ten minutes to write down their thoughts about the day's class: what they liked and didn't like and perhaps why. In addition, or as an alternative, you could take five-ten minutes at the end of each class to write down your own similar thoughts and suggested changes in your teaching.
6. Systematically observe your students. This could be either directly, by watching them, asking for feedback from the class, etc. or indirectly, by asking their peers and/or parents what a given student is feeling about the class experience.
7. Observation by a supervisor/inspector. Again, teachers would want to take advantage of such visits to systematically think through and talk over a given class or certain elements it.

Using the above information as tools, we suggest teachers consider developing their own program of professional improvement based on the principles of reflective teaching. Such a program might include the following steps:

1. Try to form a group of at least two-four similar-minded EFL teacher colleagues at your institution or in your organization who are all interested in taking part in such a development experience.
2. At your first meeting you might brainstorm all the ways you can think of to

- improve your teaching (alternately, you can leave this step out as less essential).
3. Each person in the group should think of/reflect on two-three areas in their own teaching which they view as problem areas and then share these "problem areas" with the other members of the group.
 4. Group members should help each other pose investigative questions which help examine the particular details. [For example, if the Problem Area is "Grammar Teaching" then a possible relevant investigative question might be "How can I teach grammar in such a way that my students will consistently use what I teach them correctly?"]
 5. Next you would need to help each other decide on what types of data to collect to help you observe each person's teaching as it currently is and as it changes during the course of the systematic reflective process. [For example, in the case of one teacher's class, the decision might be to find out what is happening in the class by a) collecting student journals periodically, b) having the others in the group observe that teacher's class periodically and following up with consultation sessions, and c) conducting audio taping of the class at certain randomly selected times.]
 6. The group would need to decide on a time line for the project. That is, over how long a period of time would this whole process take place, how often and how long would the group meet, and what exactly would the group focus on accomplishing at each meeting?
 7. From the beginning each person in the group and the group as a whole would need to set down the eventual goals and/or results they would like to see achieved.
 8. And finally, once the group has gone through the entire process, they should seriously consider how they might share what they have learned with other professional colleagues beyond their immediate group, either via a presentation at a conference and/or by writing up their experiences for possible publication in a professional newsletter, magazine or journal.

Conclusion

If EFL professionals are seriously committed to their own professional development and willing to spend time and effort trying to improve their teaching and students' learning, then they would do well to give thoughtful consideration to incorporating the above-outlined eight-step procedure into a continuous program of reflective self development.

References:

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