

**Exploration of reflective practice as a teacher development endeavor:
Reflection and reflexivity**

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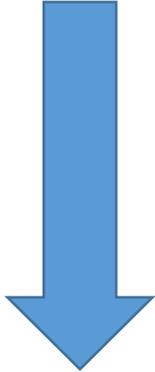
Introduction

This presentation is based on a qualitative multiple case study of reflective practice conducted by the presenter. As an alternative to a conventional teacher training where knowledge is bestowed from teacher trainers to in-service teachers, I explored reflective practice as an alternative approach, where experiences of practicing teachers are regarded as legitimate knowledge, teachers are regarded as owner and producer of knowledge, and reflection is regarded as a way of professional development. At the onset of the study, reflective practice was a new endeavour in Japan with a few existing literature on the topic and a few institutions engaging in the practice; the study was exploratory in nature, where I was interested in how reflective practice would be experienced by in-service high school of teachers. Thus the main research question posed was “How does reflective practice work as a professional development tool for in-service high school teachers of English in Japan?”

Procedures

The study was conducted with six in-service high school teachers of English for duration of 7 months. The study employed three research methods, focus group discussions, journal writing, and interviews. During the seven months, the teachers engaged in three focus group discussions, weekly journal writing, and monthly interviews. The methods, which were called reflective interventions, were forums for the teachers to reflect as well as for me to obtain data. With the consent of the teachers, the focus group discussions and the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. In the course of the study, the participants engaged in what is called a reflective task, which is incorporated as ways to enhance their reflection on their practice, such as selecting reflective themes, that is, their recurring interests or concerns in their teaching practices. The following chart summarises the timing and the topic of the reflective interventions.

The Reflective Tasks and the Interventions

Month	Topics of focus group	Topics of interviews	Topics of journal entries
9	1st focus group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting the other participants Questions about the study Suggestions for the first journal entry 		
10		1st interview Learning about the background of teachers and school contexts	1st journal entry Reactions to the first focus group discussion
11		2nd interview Asking specific questions about the journal entries	2rd journal entry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended reactions Responses to questions posed by the researcher 
12		3rd interview Asking specific questions about the journal entries	
	2nd focus group <u>Reflective task:</u> Participants ask questions and share experiences of participating in the study		
1		4th interview <u>Reflective task:</u> Sharing interview transcriptions with each teacher	
2		5th interview <u>Reflective task:</u> Identifying their reflective themes	
3		6th (final) interview <u>Reflective task:</u> Discussion based on the last journal entry	Final journal entry Selection of reflective themes, based upon re-reading past journal entries
	3rd focus group <u>Reflective task:</u> Sharing feedback in the participation in the study		

Findings

From the analysis of the data, first I would like to introduce my conceptualization of reflection. I defined reflection as “an act of looking back at one’s practice and ideas in order to make their meanings in dialogue with oneself and with others” (Watanabe, 2016). Also, I identified the following types of reflection; description, reconfirmation, *hansei*, reinterpretation, and awareness. It should be noted; however, that reflection is an abrupt, arbitrary, and random

development which one does not follow a sequential manner. I call this development, reflective continuum, that is, a non-linear and recursive journey of reflection that individuals travel in different ways and at different speeds. The participant teachers accessed this continuum in unpredictable and very individual ways.

Secondly, I would like to say that reflective interventions seemed to have given a space for reflection and expression to teachers. I also found that the teachers reflect through their multiple opportunities to engage in the three different interventions. I would like to argue the importance of offering multiple reflective interventions to participant not only for the rigorous data collection but also for catering to individual preferences for different modes of communication and interaction. Through the analysis of the reflective interventions, I would like to emphasise the importance of relationships created between a participant and a researcher in generating meaning to their engagement in reflective practice.

Commonalities were observed among teacher with a similar length of teaching careers, which were manifested in their shaping of professional identity and teacher cognition. The novice teachers experienced substantial shaping of professional identity and teacher cognition through their participation in the study. Their images of professional identity and teacher cognition gradually changed to be perspectives of those based on their observation as a high school student to those of novice teachers. On the other hand, the experienced teachers seemed to have already possessed multifaceted professional identities and the rich repertoire which were versatile and adaptable to various sociocultural contexts. The study found that professional identity is an amalgam of various elements, and is uniquely constructed by different individuals in a given context. In accordance with their career paths, however, I identified a trajectory of the development of teacher self, from primarily being concerned with their own role, to negotiating their identities, to eventually envisaging and assuming individual missions.

Finally, I would like to note the importance of researcher's reflexivity in research not only for rigor but also for the ethics of research. The data from the reflective interventions, especially the interviews, were a product of an interaction between the participant and the researcher. As the impact from the researchers in research is inevitable, such as its process and outcome, it is vital for the researchers to be aware of their positionality, that

is, 'acknowledge who we are as individuals, and as members of groups, and as resting in and moving within social positions' (Bourke, 2014, p. 3). As our positionalities impact the research, researchers need to engage in reflexivity, 'the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome' (Berger, 2015, p. 220). I go one step beyond Berger and would like to say that the positionality of the researcher almost certainly *does* affect how the research progresses.

References

- Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15 (2), 219-234.
- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. *The Qualitative Report* 19, 1-9.
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