
Exploring Teaching in *The PAC Journal*

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These days second language teachers have been asked to reflect on their work as part of their professional development. The main reason for teachers to take a reflective stance is to break from established routines they may have adapted over time. This is not a new focus, as 70 years ago the American educationist John Dewey saw a need for teachers to reflect when he alerted teachers to be aware of allowing routine teaching without reflection. Dewey (1933) called for teachers to take reflective action that entails 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads' (p. 9).

Richards and Lockhart (1994, p. 3) list five assumptions to the nature of teacher development. These are:

1. Teachers need an extensive knowledge base in order to make informed decisions.

These informed choices give teachers a deeper awareness about teaching and learning and can thus make appropriate decisions about what will be effective in their classrooms.

2. Self-inquiry using action research-type techniques can reveal important information about one's teaching.

Teachers should collect information about their teaching individually or in collaboration with colleagues so that teaching decisions can be more strategic.

3. Teachers are often unaware of what they do when they teach.

A lesson is a dynamic event in which many things happen at the same time. Teachers cannot hope to be aware of everything that is happening in their classes. This lack of knowledge about what is happening in the classroom can, as Good and Brophy (1991) say, result in "unwise, self-defeating behavior" (p. 1). However, Good and Brophy (1991: 1) continue: "if teachers can become aware of what happens in the classroom and can monitor accurately both their own behavior and that of their

students, they can function as decision makers.” Teachers can thus try and control classroom events and not be controlled by them. First, though, the teacher must know what is going on in that classroom.

4. *Experience without reflection is insufficient.*

Can twenty years of teaching the same way and doing the same thing twenty times be called development? Teachers need to constantly reflect on their experiences and remain observant so as not to fall into the trap of blindly following routine.

5. *Critical reflection is essential for greater understanding.*

This fifth assumption about teacher development means that teachers, when they reflect, should go beyond mere descriptions of their teaching and examine where their practices originate. As Richards’ (1990, p. 5) has suggested, reflection can “help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking.”

One means of professional development for language teachers is to engage in reflective practice. However, a reflective approach to everyday teaching is not easy to put into practice for the busy teacher. Some teachers may not be interested or may not be willing to discuss their ideas about teaching publicly in a crowded staff room. But many teachers are already reflecting on their everyday classes by simply having thoughts such as “That was a good/bad class today”; “my students related well/badly to that activity. I must modify it for the next class.” So, teachers are already defining their own development needs in private. Language teachers can also share these private reflections with others in the field. Ways of sharing could include:

- Getting a group of teachers together to talk about teaching;
- Collecting data from actual classroom teaching situations and sharing this data with the group for discussion by analyzing, evaluating and interpreting it in light of their unique context;
- Self-observation with audio and/or video cameras; observation by critical friends
- Journal writing for reflection and comments by group members (see Bailey, this issue);
- Going to conferences (such as the PAC series), workshops and subscribing to professional journals;
- Taking on action research projects for publication (e.g., in the *PAC Journal*) in order to share with other colleagues.

It is this latter aspect of sharing action research that the *PAC Journal* was set up to encourage. Action research has been defined variously and there are many forms, arising from different epistemological bases. What the definitions have in

common is that action research involves inquiring into one's own practice through a cyclical process that involves planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Action research and reflective teaching practice are depicted as closely connected, but not the same. Action research is the investigation of those craft-knowledge values of teaching that hold in place our habits when we are teaching (McFee, 1993). It concerns the transformation of research into action. As McFee (1993) says: "It is research into (1) a particular kind of practice--one in which there is a craft-knowledge, and (2) is research based on a particular model of knowledge and research with action as an outcome...this knowledge is practical knowledge" (p. 178).

The general stages (cyclical) of the action research process adapted for the *PAC Journal* were: (1) plan (problem identification), (2) research (literature review), (3) observe (collecting data), (4) reflect (analysis), and (5) act (redefining the problem). The language teacher sees a need to investigate a problem (perceived or otherwise) and then starts to plan how to investigate ways of solving this problem. The teacher starts reading some background literature on the problem to give him/her ideas on how to solve the problem. Of course, this "research" cycle can include talking to other colleagues about the concern as they may have some advice to offer. The teacher then plans a strategy to collect data now that the problem has been identified and researched. Once the data has been collected, the teacher then analyzes and reflects on it and makes a data-driven decision to take some action. The final step in this spiraling cycle of research and action is problem redefinition. In this way, language teachers can take more responsibility for the decisions they make in their classes. However, these decisions are now informed decisions, not just based on feelings or impulse. The idea is for language teachers in the PAC region (mainly from Japan, Korea, Thailand, and Taiwan) to carry out action research projects and then share their results with colleagues by publishing the results in this new *PAC Journal*. And so to this first issue of the *PAC Journal*.

Action Research and The PAC Journal

The first issue has a range of articles and studies concerning language teacher professional development. This issue sees articles from leading TESOL scholars and also action research reports from Japan, Korea, Thailand and Hong Kong. The lead article is surely heartening for practicing ESL/EFL teachers who think that the so-called experts in the TESOL field only talk about reflections and action research but do not actually do any reflecting in a real TESOL context. In this paper, Kathleen Bailey, the past president of TESOL, reports on a research project in which she kept a teaching journal for an academic year as she taught four lower-intermediate EFL classes at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The classes focused on learning strategies, listening and speaking. Bailey said that she gained new awareness about her teaching as a result of her reflections. Although she considers herself an informed

teacher who has an extensive knowledge base about teaching, she now realizes that much can be learned about teaching through self-inquiry. Especially by writing entries in her teaching journal, reading over them – both at the time and later — and looking for patterns, she was able to pose questions and learn things about her teaching that had not been obvious to her before. From her study Bailey also realized that “much of what happens in teaching is unknown to the teacher.” She made this realization from working with her EFL students in Hong Kong and by analyzing the data in her journal. Although she is an experienced English language teacher and teacher educator, she realized that experience is insufficient as a basis for development. She said that she gained a new type of experience by working with these lower-intermediate EFL learners. However, it was by examining this experience which led her to a new level of awareness about her teaching.

In the second article, Penny Ur reminds practicing language teachers that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. In the third article, Jack Richards, Patrick Gallo, and Willy Renandya explore teachers’ beliefs and the processes of change.

The action research reports come from Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Thailand. Andy Curtis shares an interesting account of Hong Kong secondary school teachers’ first experiences of action research. The next article moves to Japan and Timothy Stewart’s study of the value of action research in exploring methodology. Staying in Japan, Steve Cornwell uses action research to explore the use of first language in an English discussion class. Next we move across the sea to Korea where Andrew Finch investigates a task-based English conversation program. Also from Korea, Trevor H. Gulliver, Erik Newson, and Colleen Chapco investigate the value of input versus instruction in facilitating successful task completion in the EFL classroom. Staying in Korea, Douglas Margolis investigates Korean students’ compensation strategies as observed during interview examinations. We then move to Thailand for the final action research article: Jintana Suttanu looks at the self-development counselling micro-skills of a self-access counsellor in Thailand.

The journal ends with an interesting book review section edited by Robert Dickey in Korea. This is a reflective essay and comparison of three of the most recent books on action research for language teachers: *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers* by Anne Burns, *Doing Teacher Research* by Donald Freeman, and *Action Research for Language Teachers* by Michael Wallace.

Conclusion

Action research projects carried out by practicing language teachers in the PAC countries can go a long way towards increasing the levels of professionalism

within the region. The *PAC Journal* is only one forum for sharing the results of these action research projects. Another logical development of sharing would be to initiate a forum where second language teachers could meet and share many of these action research projects. The *PAC Journal* is a great start to this sharing process. As I hand over the general editorship to *JALT* (*KOTESOL* hosted this first issue and it was my honor to have been chosen as the first general editor on behalf of *KOTESOL*) I hope you, the practicing language teacher, will continue to explore your teaching and share your accounts of the exploration in the *PAC Journal*.

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