

Research on Reflective Teaching and Professional Development of English Teachers

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Abstract— This paper has attempted to draw upon the issue of English teachers' professional development with the purpose of promoting the development of English education in China. English teachers' professional development can be achieved through reflection, which is regarded as an effective means to facilitate the process of teachers' professional development. The paper makes a literature review of teacher reflection. Based on the related theories, the author presents case study to describe how teacher reflection can be employed in practice, and gives some suggestions on how to promote teachers' professional development through teacher reflection.

Keywords—reflection; reflective teaching; teacher professional development

I. INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of the College English education reform, the demands on professional development of College English teachers are becoming increasingly high. However, the traditional "up-down" model of teacher professional development cannot satisfy the need of teacher professional development. In the 1980s, a completely new model, "bottom-up" model, appeared in the teacher education field of such western countries as America and Britain, which has attracted many teacher education researchers into this field. This "bottom-up" model holds that a teacher should take the self as an important source in her/his professional development by reflecting upon her/his own teaching practice. How to do reflective teaching to facilitate professional development has ever since become a very important issue in the teacher education research field of the world.

However, in the teacher education field of our country, such research is rare and just belongs to an initial stage. I attempt to explore an effective way for College English teachers to promote their professional development by inviting College English teachers to participate in the research and investigating the general situation of their professional development as well as their reflective teaching practice. So this study adopts a qualitative research method including in-depth interview and case study in order to answer the following questions:

- How is the general situation of reflective teaching practice among College English teachers?
- Does reflective teaching help teacher professional development?

- How do College English teachers do reflective thinking in their teaching to facilitate their professional development?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Teacher Professional Development

First, Teacher professional development is a term used in the literature to describe "a process of continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal of teachers" [1]. Teacher professional development means "a process of evolving as a teacher, of the continual unfolding of beliefs and teaching practices throughout a teacher's career" [2]. For Underhill, teacher professional development is a self-reflective process of becoming the best kind of teacher that he personally can be [3].

According to Hargreaves and Fullan [4], the conceptualization of TPD includes "knowledge and skill development, self-understanding, and ecological change". Johnson & Golombek view teacher professional development as a process of reshaping teachers' existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices rather than simply imposing new theories, methods, materials on teachers. The sign of teacher professional development is the formation of teachers' ability of self-education and self-reflection. Knowledge and skill, morality, self-education and self-development consist of the framework of teacher professional development [5].

B. Reflection and Reflective Teaching

1) Reflection

The original definition of reflection can be found in John Dewey's description of how we think in a book by the same name. He originally defined reflection as the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" [6]. Dewey regards reflection as a way of thinking about a problematic situation that needs to be resolved.

Van Manen suggests that reflection occurs and progresses in three stages or levels: technical rationality, practical action, and critical reflection, and each one higher than the last and superseding it. For Van Manen, reflection is a continuum.

Obviously, the concept reflection varies slightly with different scholars. According to Wildman, Niles, Magliaro and McLaughlin, reflection is "an active, effortful enterprise" which does not just happen but arises under the operation of certain motivational forces [7]. Similarly, Bitting and Clift argue that

"reflective thought" is a kind of mental activity distinguished from others like daydreams or imagination, and should be described as a special kind of process [8].

As a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, reflection roots itself in scientific inquiry. Kemmis highlights the connection between individual reflection and social action. He says: Reflection is not just an individual, psychological process. It is an action oriented, historically-embedded, social and political frame, to locate oneself in the history of a situation, to participate in a social activity, and to take sides on issues.

Schon sees reflection not only as a way of thinking, but as a hallmark of being a professional. He contends that professionals need to recognize the "complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value-conflict" of a work setting and to frame the context in which a problem is situated [9][10].

Recently, Jay and Johnson give a comprehensive definition of reflection as follows [11]:

Reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is composed of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others. This definition forms the basis of a typology of reflective practice for teacher education, which profiles three dimensions of reflective thought: descriptive, comparative, and critical.

2) Reflective Teaching

Cruikshank and Applegate, define reflective teaching as "the teacher's thinking about happens in classroom lessons about alternative means of achieving goals or aims" [12]. Richards & Lockart also think that in reflective teaching "teachers and student teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching" [13]. These authors note that reflective teaching can be practiced by both in-service and pre-service teachers, so long as the persons have some current, ongoing teaching experience that can serve as the basis for reflection.

Other definitions take a broader stance and embed the concept of reflection within the social and political contexts of programs, schools, and communities. Zeichner and Liston, influenced by the work of John Dewey, give a more socially oriented definition of reflective teaching [14]. For them, reflective teaching involves "a recognition, examination, and rumination over the implications of one's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and values as well as the opportunities and constraints provided by the social conditions in which the teacher works".

These ideas about reflective teaching disclose the connotation of it from different aspects. On the basis of them, Xiong Chuanwu critically defines that reflective teaching is "the process that the teaching subject, with the help of action research, keeps on inquiring and solving some problems existing in his/her teaching goals and teaching instruments, connects 'learning to teach' with 'learning to learn', tries to

improve rationality of teaching, and makes himself/herself become a teacher of some scholar kind." [15] So reflective teaching has the peculiarities of teaching activeness, situation, feedback, and effectiveness [16]. Teachers are the subjects of reflection. The core of reflection is self-development of teachers. In a word, reflective teaching is a process in which a teacher acts as a life-long learner and a researcher.

III. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

A. Method

Define to investigate the general situation of reflective teaching, its effects on professional development of teacher in China and how teachers do reflective thinking in their teaching to facilitate their professional development; a qualitative research approach was mainly adopted so as to provide a clear picture of reflective teaching practiced among teachers.

B. Participantss

The subjects involved in the study were teachers in Zhejiang International Maritime College. I conducted in depth interviews with 4 teachers who have better performance in reflective teaching. The four teachers all were female.

C. Instruments

In this study, such instruments as in-depth interview, teaching journals or diaries were used. In-depth interview was to show teachers' understanding of reflective teaching and the specific process of teacher professional development and effects of reflective teaching on teacher professional development, and teaching journals or diaries tried to further disclose effects of reflective teaching on teacher professional development and ways of reflective teaching..

IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

By analyzing the contents of the in-depth interviews, I have found that there exist a lot of things similar to each other in the process of their professional development and their understanding about reflective teaching. Due to the limitation of the length of the thesis and the convenience of the narration, Miss A is chosen as the representative of the four.

A. Results from In-depth Interview

According to the contents of the in-depth interview, I mainly narrate the process of her professional development and her understanding of reflective teaching.

1) Process of Teacher Professional Development

The process of her professional development can be induced into three stages.

The first is the stage of "Imitation". In 1999, she graduated from Foreign Language Department of a university. Like most of student teachers, she had high aspirations and enthusiasm for teaching work. However, in this stage, she just simply imitated what her teachers had done in class or what she had learned from some educational literature. What she did was guided just by impulse, intuition, or routine. Due to lack of practical teaching experience, the effectiveness of her teaching was not good.

Facing all pressures from college and students, she entered the stage of "Frustration". In this stage, though she felt dimmed about teaching, she began to initially reflect about her own teaching activities. She occasionally wrote something after class just like teaching journals, listened to students feedback and learned from experienced teachers. Her reflection about teaching is spontaneous. It was this kind of spontaneous reflection that she slowly became clear about teaching. At the same time, she also felt the importance of educational theories, and she seized a chance to continue studying to get her Master of Arts Degree in applied linguistics.

She has gotten into the present third stage, the "Development" stage. With the guide of her tutor, she has read a lot of educational literature and come to accept reflective teaching. She has begun to practice reflective teaching in her own teaching, thus conscious and systematical reflection has appeared in her teaching. In this stage, her students have given her high evaluation. She attended teaching contests held by the college, getting the first prize in the college. Besides the achievement in teaching action, she has gotten her MAD, attended several international academic conferences, and had three papers published. She has benefited from her reflective teaching practice.

We can see that in the process of her professional development, reflective teaching plays a very important role. Through reflective teaching, her profession has been developed obviously.

2) Teacher Understands of Reflective Teaching

The following is Miss A understands of reflective teaching.

To me, reflection is a way of thinking. It is reflection that forces me to try to externalize my abstract thinking, making my thinking visual. Reflection on teaching practice also makes me focusing myself, students, interaction between me and students, and context.

This quote shows that Miss A thinks reflection is a way of thinking and reflection can externalize her abstract thinking.

Through reflective teaching, my teaching beliefs change, and due to this change of teaching beliefs, my teaching practice also changes. I begin to focus my classroom teaching and my roles changing in the classroom teaching. I focus on student-teacher interaction and students' development.

This quote reveals that Miss A realizes that reflection can change her teaching beliefs and practice.

Reflective teaching makes me become a learner. In the process of reflective teaching, I learn from my colleagues, other experienced persons in this subject such as my college classmates, educational literature and even my students. Besides, I begin to observe and research on my own teaching. In the process of reflective teaching, I become conscious of teaching practice...

This quote shows that reflective teaching makes Miss A learn and research.

B. Results from Case study

In this section, results from case study are presented, which are mainly from teaching journals or diaries.

1) Teaching Diaries

From the date of Miss A's teaching journals, in the stage of her "Frustration", she has begun to write something about her teaching. Now, on the average, Miss A writes about three teaching journals in a week. I cite some of her teaching journals, for they have relations with each other, and can show how she does reflective teaching to some degree.

The class of students whose major is International Trade pay more attention to their oral English. However, from my observation, I find that sometimes they perform very well, while sometimes they perform badly. I want to know why.

This teaching diary shows that she found out some questions by observing. After having observed and listened to what the students said in class for about two weeks, She feels that they learn best when they have a chance to practice English using group work activities, which encourage free production of the language and learner-learner interaction. Here, she found out some principles behind the question.

Today I discussed with one of my colleagues who is an experienced teacher: She suggested me to use problem-solving discussion in my lessons to provide chances for students to practice English.

This quote shows she set out a plan by discussing with others.

I reflected this teaching method through educational literature, network and discussing with other experienced teachers. I decide to use problem-solving discussions in my lessons to provide such practice.

This quote shows she tried to check her plan by reflecting through literature.

Today I used the activity "The Ship Sink", a situation where a ship will sink, with twenty passengers but only ten parachutes in my class. The students discussed the problem in groups of six, and have to agree on which ten individuals on the ship should survive. I gave the students a handout and explained the activity to them, divided the students into five groups and asked one student in every group recording what every member said. The activity lasted for about 30 minutes. I was impressed with the overall quality of student language as carried out their problem-solving activity.

This quote shows she appraised her plan in teaching practice.

In these classes, I still used problem-solving discussion in my oral English lessons. The results confirmed my beliefs about the usefulness of problem-solving discussion as practice activities. I use this method to make students perform learning activities.

Here she put her plan into teaching activities.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Effects of Reflective Teaching on Professional Development of College English Teachers*

From the process of Miss A's professional development, we can see that it is initial reflection that has made her step out of the stage of "Frustration" and also it is critical reflection that has made her enter the step of "Development". Does Reflective teaching further professional development of College English teachers? We can see some reasons from the following four aspects.

1) Improving Teachers' Self-awareness and Self-observation

Teacher professional development is a process of improvement of the capacity of self-awareness and self-observation. Self-awareness and self-observation are the cornerstones of all professional development. Self-awareness refers to being cognizant of something about oneself. Self-observation refers to monitor or observe his/her own behavior as a teacher.

In the process of reflective teaching, they are trying to externalize their abstract thinking, making their thinking visual and then becoming self-aware on their teaching. In the process of reflective teaching, they are trying to self-observe and self-monitor their teaching. And also in this process, they are experiencing a process from limitedly concerning classroom teaching and student learning to student-teacher interaction and their own development. When they realize the significance of their development and confront serious problems in teaching, they tend to reason positively and to construct actively. This shows that the capacity of their self-awareness has been improved and their eagerness to improve also became more intense.

2) Making Teachers Learn and Research

Teacher professional development is a process of self-learning, self-improving and life-long educating, and because in a process of reflective teaching, a teacher needs to actively observe, analyze, and reconstruct to realize his own professional development, and this is a process of continual reflecting and learning. Teacher professional development is a continual, life-long process. Development needs learning and education, while learning is an active process in which learners construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through action and reflection. If a teacher wants to be a good teacher, she/he has to learn, to construct her/his own professional knowledge.

From the situation of reflective teaching and professional development of college English teachers, we can see that in the process of reflective teaching, they are playing roles of learners and researchers. They learn from their own experience, colleagues, literature and even students. They research on their own teaching with the guide of educational theories. They try to write academic papers by integrating their teaching beliefs and teaching practice. In doing reflective teaching, they become life-long learners and researchers.

3) Making Teachers Change in Teaching Beliefs and Practice

From Miss A's spontaneous reflection to conscious reflection, we can see that she has experienced great changes. Among the changes that she has experienced are changes in

her teaching beliefs and teaching practice. This is a long, slow, ongoing process, during which her improvement in both beliefs and teaching practices emerges gradually.

Most of the changes in her beliefs include beliefs about teaching, students, self and research. She has focused on her classroom teaching and the role often classroom teaching for the students' learning. In doing reflection, her self-awareness on personal development has become more and more obvious. And her acquaintance with and interest in doing classroom research have been engaged in her growth with the development of her classroom-oriented action research.

4) Making Teachers Integrate Their Educational Theories and Teaching Practice

From Miss A's process of professional development, she starts with an initial theory of language teaching and learning, based on personal experiences as a language learner and, in some cases, reading or training. In reflective practice, she applies this theory in classroom, observes and reflects on the results, and adapts the theory. The classroom becomes a kind of laboratory where she can relate teaching theory to teaching practice. The theory provides a unifying rationale for the activities that she uses in the classroom; classroom observation and reflection enable her to refine the theory and adjust teaching practice. Concepts that she acquires through reading and professional development are absorbed into the theory and tested in the reflective practice cycle. This cycle of theory building, practice and reflection continues throughout her career, as she evaluates new experiences and tests new or adapted theories against them.

In a word, though reflective teaching is not the only way for teacher professional development, it is the most effective way for teacher professional development, for it can make a teacher pursuing professional development on the basis of the self.

B. *Ways College English Teachers Do Reflective Teaching*

The basis for critical reflection is events that occur in every lesson and in every classroom. But not every teacher can exploit these events and make critical reflection. Critical reflection works on condition that teachers can find ways to capture the thoughts of and reactions to these events, as well as ways to gather further information about the events themselves. It is necessary for these ways or procedures to be introduced to help teachers investigate classroom teaching so that teachers can develop strategies for intervention or change according to their needs.

From in-depth interview and case study, we can find which techniques of reflective teaching are commonly used and which techniques of reflective teaching are used occasionally or never.

1) Teaching journals or diaries

Teaching journals or diaries are written or recorded accounts of teaching experiences, which will be about teachers' routine and conscious actions in the classroom. These actions include conversations with students, critical incidents in a lesson, teachers' beliefs about teaching, events outside the classroom that will influence teaching, and teachers' views about language teaching and learning. There are two purposes

for teaching journals, one of which is for later reflection and the other of which can trigger teachers' insights about teaching by writing.

2) Lesson reports

Lesson reports are very important and more formal than teaching journals or diaries [13]. They are written accounts of lessons, which describe the main features of the lessons. The purpose of a lesson report is to give 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. Whereas a lesson plan describes what a teacher intends to do during a lesson, a lesson report describes what actually happened from the teacher's point of view.

3) Surveys and questionnaires

Many teachers ask students to write anonymous letters, and some of them use questionnaire to get information from students. Surveys and questionnaire include activities such as administering a questionnaire or completing a survey, designed to collect information on a particular aspect of teaching or learning. Surveys and questionnaires are useful ways to gather information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences, and enable a teacher to collect a large amount of information relatively quickly.

4) Observation

Teachers frequently use observation as a way to do reflection. Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart suggest observation as a way of gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching [13]. In many language programs, teachers are often reluctant to take part in observation or related activities since observation is associated with evaluation. Thus in order for observation to be viewed as a positive rather than a negative experience, the observer's function should be limited to that of gathering information. The observer should not be involved in evaluating a teacher's lesson.

VI. CONCLUSION

In Reflective teaching College English teachers reflect their teaching through self, students, colleagues, and literature. By thinking what they are doing in teaching, and why or how they are doing it, they can develop the habit of reflection and internalize new educational theories which they have touched.

Reflective teaching is an effective way to teacher professional development. The qualitative results have shown that reflective teaching can improve teachers' capacity of self-awareness and self-observation, make teachers learn through reflective teaching, and make teachers' teaching beliefs and practice change and then integrate teaching beliefs and practice.

Different techniques for reflective teaching such as teaching journals, lesson reports, observation, surveys or questionnaires, audio or video recordings and action research are commonly used. Teachers can do reflective thinking through selves, students, colleagues and literature. Of course, each procedure has advantages and limitations, and some are

more useful for exploring certain aspects of teaching than others. It is up to teachers to decide which procedures are useful and for what purposes.

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