

Reflective Teaching

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Why did I choose the topic?

As a teacher, I am often exhausted. Others kindly gave me advice, but those wonderful ways just don't seem to fit me and my situation. I kept learning, going to classes, going to workshops, feeling tired, resting, working again and so on. This was a vicious cycle I just couldn't get out of.

In this process, I learned some interesting methods and applied them through trial and error. For example, I knew of the theory about multiple intelligences and classified myself as a kinesthetic learner. Therefore, it was quite easy for me to make kids move as they followed my demonstration. However, it is not easy for me to work with those visual learners, who I believe are the majority of my students. Then I understand it is more natural for me to focus on those kids who have similar learning styles as me. It's a good assumption so far.

I was not aware of the solution until after I wrote an action research. At that time I kept teaching journals and talked with other teachers. I realized that keeping journals and talking about teaching were really helpful. Therefore, I would like to dig into the topic, teaching reflecting, more.

What did I learn? -- Two related workshops and one book

1. Workshop one--Reflective Teaching by Loraine Kennedy

At first, the teacher asked us why we wanted to know about reflective teaching. One said she wanted to have a chance to talk about teaching. Another one wanted to improve herself. I agreed with them both.

We talked about our experiences of being observed because observation is the key of reflective teaching. Though each of us answered with a set pattern, "I have been observed ___ times in ___ years," we figured out our experiences were very different. One of us had been

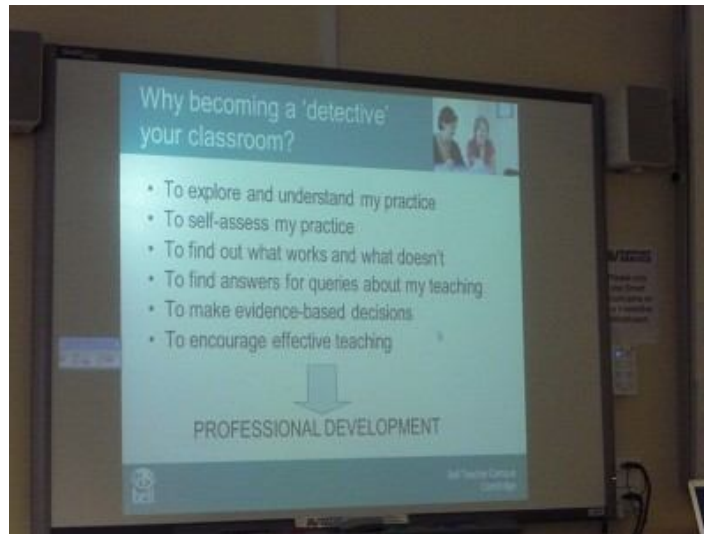
observed six times in the last six months, while one of us had never been observed in ten years! Most of us agreed that there would be pressure when we were observed.

According to Loraine's document, reflective teaching means "...the process of thinking about, evaluating, analysing and reviewing what takes place in the classroom... Its goal is to improve and transform our teaching... It involves asking questions about teaching practices, exchanging experiences with colleagues, finding out about and trying different approaches and new ideas." To do reflective teaching means we find time and ways to think about our own teaching. If we believe it can help us, we will keep on doing this. In doing this, we also have to know whether we do it right or not. For the latter question, we need a standard. Loraine asked us an interesting question, "What do you benchmark yourself against?" We talked about the given guidelines, whether we talked a lot or not, and whether students are involved or not.

Then we did a reflective practice. Loraine suggested an unthreatening practice called blind observation. There are six stages of them. Description (talk about it/make it real), Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. Therefore, I talked to a classmate about one of our classes. We described it from the very beginning in details. We were reminded to find the key time/action/sayings when we felt bad or good. Figure out why it is so. We need to clarify the expectation or belief in the feeling. During the practice, Loraine worked with us and helped us find a solution, using questionnaires. With questionnaires, we can ask students how they want to learn at the beginning or at the end of the semester. We may also get feedback from kids every week.

Apart from blind observation, teachers may also improve by observing other teachers, writing a journal, recording their own teaching, and reading what the experts say.

2. Workshop—I'm Sherlock Holmes: "detective-ing my classroom" by Paula Rebolledo



Paula encouraged teachers to do research on their own teaching. Therefore, she talked about “how” in this workshop. Teachers have a lot of experiences, but experiences are not evidence. Experiences are mere assumptions that need to be checked. Besides, we teachers are normally not aware of our own assumptions. She suggested that we think in this way, “I’m not sure. Let me get evidence to talk about this.”

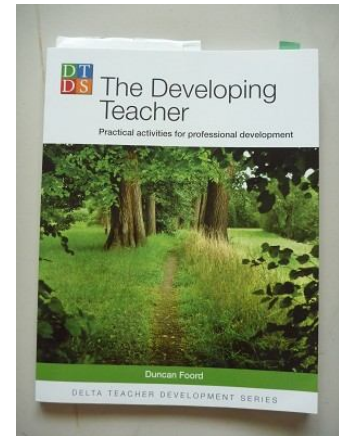
Paula then talked about exploratory practice and action research. AR(Action Research) is more familiar to me. To do AR, we find a problem, collect data, examine and find a solution. Compared to AR, the goal of exploratory practice doesn’t have to be limited to finding a solution to a problem. It may also be to understand about a teacher’s self or the situation. Therefore, the concept of exploratory practice is a big umbrella, which action research is under. According to Paula’s document, their differences are seen below.

Action research	Exploratory practice
A teacher is a researcher to improve a situation. The teacher reflects.	The teacher and <i>students</i> are researchers to <i>understand</i> a situation. They reflect.

For research, a good question is the key. How do we get a good question? Paula suggests that we need to “ask as many people as possible.”

3. Book summary (The Developing Teacher by Duncan Foord)

When teachers do observation and reflection, teachers are on the way of professional development. The author, Duncan Foord believes, “dealing with all the challenges at work can be development in itself.”(p.9) I agree with that. It’s natural that we teachers develop all the time, thanks to our students and work environments. The book suggests that there are five circles of development: “you, you and your student, you and colleagues, you and school, and the last one, you and your profession.”(p.14)



Duncan suggests that Teacher can develop in four areas. First is skills, such as clear instruction. Second is knowledge, i.e. how English sounds are produced. Third is awareness, i.e. how we can use our own eyes and ears to know that kids are learning better. Fourth is attitude, i.e. we learn about our own assumptions. (p10) We can choose one from the four areas to form our research topic.

Duncan also suggests that a teacher develops in seven ways. 1. Learning from instructions. 2. Learning from research. 3. Learning from ideas. 4. Learning intuitively. 5. Learning from analyzing your own teaching. 6. Learning as an adult. 7. Learning from an inspirational example (p10-14) Collecting data such as keeping a journal, videotaping the class, collecting student work and questionnaires follows the fifth method (as listed above) learning from analyzing your own teaching. Finding a peer to do a blind observation is the sixth, learning as an adult.

Before I go to my third part of this article, I want to mention about my trainer in the program. Her name is Amenda. Amenda’s style of teaching is like a model to me, as I want to improve my instructional skills. Furthermore, the content is a good refresher course on teaching pedagogy. I often refer back to the notes I took there. The notes were labeled as

day-one or day-two notes in my report. My goal also includes speaking more English in class than before. In doing this, I might save my voice.

My Application—Journals

I have kept teaching journals since the beginning of the semester. In this report, the journals end on September 14, 2011 because I need to hand in my report at the end of September.

September 4, 2011

The chart, “mirror, mirror”, on Foord’s book p.32 helped me to evaluate one of my classes. I choose this class because the students are new to me. After filling two charts out, I figured out students didn’t interact with other students enough. I decided to improve it. So I read my day-one notes. From the notes and questionnaires. I chose one stir activity (jump a line) and one settle activity (bingo). I put down the activities on my idea book to get ready.

Self-observation: diagnosis and reflection		Self-obs
Section 1: Class information		
Level:	Date: 8/31	
Class profile: 2/0 2 sessions		
Aims: Greeting / Rules (write in L1)		
Section 2: Planning		My score
Did I anticipate the problems my students had?		6
Were the aims appropriate for these students?		7
Did I achieve my aims (linguistic and communicative)?		6
Section 3: Teacher performance		My score
Did the students understand my instructions?		7
Were all my students catered for?		7
Did I vary interaction patterns between students?		3
How much did I talk?		5
Was any of my talk “inappropriate”?		
How often were students corrected?		3
Was there any peer or self-correction?		
Section 4: Student performance		My score
Were there a positive learning environment or not (teacher support, humour, listening to students with interest, inappropriate use of L1 by students, bad atmosphere)?		5
How authentic was the communication?		6
How much did my students talk (to other students to me)?		4
Section 5: Conclusions		My score
In what areas do I need to improve?		53

Self-observation: diagnosis and reflection		Self-obs
Section 1: Class information		
Level:	Date: 9/2	
Class profile: 2/0 2 sessions		
Aims: Introduce survey, Write letters		
Section 2: Planning		My score
Did I anticipate the problems my students had?		7
Were the aims appropriate for these students?		6
Did I achieve my aims (linguistic and communicative)?		6
Section 3: Teacher performance		My score
Did the students understand my instructions?		7
Were all my students catered for?		4
Did I vary interaction patterns between students?		3
How much did I talk?		3
Was any of my talk “inappropriate”?		
How often were students corrected?		
Was there any peer or self-correction?		3
Section 4: Student performance		My score
Were there a positive learning environment or not (teacher support, humour, listening to students with interest, inappropriate use of L1 by students, bad atmosphere)?		6
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September 5, 2011

For classroom rules, I made students copy all the 6 items on the notebook at the beginning. Later I changed it to “fill in the blanks” statements for kids to have more interaction with each other. I spoke Chinese to explain. They got the rules right away and everyone could finish it, and glue the work in his notebook. Although they were only

7-year-old, they could do it. Next time, I might demonstrate it all in English first.

(第一版本-copying)

(第二版本- information gap)

我們的約定

1. 老師說好才離開座位。
2. 帶齊簿本。
3. 教室保持清潔，不飲食。
4. 準時上課，交作業。
5. 說話要舉手，點到才開口。
6. 和同學相親相愛。

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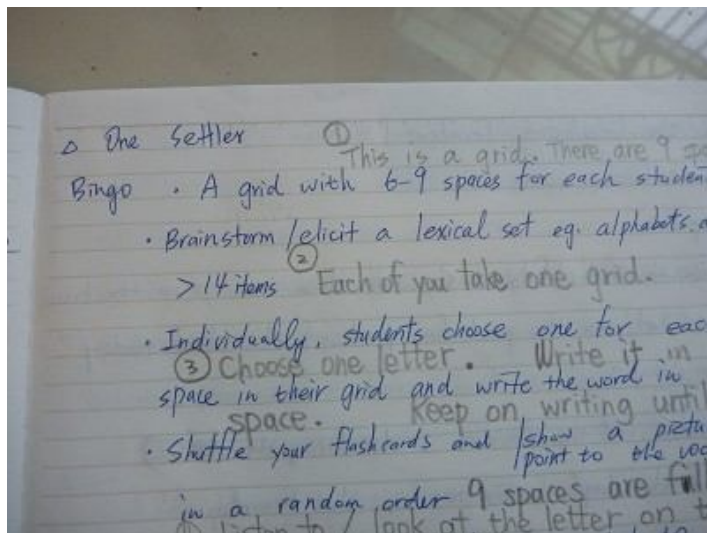
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In one class, I use the prepared stir and settle activities. Almost every kid enjoyed “jumping a line”. Some learners were left behind and lost quickly, mostly because they lacked confidence and were a bit slow. Students loved to help reset the target letters. They were also eager to be a teacher to call out the target letters. When we had Bingo, students became silent while waiting for next call or cheered when they got one letter circled on their Bingo. They were focused. I felt good.

Can slow learners be successful in the games? They probably can't. What are some ways I can encourage them? Oh. I forgot one thing. One slow kid asked me if he needed to stay after the class. I forgot and said no. I need to find him and play more alphabet games with him.

September 6, 2011



I said the instructions in English for the Bingo game today. First I talked about the game in English. Students kept guessing and someone said that it is Bingo. By doing this, I found some advanced learners. Then I check their understanding by speaking Chinese. They understood it and answered me in Chinese or English.

I was frustrated in one class. There were about 11 out of 28 students in the class that lost their concentration easily. No wonder I have difficulty with this class. Maybe I should do more listen and do activities to match their learning styles. Should I give out some prizes for those who have good manners?

September 7, 2011

I tried to use the six stages of reflection practice learnt from Loraine.

Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boys were noisy and I asked them to come in the classroom quietly again. 2. I sang to greet them, and they sang to me. 3. I said, "Do you want to play a game?"¹ I introduced boys' chalk and girls' chalk. First I spoke English to instruct the game. Then I spoke Chinese to check their understanding. (I may revise the sentences to check understanding.) Students could understand me. They were involved in the
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¹ The game is about alphabet writing. First separate blackboard to 2 parts, one for girls and one for boys. A boy and a girl come to the board and write down alphabets then give their chalk to next one to continue.

games. After each boy and girl finished their turn, I asked them to find the missing letters in pairs. Then I drew lots to choose kids to share their answers. They (seven were chosen) could find almost all of the missing letters. I said good and invited them to next game. (I may have said “good” more times. Other expressions are “lovely” and “yes”).

4. To demonstrate jump a line, I asked 5 kids to come and do. They picked it up quickly. In turn, I invited 5 kids at a time to come and play. When kids were coming to play, I asked other kids to change the target letters. I also invited a kid to come to be the teacher to call out the letter. They did it well. They showed disappointment when they were not picked. I faced their disappointment directly without comment. I insisted that only those who were silent to wait for my call could be picked. I had the right to choose. When it went to the final two teams, we had a break.
5. We continued to play. One girl was crying loudly because she felt other people didn't treat her fairly. I kept going to next game without stopping for her. When she had disturbed the class further, I told her she could cry if she felt sad, but she could not disturb our English class. I told her to be quieter in Chinese.
6. I introduced the Bingo game. The once-crying girl talked with two other boys for a long time. I asked them to behave and there was no use. I asked them to stand at different places. We had the Bingo game while I asked the girl to help me so she could move about. When there was a winner, we finished the game.
7. Students had to run to three other students to read the letters on their Bingo. Then the class dismissed.

Feelings	I was focused on the kids' misbehavior a lot. I didn't like it. So I felt bad.
Evaluation	The class design itself was ok.
Analysis	The classroom management didn't work well, but it shouldn't bother my lesson plan. They are different in some ways.
Conclusion	I felt bad because of some kids' behaviors, but the class itself was fine. I had a clear distinction between the classroom management and my teaching. I want to know about the class as a whole so I might use questionnaire. I'll treat the three kids separately. Um... I gain some self-assurance.
Action Plan	I decided to change the seats of the three kids. Later I might give my questionnaire to the whole class.

September 8, 2011

I also worked with fifth graders. I can share anything I want with the kids without a set curriculum. I want to read with kids. The main goal is to set up a daily five classroom. As I read the book² again, I found that there's something important about instruction! It reminds me with the purpose of instruction.

“Effective instruction is about developing learners who actively and independently monitor and regulate their own learning.” (p 40)

September 9, 2011

² The daily 5-fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades by Gail Boushey & Joan Moser, published by Stenhouse Publishers

Self-observation: diagnosis and reflection		Self-observation
Section 1 - Class information		Section 1 - Class information
Level	Date 7/9	Level
Class profile	210 2 sessions	Class profile
Aims	Interest, Write letters + read with support	Aims Old
Section 2 - Planning		Section 2 - Planning
Did I anticipate the problems my students had?	6	Did I anticipate
Were the aims appropriate for these students?	6	Were the aims
Did I achieve my aims (linguistic and communicative)?	6	Did I achieve
Section 3 - Teacher performance		Section 3 - Teacher performance
	My score	
Did the students understand my instructions?	8	Did the students
Were all my students engaged for?	7	Were all my
Did I vary interaction patterns between students?	3	Did I vary in
How much did I talk?	3	How much did
Was any of my talk 'inappropriate'?	3	Was any of
How/when were students corrected?	5	How/when
Was there any peer or self-correction?		Was there an
Section 4 - Student performance		Section 4 - Student performance
	My score	
Was there a positive learning environment or not (teacher rapport, humour, listening to students with interest, inappropriate use of L1 by students, bad atmosphere)?	6	Was there a
How authentic was the communication?	5	How authentic
How much did my students talk (to other students/to me)?	4	How much
Section 5 - Conclusions		Section 5 - Conclusions
	My score	
In what areas do I need to improve?	53	In what areas

After checking with the mirror-mirror chart, I found I needed to improve the part of teacher's performance this time. This was because of the aim I set. I aimed to check students' work one by one. There were two assignments. One was about each kid's interests. It was a survey in pictures and Chinese so I could have authentic and personal data of kids. The second was a writing task to check kids' uppercase and lowercase alphabets. When a kid finished the work, he or she could read books in my classroom.

When I checked the notebooks one-by-one. Other kids went to the reading corner and found a book and went back to their seats to read. There was some misbehavior. I corrected those kids one-by-one. It was time consuming. I really wanted to build their reading behavior. Maybe I need a good patrol to make sure the readers are in order while I'm working with one kid.

The lesson plan was ok because it is important to have individual time as well as for group time.

September 9, 2011

I kept reading the note I made in the UK. The topic was about listening. Amenda reminded us not to use messy language. Messy language is unnatural, and is not the language

kids will listen to or use when they speak to native speakers of English. I took it as a principle for my word usage and the sentences I choose to form my instruction.

I'm going to present the song "Old Macdonald Had a Farm". Amenda also suggested that I provide a context as well as a pre-listening stage to activate the students' existing knowledge on the topic.

September 13, 2011

I read the day-three notes. The topic is speaking. It was Amenda's way of teaching different foods on a pizza. I applied it step-by-step to introduce animals on the farm. Below were the steps I revised.

Step 1 T says, "It is about a farm. What are the animals in the farm?"

Step 2 T draws a farm on the board and asks students to number the animals. T plays the sound track.

Step 3 T play the song again and at the same time shows the picture of animals to make the content understood by students.

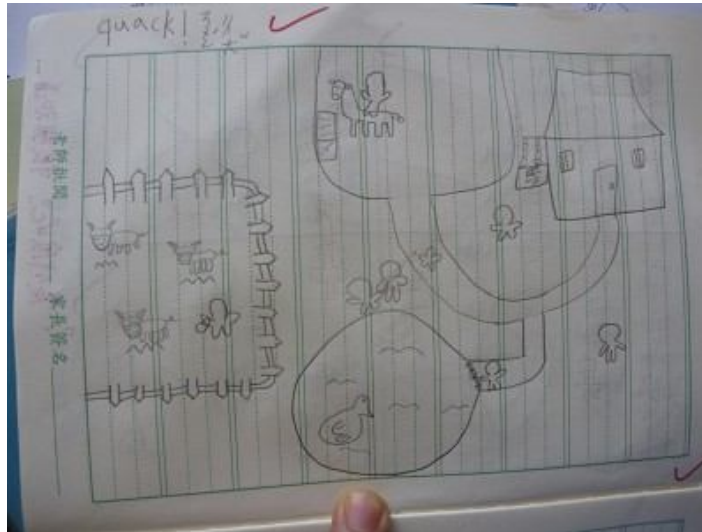
Step 4 T draws a bubble next to each animals and elicits the sounds from the students.

Step 5 T asks students to practice the song.

Step 6 T asks student so to draw three animals in their own farms. Later students have to find out who have the same farm by acting the animals only.

Step 7 T asks students to create a name for their own farms.

September 14, 2011



I wrote down the instruction words today.

Step 1 “It is about a farm. What are the animals in the farm?”

Step 2 “Listen. Find out the number of animals” or “How many animals are there in the song?”

Step 3 “Look and listen.”

Step 4 “What does a duck sound like?”

Step 5 “Let’s sing along.”

Step 6 “Draw a farm in your notebook. Draw 3 animals on your farm.” “Let’s have a game. You need to find someone who keeps the same animals on his or her farm.” “You can only act your animals. Don’t say the words.” “For example...”

Step 7 “Put a name on your farm.”

I practiced and found students would listen to my Chinese translation. We still could not use English only. But it’s ok for now.

Students compared their own pictures with their notebooks directly. I invited them to act out when we checked the work afterwards. Some of the kids used gestures and sounds, and other students could guess the right animals.

Conclusion

What is reflective teaching? For me, reflective teaching is a cycle of action, thinking, action, thinking, action, thinking, etc. During the process, I worked with kids and searched for an answer to the question raised along the way. By keeping a journal, I can link information both from actually practice and knowledge learnt.

Nicola, one of the speakers in the workshop, said, “There are no right or wrong answers.” That’s true. I just need to find my own way of teaching, and to be clear of what I am saying and doing. Working on this report helped me a lot, and it is my pleasure to share it with you.

Self-observation: diagnosis and reflection

Section 1- Class information	
Level:	Date:
Class profile:	
Aims:	
Section 2- Planning	My score
Did I anticipate the problems my students had?	
Were the aims appropriate for these students?	
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Section 3- Teacher performance	My score
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Were there a positive learning environment or not (teacher rapport, humor, listening to students with interest, inappropriate use of L1 by students, bad atmosphere)?	
How authentic was the communication?	
How much did my students talk (to other students/to me)?	
Section 5- Conclusions	My score

In what areas do I need to improve?	
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From p32, The Developing Teacher, Duncan Foord, Delta Publishing