



2nd GLOBAL CONFERENCE on LINGUISTICS and FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING,
LINELT-2014, Dubai – United Arab Emirates, December 11 – 13, 2014

Humming The Rhymes without Knowing the Lyrics: A Case of an English Lecturer's Reflection

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Abstract

Reflection seems to be a practical choice to develop teachers' continuous growth (Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). This study intends to explore a reflective teaching of an English lecturer in a local polytechnic's context. It is meant to identify her reflective teaching apart of her denial about being unfamiliar with the practice and unable to theoretically recall its concept. A participant was purposely selected due to her willingness and access to her teaching. Classroom observations, interview, and teaching journal were used to generate the required data. The content analysis was manually run to get the results. The findings reveal that participant's reflective actions (specifically refer to *reflection-in-action*) constantly present in her teaching. Overall, participant is considered as a reflective practitioner regardless her oblivious thought about reflective teaching.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Research and Education Center.

Keywords: reflection; polytechnic lecturer; ELT; Malaysian's context

1. Introduction

Theoretically, reflection seems to be a practical choice to develop teachers' continuous growth (Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In teacher development scope, reflection is described as a 'must' ability to be acquired during the teaching training stage or within in-service professional development practice (Yesilbursa, 2011). It is claimed that being reflective means one is critical, thoughtful, or evaluative towards his or her own self (Farrell, 2012; Ferraro, 2000) which contributes to the successful of teaching and learning process. However, much reliance on the research from the perspectives of teacher educators in looking at pre-service teachers invites invisible assumptions that similar features of reflection are applicable to the in-service teachers (Moon, 1999). Undeniably,

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much has been written about effectiveness of reflection and reflective practice in many fields, teaching contexts or other professional practices, but there still remains a sense of lack of clarity about what it is and how it can be achieved (Farrell, 2012:8). Hence, this exploratory study intends to investigate reflection in English teaching practice from an in-service lecturer's perspective in a local polytechnic's context. The aim is that to explore the reflective teaching practice from a less explored English educators' population in Malaysia (Suhaily & Faizah, 2014).

2. Literature review

Reflection is derived from Dewey's concern regarding a routinized thought and action in one's practice (Farrell, 2012; Moon, 1999). His alarm was based on the issue of one's practice was guided by impulse, local work culture, customized rules which implies his or her practice leads to less meaningful exercise (Farrell, 2012). The rationale lays on the basis that theoretical ideas on a particular work procedure do not spell out the same practicality aspects into real life especially in term of teaching. It is because teaching invites constant changes and welcomes the multidimensional factors to the practice (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001). Hence, the principle of language teaching in a western context could be differently applied in similar level of proficiency students in eastern countries (e.g. Bray, 2012; Hayes, 2009). Moreover, hanging too much on the top-down guidance would probably fade the actual definition of being a teacher. The illustration given by Greene (1973, cited in Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999:3) may conclude the researchers' view:

If the teacher agrees to submerge himself into the system, if he consents to being defined by others' views of what he is supposed to be, he gives up his freedom to see, to understand, and to signify for himself. If he is immersed and impermeable, he can hardly stir others to define themselves as individual. If, on the other hand, he is willing...to create a new perspective on what he has habitually considered real, his teaching may become the project of a person vitally open to his students and the world...He will be forever new; he will feel more alive than he ever has before.

Reflective practice, in teaching, is viewed as an on-going process even there is no consensus on the definition of the term (Yesilbursa, 2011:105). It is an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated to improve one's condition for a better change (Richards, 2005). It is a continuous evaluation process that can help teachers to identify and illuminate issues within their teaching practice, and alert them to any potential barriers to promote effective learning (Kahn & Walsh, 2006). That is why the result of a particular reflective action does not personally cater the proposed effective teaching guidelines for general use (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Hence, there comes a feature of reflective teaching as teachers' private voice (Zandian, 2011). The practicality of any findings is more contextual and workable to be applied as it is a bottom-up solution (e.g. Farrell, 2001; Suhaily & Faizah, 2013). So, the measures taken are varied from one to another based on their current requirement to overcome their teaching issues. These conclude that reflection happens as teachers, who constantly deal with decision making, are able to identify and describe what is happening in their teaching and evaluate the process on why something goes wrong then act on it to fix the hassle.

In addition, the self-voluntary exploration on one's personal teaching practice promotes professional development (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). It is because reflection is a tool for teachers' learning too (Avalos, 2011). Self-observation would offer extensive detail about practice, and the reshaping of practice, so that new ways of conceptualizing teaching about teaching might be possible (Loughran, 2006). The marriage of teachers' received knowledge and their experiential learning (Wallace, 1991) produces a contextual competency in which teachers' personal pedagogical knowledge is formed (Suhaily & Faizah, 2013). As they keep embracing this type of exploration, teachers are able to identify their weaknesses and act upon it based on the practical implementation that matches their students' immediate needs, and towards certain extents, it compliments their present issue (Bray, 2012; Farrell, 1998; Hayes, 2009; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Suhaily & Faizah, 2013, 2014). Hence, taking part in reflective teaching implies that teachers personally monitor themselves in the process of developing their teaching competency and professional growth.

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