TEACHING JOURNAL AND LESSON REPORT: AN ATTEMPT TO PROMOTE CLASSROOM REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract: Teachers as professionals should be aware of the importance of professional development since professional development is a key tool that keeps teachers abreast of current issues in education, helps them in implementing innovation, and refines their practice. Reflective practice, two kinds of which are teaching journal and lesson report, could be the basis for professional development. Through the development of teaching journal and lesson report, teachers can reflect on their past and plan for their future action and for the purpose of promotion or self-assessment.

Key words: ELT, EFL, professional development, reflective practice, teaching journal, lesson reports

English as a foreign language (EFL) has been taught for decades in Indonesia, and throughout the period there have been numerous efforts and actions done in order to improve the quality of the teaching and leaning of EFL ranging from the changes of the curriculum along with the revision of the textbooks and the implementatation of teaching methods to various models of teacher training (preservice and inservice trainings). Regarding the development of English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, Sadtono (1997,17) puts forward some achievements in ELT that can be briefly listed as follows:

(a) There are now more qualified as well as unqualified English teachers in proportion to the population;
(b) There are now more graduate programs offering masteral and doctoral degrees domestically;
(c) There are now more qualified lecturers at the teacher colleges with masteral and doctoral degrees;
(d) There is now an association for English language teachers, i.e. TEFLIN;
(e) There are now myriads of English courses;
(f) There are now dozens of teaching materiala available in the market;
(g) Different kinds of methods have been used to teach our students;
(h) More pople know English and a lot more know English;
(i) More indigenous publications are printed in English.
Despite the achievements, Sadtono says that formal ELT at school would continue to be unsuccessful, i.e. fail to achieve the set objectives for various reasons. Some possible reasons for this failure could be the quality of teachers, students’ motivation, the curriculum, and learning resources. This prediction; however, should not prevent us, English teachers, from making efforts to improve the quality of ELT at schools.

In this fast-changing world we have to cope with the demand of the change. We have to change and teachers as the agents of change should take part in the effort of making ELT a success by making changes. Professional training and professional development for teachers, personally or institutionally-initiated, could possibly be the alternatives for better teaching and learning of EFL at schools.

**TEACHING AS PROFESSION**

There have been a number of views upon the conception of teaching. These conceptions could be represented in the continuum with two extreme oposite positions in which teaching-as-magic at one extreme position and teaching-as-science at the other extreme end. In this continuum teaching-as-profession emerges as intermediate between two extremes of ‘mystical’ and scientific views of teaching. Pennington (1989:20) developed this continuum in the following figure.

The conception of teaching-as-magic views teaching as a mysterious or mystical act situated within a complex context whose characteristics are dependent on personal and individual factors that can never be fully known or described and stresses the individuality and the importance of ‘natural gifts’ and ‘personality’ as qualifications for teaching. It also stresses that teaching acts are highly contextual and so indescribable outside the various layers of contexts within which they occur. In contrast, the conception of teaching-as-science views teaching as an act whose defining features are repeated in different contexts and can be revealed through empirical observation and analysis. From this perspective, teaching contexts can be described generically and analytically, in terms of their individual elements, and teacher knowledge is objective and rational. This conception also seeks to provide a universal basis for teaching in a given field, to find the elements which all teaching contexts have in common, and to exhaustively describe and analyze these so that a body of knowledge can be built up and passed on to new teachers. It also emphasizes the objective qualifications for teaching based on skills that can be trained and knowledge that can be tested outside a classroom context (Pennington in Lomax, 2001: 100-101). Since teaching-as-magic ignores its universal elements, neither of this conceptions provides a realistic model of teaching.

Viewed as intermediary between the two extreme conceptions of teaching, teaching-as-magic and teaching-as-science, teaching-as-profession can then be
described as bridging these two orientations. In the ‘professional’ conception, teacher knowledge includes a universal component which must be (a) situated in and adapted to specific teaching context and (b) given a personal interpretation as part of an individual teacher’s schema for thinking and acting.

In the model of teaching conception Pennington elaborates, it can be seen that the keys to success of teaching profession are personality and intelligence while the bases for change is a combination of introspection and observation. Thus, reflection becomes crucial for mediating between internal and external sources of knowledge.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Brown in Hiep (2001:31) optimistically remarks that one of the most interesting things about teaching is that teacher never stops learning. This means that teacher development is the process of life-long learning in the teaching profession; it involves any activities aiming to achieve personal and professional growth for teachers. Hiep (2001:31) affirms that development activities can range from observing colleagues’ classes, reading academic journals and books, and attending conferences, to collaborating with other teachers in classroom research or other professional projects.

We need to recognize the distinction between teacher training and teacher education with respect to their conceptual framework and implementation. Teacher development is viewed as a continuous process that begins with preservice teacher preparation and spans the entire career of the teacher (Sithamparam and Dhamotharam in Okwen, 2003:30). Teacher training involves giving novices and experienced teachers alike “ready-made answers” as opposed to “allowing them to discover their own alternatives”.

Why Is Teacher Development Necessary?

The need for teacher development arises from the inadequacy of training courses, which alone cannot fully enable teachers to be dynamic and competent in their job. The lack of training courses portrays the real condition of facing teachers in most parts of Indonesia which comprises over 13,000 islands. Therefore, along with teacher training, teacher development must be a vital component in teacher education. Development fills the gap in training by giving teachers opportunities to reflect on classroom practice, gain insight into teaching experiences, view education as a long-term process, and deal with change and divergence.

England (1998:18) asserts five critical reasons for professional development in English language teaching:

1. The role of English in the world has grown so much that the spread of English requires many more teachers and English teachers need to be able to manage a much broader range of teaching responsibility and increasingly diverse learner needs.
2. We know much more today about language learning and language teaching than we ever did before.
3. Training paradigms in academic and professional circles are changing: lines between academic and professional preparation are fading.
4. Effective English language teachers are obliged to look carefully at their professional development in order to improve their experiences in classroom and to minimize burnout.
5. ELT programs benefit from teachers who are current with the field. Program directors need to guide teachers in setting goals for professional improvement and
support the teachers in meeting those goals.

Pennington in Farrell (2003:14) says that teacher change and development require an awareness of a need to change. She defines teacher development as “a metastable system of context-interactive change involving a continual cycle of innovative behavior and adjustment to circumstances”. She sees two key components of change: innovation and critical reflection. In light of the importance of reflection, Farrell also cites that Rechards views reflection as a key component of teacher development. Freeman’s in Okwen (2003:30) defines development as a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that come with complex, integrated aspects of teaching. Freeman further states that the purpose of development is to generate change through increasing or shifting his/her (teacher’s) awareness.

By learning and changing, administrators and teachers are investing in their programs and the benefits are significant. For teachers, this includes increased instructional effectiveness, high morale, and job satisfaction. For students, the benefits include student satisfaction and affective, enjoyable learning. For program managers, the benefits include teacher and student retention.

**Reflection and Reflective Practice**

Roberts (1998) affirms that a fundamental concept in professional development is reframing; teachers are more likely to learn when reflecting on and testing personal theories. As cited by Al-Arishi (1994:2) John Locke classifies sources of knowledge involved in human understanding into sensation, intuition, and reflection. Al-Arishi further notifies that reflection is the source of knowledge that he feels present-day language teaching has to an extent ignored. Moon and Boullón (1997) in Blázquez (2007:26) states that reflective thinking can be viewed as the thoughtful, self-questioning of teachers’ actions, experience, or attitudes. If for example, teachers are not satisfied with the learning success of their students or question their own role in the classroom or the value of their procedures, adherents of reflective thinking would argue that the teachers should plan and organize acts or processes to help them address such concerns.

Central to the findings of educational research is the recognition that those who are going to be responsible for implementing change must be participants in deciding the nature and extent of change and the development of the process of change. There is a growing recognition that change is an acutely personal process and that, in order for teachers to cope with the increasing demands placed on them, change needs to be associated with reflection (Murdoch, 1993: 101). Gilpin (2001:109) states that in everyday language, reflection is considered to be a kind of thinking. She also lists what his colleagues’ definitions of reflection. Among those definitions are:

a. Structured and critical thinking about a previous experience or action with a view to understanding better the processes that shaped it, possibly to shape future action.

b. It is thinking about the strategies to be used to change a situation, innovate etc. and using the results to inform the on-going process.

Concerning the importance of reflection, Blázquez (2007:34) concludes from her study as follows:

I learned that if we teachers explore what occurs in our classrooms, if we reflect critically on the theories and beliefs that underlie our practice, and we share our findings, then fundamental changes in classroom practices can be accomplished.
Two Approaches To Classroom Reflective Practice

Teachers sometimes fail to exploit classroom events that they can use to develop a deeper understanding of teaching. However, teachers can use their classroom experiences as the basis for critical reflection if teachers can find ways to capture the thoughts of and reactions to these events, as well as ways to gather fuller information about the events themselves. From this basis, teachers can develop strategies for intervention or change, depending on their needs (Richards, 1995:6). One common procedure of gathering information about classroom practice is observation.

Observation involves visiting a class to observe different aspects of teaching. Observation is suggested as a way of gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching. Ali (2007,7) proposes teacher observation program (TOP) which has the following characteristics:

- **It is reflective.** The role of the teachers is to develop and to constantly reflect on their practices.
- **It is collaborative.** The observer helps the teachers to develop and refine their reflective good practices. A true dialogue between observers and teachers is essential since there must be agreement
- **It is developmental.** A TOP is developmental when it incorporates detailed post-observation sessions and allows teachers the flexibility to design the observation tools and decide who they want to include in the observation.

However, observation is often associated with evaluation; therefore, teachers are often reluctant to take part in observation or related activities. Classroom observation can also be threatening for teachers who have to present a lesson to their students in front of an observer who is considered an “expert” (Ali, 2003:16). As cited by Ali, Tsui states that this intimidating situation becomes worse if the observer’s evaluation directly affects whether the teacher receives her or his professional qualification or promotion.

Rather than improving the teacher’s performance, this impact may result in teacher's inconfidence. For the sake of gathering information for personal career development, teachers have alternatives to classroom reflection which are more personal and private, namely writing teaching journal and lesson report.

**Teaching Journal**

Journal is a teacher’s written response to teaching events. This serves two purposes: (1) events and ideas are recorded for the purpose of later reflection; and (2) the process of wririting itself helps trigger insights about teaching (as a discovery process). Topics from classroom experiences that can be explored, among others, are:

- personal reaction to things that happen in the classroom in the school
- questions or observations about problems that occur in teaching
- description of significant aspects of lessons or school events
- ideas for future analysis or reminders of things to take action on

Bartlett in Richards (1995,3) gives suggestion for what to write in the journal as follows:

Our writing will be about our routine and conscious actions in the classroom; conversation with pupils; critical incidents in a lesson; our personal lives as teachers; our beliefs about teaching; events outside the classroom that we think influence our teaching; our views about language teaching and learning.
In keeping a journal, it is recommended that we:

1. make entries on a regular basis, such as once or twice a week, or even daily if possible. It may be useful to spend five or ten minutes after a lesson to write about it or record it.
2. review our journal entries regularly. This is to find out what might not have been written or recorded.

It could also be beneficial to share the journals with colleagues and to meet regularly to discuss them.

The following is an example of a teacher’s journal entry.

Today I gave my class a reading activity which focused on skimming. I gave them an article to read called “Study Paints Grim Picture” and asked them to skim through the article to identify the social problems mentioned. After a few minutes, I checked the answers and asked the students to number the paragraphs. They had to find the paragraphs which contain information on each of the social problems. Then I checked the answers and explained some difficult vocabulary. Then I gave a handout which contained five paragraphs and another handout which contained five headlines. Students had to match them.

Afterthoughts

Timing again is a problem. I originally planned to check the answers of the matching exercise, but there was no time.

Less time should have been spent on explaining expressions as it defeated the objective of my lesson – skimming.

I should have allocated a specific amount of time to practice skimming

I should have opened the lesson with a discussion of social problems so that students could compare their answers with what they found in the article.

(Richards, 1995: 8)

Lesson Reports

Richards (1995:9) defines a lesson report as a structured inventory or list which enables teachers to describe their recollections of the main features of a lesson. The purposes of a lesson report is to the teacher a quick and simple procedure for regularly monitoring what happened during a lesson, how much time was spent on different parts of a lesson, and how effective the lesson was. In contrast to a lesson plan which describes what a teacher intends to do during a lesson, a lesson report describes what actually happened from the teacher’s point of view. To be effective, lesson report forms should be well prepared and the following are procedures Richard recommends in preparing self-report forms:

1. Identify in as much as possible the philosophy underlying the course and the different kinds of teaching activities, procedures, and resources that you expect to use in the course.
2. Prepare a lesson report form.
3. Use the lesson report form on a regular basis to record the activities, procedures, and resources used throughout the course.
4. Meet periodically to review and compare lesson report with those of other teachers teaching the same course.

An alternative approach to lesson reporting is simply for the teacher to spend a few minutes after a lesson writing answers to questions such as the following:

- What were the main goals of the lesson?
• What did the learners actually learn in the lesson?
• What teaching procedure did I use?
• What problem did I encounter and how did I deal with them?
• What were the most effective parts of the lesson?
• What were the least effective parts?
• Would I do anything differently if I taught the lesson again?

Following is a model of lesson report for a grammar lesson

1. The main focus in today’s lesson was:
   a. Mechanics (e.g., punctuation and capitalization)
   b. Rules of grammar (e.g., subject-verb agreement, pronoun use)
   c. Communicative use of grammar (e.g., correct use of past tense forms in a narrative)
   d. Other

2. The amount of class time spent on grammar work was:
   a. The whole class period
   b. Almost all of the class period
   c. Less than that ( --------- minutes)

3. I decided what grammar items to teach:
   a. According to what was in the textbook
   b. According to what was in the course syllabus
   c. Based on student’s performance on test
   d. Based on student’s errors in oral and written work
   e. Other

4. I taught grammar by:
   a. Explaining grammar rules
   b. Using visual aids
   c. Presenting student errors
   d. Giving students practice exercises from a textbook
   e. Giving students practice exercises that I designed

5. When assigning student work on grammar, I had students:
   a. Study rules of grammar
   b. Practice exercises orally in class
   c. Practice exercises orally in the language lab
   d. Do exercise for homework

   e. Etc.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We, teachers, are the agents of change, and thus should be part of the change and responsible for the change. We should not always follow the tradition, ideology, or dogma that are the grounds on which teachers justify their practice. Through professional training and professional development programs we could make the change and reflection is the key to the change. The education society (teacher training institutions, schools) should promote the reflective practice and make the teachers aware that the reflection should come out as the felt need, not externally driven. If teachers do not feel comfortable to work with others in the reflective practice (through observation) they still have alternatives to practice the reflection using teaching journal and lesson reports which can help teachers gather information about their classroom practice which is very important in assessing the teacher performance.

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