REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The value of reflection in education has long been recognised, particularly by Schon (1987), who revitalised the concept of reflection in today's educational setting. Reflective practice helps teachers, including ESL teachers, reach a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and efforts and, ultimately, attain greater effectiveness as a teacher. However, the manner and quality of reflection is not always looked into so that it can be of greatest benefit to teachers. This paper considers two tools or models that can help teachers engage in deeper levels of reflection and reach greater awareness of themselves. Moon's (1999) Two-stage Model and Scharmer's (2007) Presencing Model may be used as toolkits by language teachers to think about what they are doing, and to actively work towards improving their professional growth.

Introduction

How classroom practices can be captured to enable teachers to make sense of their own beliefs and practices about what constitutes good teaching, to acknowledge and validate what they are learning and to achieve a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher, has been in the forefront of research on teacher development for decades. A review of current research indicates that reflection has become a popular tool for improving teaching practice, and as a way to help teachers record and capture their work. However, Barnett (1997) is concerned with the quality of reflection that is taking place among teachers. Moon (1999b) points out a similar concern where the focus of reflection is to specify a desired outcome or improvement. In many cases, however, this improvement is rarely mentioned. This suggests that most practioners are reflecting at the surface level which affects the quality of the learning experience. Van Manen (1991) and Moon (1999b) believe that teachers should take reflection to a reflective or mindful stance which links thought and action in relationship between self and others. The writers believe this relationship can be achieved by reflecting on or about a problem, our actions, the actions of others and possible solutions in order

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to produce a positive outcome. By doing so, teachers will get into a relationship with the issue and reflect at the deeper level.

Recognising the value of reflection to illustrate teaching experiences, teachers – including language teachers – are encouraged to document their efforts in teaching portfolios as a means for self-evaluation and improvement. It is believed that reflective practice can spur teachers to think consciously about what makes their teaching effective, what worked and what did not and more importantly, the how's and the why's. According to Ferraro (2000), if reflection becomes a common practice among teachers, it creates a climate in which discussion of teaching–and thus teaching itself–can flourish. Reflective practice can be a beneficial process in teacher professional development, both for pre-service and in-service teachers. This paper reviews the concept, benefits and practical steps for reflecting based on Moon's model and Scharmer's (2007) 'Presencing' theory – an expansion of Kolb's (1984) learning cycles on reflection and action.

Reflective Practice

The value of reflection has long been recognised by Schon (1987) who revitalised the concept of reflection in today's educational setting. He theorised that reflection is an educational practice that helps us to articulate our prior knowledge with confidence and certainty. Prior knowledge and skills are part of our credible selves that exist to assist us but are somehow hidden when we try to retrieve them to explain to others. This often happens when pre-service and in-service teachers are asked to express their thoughts or to explain how they achieved a particular outcome. Reflective practice trains them to thoughtfully consider their own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while looking at possibilities to inspire their teaching experiences and to bring about positive outcomes from their teaching efforts. According to Schon (1998), reflective practitioners are individuals who constantly 'think about the doing', and who actively, carefully and constantly work towards improving their professional growth.

In line with this view, teaching portfolios can become a common and useful tool for teachers to think about what they are doing and to track their own personal development. Such portfolios can help language teachers reflect on the approaches and materials they use, and to evaluate whether they were effective. Records can also help language teachers keep track of their own changing beliefs about language learners and language learning.

Stages of Reflection

Moon's (1999b) mapping of the various stages of reflection illustrate that earlier stages represent surface learning while the three later stages manifest forms of deeper learning. The 'deepest' stage involves "extensive accommodation to cognitive structure and learners demonstrate capability of evaluating their frames for references, the nature of their own and other people's knowledge and the process of knowing itself" (Moon, 1999a: 28). This process, according to Moon (1999b), "demands greater control over the working of cognitive structure and greater clarity in the processes of learning and representing that learning" (p.28). Reflective practice, therefore, makes it possible for teachers to be more active and motivated as they continuously collect and assess their own progress as they undergo the teaching experience. The following figure which is a simplified model of Moon's (1999b) descriptions of the various stages of reflection illustrates the reflective thinking process where educators draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences, become aware of their metacognitive processes, and take future actions to make learning more effective.
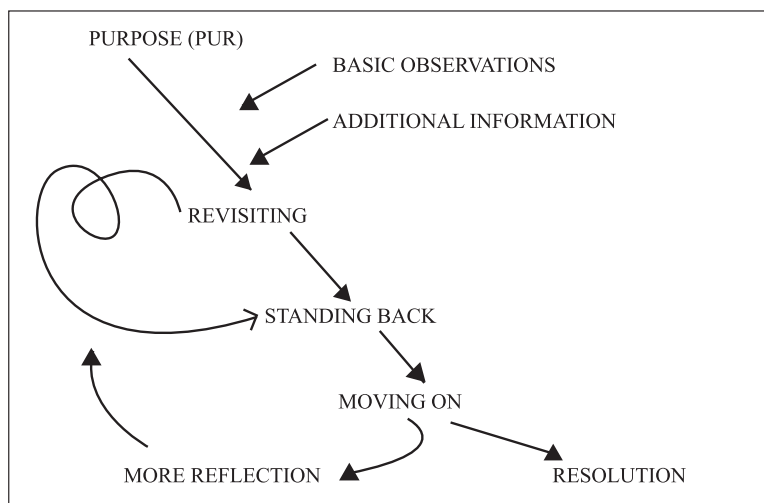

Figure 1: (Simplified Version of Moon's (1999b) model; King: 2002)

Moon's (1999b) model illustrates two levels comprising seven stages. The two levels are mediated by the cognitive structure and the quality of the representation of the learning is indicated by the number of descriptions of the best possible representations (BPR) that can be achieved at each of the stages.

The first level involves three stages that are introduced as the basic steps for later reflection. According to Moon (1999a), the stages represent the surface level of reflection where teachers try to make sense of the situation. At the surface level, ideas will not be properly integrated. This level begins with the stage of deciding on the 'purpose' for reflection. 'Basic observation' is the next stage which includes events or issues upon which reflection will occur. This would be the teaching methods or strategies employed, which require teachers to make general observations. Finally, 'additional information' involves new information obtained from other sources or from suggestions made by others.

The next level of reflection, which involves four stages, is where 'true reflection' or 'deep learning' occurs (King, 2002). This involves 'making meaning' in learning where the teachers process new material and are able to explain elements of it, as the material will be linked to the cognitive structure. This is called 'cognitive housekeeping' where teachers think things over until they achieve a better understanding, explore or organise the understanding towards a particular purpose or in order that it can be represented in a particular manner (Moon, 1999b: 139). This level begins with the stage of 'revisiting' where earlier reflections are reviewed, and there is a possibility for 'mulling over' issues and problems so that it is possible to look at an issue or event from a different perspective. She explains that learning is deepened when teachers rethink or reflect upon material that they have learnt at the surface level. Consideration can be given here to theorising and planning experiments or new actions. The stage of 'Standing Back' takes the reflection to a new level as the experiments or new actions are tested and the results are re-evaluated. New ideas go through a process of drafting and redrafting and the act of representing the material in the best possible form is a learning process (Moon, 1999a: 34).

'Revisiting' and 'Standing Back' are complementary stages that open windows of opportunities for teachers to develop their ability to synthesise and to fit new ideas into their existing schemata. They monitor and evaluate and decide on the plausible ways to make their teaching more effective. Here, teachers work on their portfolios by reflecting and rethinking what they have been doing and try to improve the quality of their teaching by evaluating and revising. This will eventually lead to the 'Moving On' or 'Resolution' stages of reflection to signify that something has

been learned and the teachers feel a sense of moving on. Further possibilities for reflection may be generated and the cycle of reflection will start again or a sense of accomplishment has been achieved at the end of the learning cycle (King, 2002).

Reflective practice requires one to actively think about one's actions as well as the consequences resulting from these actions. Teachers have to constantly think if the strategies derived as an outcome of their reflections will reap benefits for themselves as well as for their students. This active thinking process is triggered when the practitioner is engaged in problem solving situations or experimentation. The teacher is encouraged to apply theories that they have learned into practice within their own classrooms and to document reports of their experiences in their teaching portfolios. Teachers are also encouraged to analyse their teaching strategies with their colleagues and this collaborative model of reflective practice enriches teachers' personal reflections on their work and provides them with suggestions from peers on how to refine their teaching practices.

Reflective thinking has been closely associated with improved capacities for self-regulation as teachers become more aware of their own thinking as they think, write and solve problems. Moon (1999a) maintains that it is through reflection that practitioners begin to spend more time exploring why they acted as they did. Thus, they develop self-monitoring questions about the activities and get more involved in the teaching and learning process. This act of self-regulation through reflection encourages teachers to think and fully understand things before acting to avoid major problems. Therefore, teachers are totally engaged in self-development. In fact, reflective practice performed over a period of time can raise teacher's consciousness towards problem-solving and empower them to 'think and rethink' prior knowledge to generate new strategies for future possibilities.

Benefits of Reflective Practice

Reflection is a valuable skill or strategy to use in the learning process because it enhances teachers' insight and promotes their metacognitive awareness. Although reflection is considered an internal activity done in relative isolation, it is important to reflect with another person of your own level, who is learning with interest and appreciates your ideas and questions. Reflecting with a learning partner or partners about one's ideas and in the process receiving feedback about one's thinking is especially important for teacher development. Leong and Mardziah (2006) who studied the development of third-year student teachers found that the use of peer reflective groups encouraged student teachers to challenge existing theories and their own preconceived views of teaching while modeling for them a collaborative

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style of professional development that would be useful throughout their teaching careers. At the level of in-service teaching, studies have shown that critical reflection upon experience continues to be an effective technique for professional development (Ferraro, 2000). Therefore, effective teacher professional development should involve more than occasional large-group sessions; it should include activities such as study teams and peer coaching in which teachers continuously examine their assumptions and practices. In another study by Leong (2006), reflections that were performed in isolation did not possess the favourable conditions that engendered reflections at the deeper level. The findings support the use of a collaborative learning environment to trigger reflection as it offers opportunities for negotiation of meaning through peer discussions which paved the way for what Moon (1999b) calls 'cognitive housekeeping' to take place. Here, students evaluate and analyse all the views given and make cognitive decisions to either accommodate or reject the ideas. The study shows that a collaborative environment can propel reflective thinking to a higher level which encourages higher levels of metacognitive awareness. Through the use of reflection in a collaborative environment, we can learn to consciously make connections with prior and existing knowledge and plan the appropriate strategy to deal with the teaching process. Thus, Haneda and Wells (2000) maintain that where possible, opportunities should be provided for peer reviews to reflect on "work in progress or completed in order to make connections among topics researched and to encourage a metastance to the choice of goals and strategies" (p. 436).

Reflective practice, in general, is described as "a mode that integrates thoughts and action with reflection" (Imel, 1992: 95). In education, reflective practice is considered as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Only when teachers reflect whether through teaching portfolios, personal reflections or through action research, are they able to make sense of and extract meaning from their experiences.

In reflective practice, teachers are constantly engaged in a cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in their teaching efforts. Schon's (1988) concept of reflective practice helps teachers make sense of a method or a technique they perceive to be unique and retrieve existing knowledge or metaphors to act upon it. Smith (2001) believes that reflective practice encourages teachers to think and fully understand things before acting. Therefore, Moon (1999a) maintains that reflective practice needs to be structured accordingly to encourage teachers to "reflect on appropriate issues" and help them 'move on' in their reflection and their learning (p. 46). She argues that if teachers know the components that they are to reflect on, they are

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less likely to go around in circles and waste precious learning time reflecting on non-related issues.

On the other hand, reflective practice need not always focus on specific teaching methods and strategies. It can also help teachers redefine their attitudes towards teaching and learning and help them regenerate new feelings and new insights for self-improvement. Reflective practice can offer teachers an opportunity to explore attitudes, develop management skills, and reflect on the ethical implications of practice in classrooms and encourage teachers to step back and critically reflect not only on how they teach, but also on why they teach in a particular way. ESL teachers who frequently point out students' errors in an explicit way may, for example, ask themselves if that is how they would like their own mistakes to be identified, or if they would prefer an alternative approach. Reflection also helps ESL teachers examine any underlying – and perhaps unrealised – bias towards particular students.

Reflective practice is one of the educational strategies that can be easily applied in any learning situation to enhance teachers' consciousness of their ability to seek solutions to solve an existing problem. Furthermore, they can also develop strategies to overcome similar problems in the future. Thus, the next section outlines an innovative technique to reflection adapted based on Scharmer's (2007) model on 'presencing' which is an expansion of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, moving back and forth between action and reflection. Based on the model, teachers may not be able to address teaching and learning problems using traditional practices. Instead, the model suggests that teachers need to begin by observing and immersing oneself into the context. Then they should retreat and reflect on prior knowledge. In the process, they need to question their purpose or intent for seeking solutions and the 'highest future possibility' which requires teachers to let go of past practices in order to see new and emerging ideas. When a new idea evolves, teachers must move into action quickly and act instantly. Face reflection will be used as a guide for students to reflect and record their reflections down via reflective journals.

A Presencing Model: Reflecting for Future Possibilities

Although reflective practice in essence is beneficial in self-development and self-improvement, not all reflection results in learning (Beatty, 2003; Herrington and Oliver, 2002; Jasper, 1999; McConnell, 1994). Scharmer (2007) laments that in all aspects of society, major change is needed, yet this needed change is not taking place. Instead, people tend to follow the same pattern of tackling problems or issues which produce results that are basically the same or that no one actually wants. He maintains that this sad state of affairs is because society as a whole

tends to reflect on the past without bringing the future into the present. Scharmer (2007) calls this 'presencing'.

In like manner, teachers are often confronted with the same challenges and tackling the same issues with the same old practices as they tend to reflect on the past without future possibilities. Boud and Walker (1998) noted shortcomings in the way reflective practice has been applied in teacher education and development programs. They took issue with what they considered to be a 'checklist' or 'reflection on demand' mentality, reflection processes with no link to conceptual frameworks, a failure to encourage challenges to present teaching practices, and a need for personal disclosure that was beyond the capacity of teachers.

Therefore, in line with Scharmer's theory of 'presencing', these weaknesses can be addressed when teachers create a new mindset by building a context for reflection unique to every learning situation – by reflecting on the past and by bringing into the present all future possibilities so that they do not hold on tightly to past practices but quickly act on a positive idea that was developed to solve current problems.

Scharmer's (2007) theory on 'presencing' is an expansion of Kolb's (1984) "learning cycles – learning through reflecting on the past- through 'presencing', through the becoming-present of the highest future possibility." In applying Scharmer's theory into teacher development and the reflective process, his seven-step process is adapted in this chapter to enable teachers to re-invent their teaching practices, regenerate their attitudes towards their profession and to create new possibilities that bring about positive results.

A Tool-kit: A Practical Approach to Reflection

Schon (1998) advocates the use of practicum as a setting for good reflective practices where the pressures of normal practices are removed to enable better opportunities for deep reflection to occur. It is through reflection that we can come to a clearer sense of the values that underpin our work and of who we are as professionals. Reflection takes us back to meaning and purpose. Guided or structured reflection with the use of a cue question tool-kit offers teachers a more comprehensive and valid means of reflecting at the deeper level. It teaches us how we can be reflective practioners, which involves thinking about what we believe in and what we do. The following tool-kit integrates the stages of Moon's (1999b) Model and some of the principles of Scharmers' (2007) theory on 'presencing' to encourage teachers to view their teaching practices in a more socially-constructed manner and to develop solutions that are practical and effective for now and for future possibilities.

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Constructivism views learning as a process of embedding the target context which requires the kind of thinking that would be done in real life (Mardziah, 1998). Thus, this tool-kit offers teachers a practical approach to collaborate and problem-solve through the use of reflective practice, and it can be as easily applied to language teaching as it is to the teaching of other subjects.

Moon (1999b) reiterates that the cycle of reflection is one that encourages teachers to rethink and re-evaluate their teaching practices with the aim of self-improvement. The use of reflection enhances decision-making in professional education and practices and creates mindfulness to institute good teaching practices. According to Scharmer (2007) 'presencing' allows us to bring the future in to our present so that we create "spaces where people can reflect, sense, and then prototype and implement." It involves the will to let go of past practices and embrace new and innovative ways to problem-solve.

Conclusion

The tools and strategies for reflection explicated in this paper would be of benefit to teachers, regardless of their area or content of instruction. The primary benefit of reflective practice for teachers is a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher. Therefore, good teachers reflect effectively by letting go of their grip on the past and changing their set patterns. As explicated by Moon (1999b), teachers' self-development is only deepened when they acquire the ability to restructure what they have learnt at the surface level and when that happens, 'cognitive housekeeping' automatically occurs to facilitate their development to the next level. According to Moon (1999a) reflections are enhanced when ideas or thoughts are "represented in reflective discussions" (p. 26). Opportunities to reflect actively within an environment that allows them to discuss and challenge the ideas contributed by their peers amplifies the process of knowledge construction. Thus, reflection should not just remain at the level of 'reflection and action' but move towards the next level of 'future possibilities to enhance one's development and effectiveness in the teaching profession.'

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APPENDIX

Levels in Scharmer's 'Presencing' Theory	Scharmer's Description of Each Level in the Process	Moon's Stages of Reflection	Reflective Approach	Cue-Questions
1. Intention	Bringing key players together and then develop strategic intent.	PURPOSE	Teachers in a school gather to reflect on present teaching and learning practices. Decide on a common teaching or learning problem that they face.	1. What teaching problem(s) am I facing now? 2. What problem(s) are my students facing now?
2. Core Group	A group that is 100% committed to the project. The group goes on 'deep-dive' journeys, immersing themselves in all the relevant contexts in order to cope with a challenge or opportunity.	REVISITING	Teachers who are fully committed to seeking solutions to the existing problem. This group accesses their own sources as they 'get into relationship' with the problem. They write down personal reflections on a daily basis for a few weeks on why they feel or think this problem exists and how they would have tackled it traditionally.	1. What factors are contributing to this problem? 2. What are the significant factors that are contributing to this problem? 3. What do I normally do to tackle this problem? 4. Have I used the same approach before in the past? 5. IF yes, why isn't it effective?

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Levels in Scharmer's 'Presencing' Theory	Scharmer's Description of Each Level in the Process	Moon's Stages of Reflection	Reflective Approach	Cue-Questions
		STAND-BACK		1. Why did I intervene as I did? 2. What was I trying to accomplish? 3. Was my method/ approach effective? 4. If yes, how? 5. If no, why not? 6. What factors influenced my decision-making? 7. How did my colleagues or students react to the approach?
3. A Retreat	Everyone comes together for a short retreat where key insights from the journeys are synthesised.	MOVING ON	The core group comes together for a retreat where they share their reflections and draw on each other's prior knowledge and experiences. Here, discussions will lead to key strategies that are effective being identified and noted.	1. What are the various ways I could tackle this problem? 2. What will be the consequences of this action?

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Levels in Scharmer's 'Presencing' Theory	Scharmer's Description of Each Level in the Process	Moon's Stages of Reflection	Reflective Approach	Cue-Questions
4. Deep Personal Reflection and Presencing Work		RESOLUTION	The core group then 'rethink' the key strategies and reflect on future outcomes. For instance, will the solution prevent the same problem from occurring in the future? What are the possibilities that this problem will occur in the future and if so will this solution be effective or another solution is called for?	1. How do I feel about this decision? 2. How have I made sense of this experience in light of past practices and future possibilities? 3. Has this experiences changed the path of my development as a teacher?
5. Sharing and Closing of Ideas and Experience	Team operates from a different place. A different level of energy and inspiration	MORE REFLECTION	The team then brings their findings to the other teachers in their school. Teachers are asked to try out the new practices and write down their own daily reflections.	1. How effective is this approach? 2. How can this approach be improved? 3. How do my students react with this approach? 4. How do I feel about this experience?