

Novice Teachers' Formation of 'Teacher-self' through Video-Mediated Dialogic Reflection

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Abstract : With the proliferation of the idea of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), teachers' reflective practice has gained much importance in the field of teacher education and development. In the context of developing novice English language practitioners' 'teacher-self', the current study focuses on two Bangladeshi beginner teachers' understanding of their points of teaching strengths and weaknesses as identified from their own video-recorded classes. Moreover, this qualitative research explores the process of novice teachers' transformation from the 'student-self' to the 'teacher-self' through dialogic reflection sessions conducted by the researcher. The study reveals some distinctive features of the transformation of the teacher participants. It is recommended that further exploratory and longitudinal studies are required to get a more comprehensive and generalizable result in this discipline

Key-words: Professional development, education, development, teaching strengths, video recorded class, novice teachers

Introduction

In accordance with the Deweyan (1933) notion, the act of teaching can be conceptualized as a form of art and the role of teachers as artists. As a *pedagogical artist*, it is the responsibility of a teacher to shape students' view of life, and for that, they need to have a well-formulated "insight, sympathy, tact, executive power[s]" (Dewey as cited in Simpson, et al., 2004. P. 23). Since teaching is a continuing process of being and becoming (Khalil & Khali, 2015) through the construction and reconstruction of teachers' professional identities (Moyer & Sperandio, 2019), it would be supportive for the new teachers if they are guided in molding their professional vision and

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action. In this way, they can be motivated to uphold the value of developmental practice from the very beginning of their career. Moreover, it is evident from the literature in this area that novice teachers are inclined more toward their student image and find the 'transition shock' (Miles & Knipe, 2018) overwhelming. In this respect, it can be postulated that novice teachers can gradually acquire and nurture the qualities of artists that are- being introspective, insightful, compassionate, and self-sufficient- which would eventually be advantageous for them in adjusting to their pedagogical role and also for students to receive the best possible education. Against this backdrop, it is argued in the current study that the metamorphosis of a teacher's self from a student's self can be facilitated through dialogic reflection, an effective practice of teacher development, that will allow them to discover the dissonances between what they learned from books and the reality of classrooms. In line with the principles of continuing professional development, it is important that the beginner teachers are not trapped in their 'novice-teacher' image which may lead to stagnation. Further, if they are directed through proper guidance and developmental techniques they will be capable of creating their own destiny by forming and reforming their professional identity.

Research Context and Aim

In Bangladesh, the scope of professional development for novice English language teachers is limited in the sense that in many cases pre-and in-service teacher training is not provided. Therefore, to construct teachers' professional identity and accelerate their professional development, the incorporation of self-reflective and collaborative strategies into novice teachers' training programs can be considered a timely demand (Moyer & Sperandio, 2019). In this context, to conduct the study, I selected two former MA TESOL students from a reputed public university in Bangladesh who started their teaching careers recently. For the purpose of minimizing 'transition shock' (Miles & Knipe, 2018) and maximizing professional development, I planned to introduce the process of Reflective Practice (RP) supported by their own video-recorded classes and followed by dialogic reflection since video-based

reflections are not effective for beginner teachers unless any external support is provided to them (Santagata & Angelici, 2010). The aim of this research was to make the novice teachers more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their own classes through video-mediated dialogic reflections and consequently improve their classroom techniques.

For carrying out the current research, I formulated the following research questions:

- 1) Which points of teaching strengths and weaknesses can the novice teachers identify after observing their own video-recorded classes?
- 2) How does the process of transformation from a student-self to a teacher-self occur through dialogic reflection?

Conceptual Framework

In the field of teacher education and development, Reflective practice (RP) is one of the most widely disseminated and highly prioritized concepts that is consistently reported to have a positive and transformative impact on practitioners. The pioneering idea stemmed from John Dewey (1933) for whom reflection is "a meaning-making process" and "a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking" that "moves a learner from one experience into the next with a deeper understanding of its relationships and connections to other experiences and ideas" (Rodgers, 2002 p. 845). Building upon Dewey's ideas, Donald A. Schön (1983, 1987) argued that teachers can have a new comprehension of their practices through the processes of reflection and reformulation. He differentiated between reflection as a synchronous professional act and an asynchronous one which is commonly represented as "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" respectively (Mann & Walsh, 2017, p. 8). Further, by pointing at the fact that both Deweyan and Schonian approaches are based on problem-solving paradigm, Farrell (2018, p. 30) argued that "a practitioner's values are not included in any of the methods of reflection". While promoting a more holistic approach which is "reflection-on-action"

(Bleakley,1999), Farrell (2018, p. 30) maintains that it encapsulates an “awareness of the personal self, the context as well as the problem to be solved” which integrates reflection and action together. In addition to that, Killion and Todnem (1991) added another dimension - ‘reflection-for-action’-which constitutes significant guiding principles for successful reflection.

In the existing literature of teacher education, RP has been widely researched. In a qualitative study, Pedro (2005) explored pre-service teachers’ engagement with RP. The study indicated the teachers' successful understanding of the reflective process through various methods in different contexts which are useful for teacher development. Again, Jones and Jones’ (2013) study investigated pedagogical approaches that can be used to foster RP. This research implies that RP can be embedded as a component in the teacher education curriculum and dispositions of critical reflection should be scaffolded for preservice teachers. In a similar research project, Lane et al. (2014) developed a framework to assess the quality of preservice teachers’ reflective writing and supported their reflective practice in the classrooms. The result suggests developing a collaborative understanding of RP among practitioner teachers.

As far as the concept of Reflective Practice (RP) is concerned, one of the mostly used and highly successful procedural formats is self- or peer-observation of video-recorded classes along with documentation of remarkable discoveries and further discussion about the points of strengths and weaknesses either with supervisors or mentors or with peers or critical friends (Farrell 2018; Walsh 2019). Research conducted in this field indicates that the process of video-mediated self-reflection is important not only for experienced teachers but also for novice and pre-service practitioners as it can provide a holistic picture consisting of teachers’ classroom activities and behavior as well as students’ engagement and involvement with those activities (Bailey, 2001; Gibbons & Farley, 2019). Here, it is mentionable that, novice teachers systematically and significantly vary from experienced and expert teachers regarding interactional ability, classroom management skills, application of teaching strategies, and

anticipation of possible classroom incidents (Alexander & Galbraith, 1997; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Mann & Tang, 2012). As a consequence, their reflective pattern also varies since, while reflecting, they remain descriptive and become judgmental (Berliner 1986; Hammerness et al. 2002). Therefore, without any guideline or direction, new teachers may find it challenging to undertake RP in meaningful ways (Nagro et al., 2017). In this backdrop, the notion of evidence-based reflection where the teachers are given particular evidence to reflect on and a tool to reflect with (Walsh, 2019) can be considered as a purposeful starting point for novice teachers. Hence, video-mediated self-reflection can be counted as an essential step toward self-initiated professional growth which is undertaken for developmental rather than evaluative purposes (Bailey, 2001).

To develop RP further, dialogic reflection, a bottom-up collaborative process where meanings can be co-constructed and new understandings can be formulated through interaction, discussion, and debate (Mann & Walsh, 2017; Walsh, 2019), has stepped into the teacher development discipline. As mentioned in Walsh (2019), dialogic reflection has three distinctive features-dialogue, collaboration, and tools and artifacts-which are predominantly grounded on collaboration and scaffolding principles of sociocultural theory and stimulated recall paradigm. All of these lead to a deeper comprehension of the nature of novice teachers' classroom situations through the process of scaffolding to glide them to their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Method

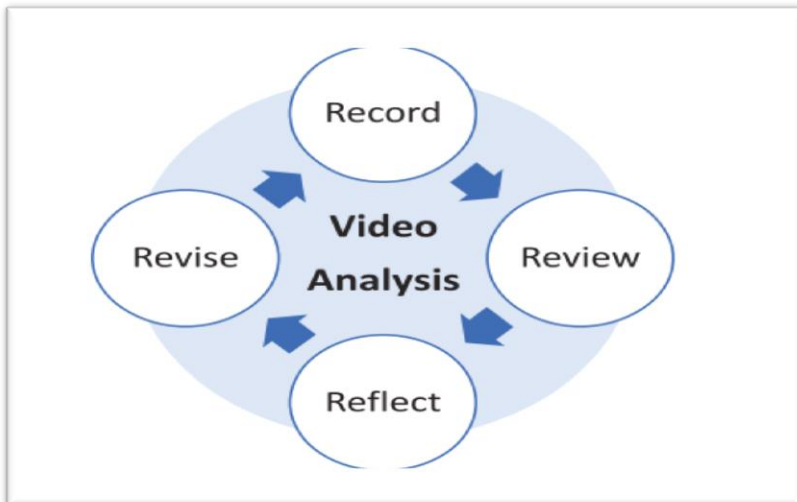
In this qualitative study, I initiated a purposeful sampling method for recruiting the participants as I needed novice English language teachers to carry out the research. The first participant (P1) had been working as a teaching fellow at a secondary school for four months and the second participant (P2) had been teaching as a lecturer at a public university for five months. Based on the participants' self-observation and reflection on their video-recorded classes, I conducted two semi-structured interview sessions with

two participants together within four weeks time span. In the interview sessions, we engaged in collaborative dialogue which was not necessarily a one-to-one question-answer session but a peer-peer (between the participants) and mentor-mentee interaction.

For communicating with the participants, *Messenger*, *Gmail*, and *Zoom* platforms were used. The interview cum discussion sessions were conducted and video-recorded through the online platform *Zoom* with the participants' consent. After explaining the research context and taking their consent, I asked them to video record their classes. It is important to note that without any specific guidelines, new teachers face challenges in locating what to observe in their classes, how to reflect on those and which points to elaborate more for further consideration (Berliner 1991; Santagata et al. 2007). Therefore, I provided them with a self-observation checklist and explained the sequential video-analysis model (Figure 1) and asked them to reflect on at least two videos by using the checklist and the framework.

Figure 1

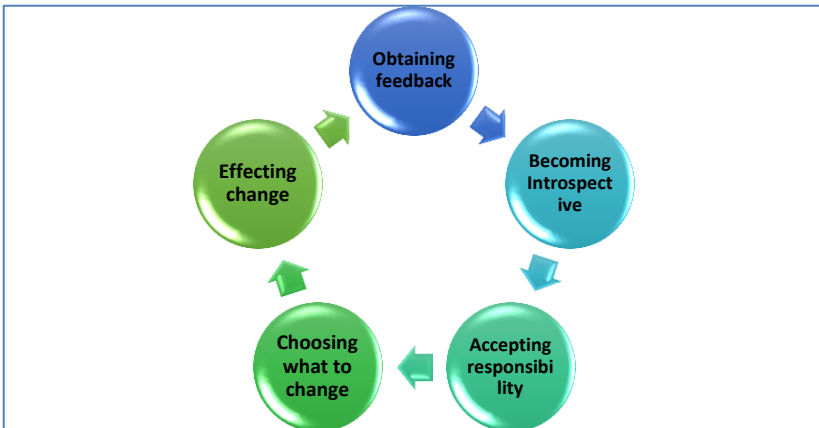
Video analysis four-step cycle; from Nagro et al. (2020)



As an overarching framework for my study, I applied Stenson et al.'s (as cited in Bailey, 2001, p. 122) five necessary components (as presented in Figure 2) which are crucial for acquiring professional competence although I acknowledge that no such model or framework is comprehensive in providing all the necessary dimensions of reflection in a balanced way.

Figure 2

Five components of professional development; modified from Stenson et al. (as cited in Bailey, 2001, p. 122)



In accordance with the cycles presented in the framework, for obtaining feedback, I asked my research participants to watch their video-recorded classes carefully. Next, for the introspective part, I provided a checklist as a guide for them and asked them to reflect on those points for initiating self-evaluation. In the third phase, the novice teachers tried to explore their strengths and weaknesses as recognizing and accepting both positive and negative aspects of teaching is the starting point for desirable change (Bailey, 2001). Here, it is mentionable that, the participants initiated this cycle individually and progressed to a more dialogic one as this point was addressed and elaborated in the discussion sessions together by the participants and the researcher. Likewise, the fourth phase was also addressed collaboratively through the principles of dialogic reflection where I tried to elicit their change preferences and

necessities based on their own local contexts. The last phase is about gathering information and searching for strategies to initiate the desired change in selected aspects of teaching.

Analysis

After analyzing the participants' responses from the checklists, I received a partial idea of their teaching and classroom management which was later transformed into a complete form after transcribing and analyzing the discussion sessions. Some significant categories related to the discovery of the participants' strengths and points of improvement surfaced from the analysis of the data through the qualitative content analysis procedure.

Strengths

After analyzing the data, some points of strength were discovered. While reflecting on the participants' strengths, P1 mentions that she found herself in the role of a careful mother:

"After observing my classes, I could see myself as a mother of my students who actually cares for each of the children and knows that each and every one is different and acknowledges their differences." (P1)

Here, she wanted to imply that, the way a mother cares for the needs of each child, in the same manner, she was also compassionate about addressing the different needs of individual learners. Her discovery complements Dewey's assertion that a reflective and prudent mother is a model for a teacher who "needs to think and make judgments as she addresses the needs of each student" (Simpson et al. 2004, p. 46).

Again, P2 reported that she found her students highly motivated and engaged in the classroom activities when she tried to facilitate their learning by presenting real-life stories, showing empathy towards their difficulties, and giving them positive feedback:

"When I showed empathy by putting myself into their situation, they liked it the best and became more attentive in the class." (P2)

In the discussion session, when I enquired further about the reason for her activity, she referred to her local teaching context and stated that, as she did not have any multimedia support in her classroom,

she had to provide those 'extra supports' through presenting motivational stories and real-life examples to students for keeping them involved in the class and facilitating their learning process.

Points of Improvement

Both of the teachers reported of observing significant gaps between the pedagogical framework of their class and its actual implementation in the classroom. For instance, P2 used to believe that she could administer the *engage-study-activate* teaching approach very skillfully in class. But after observing her video, she found that three parts were not balanced and she was just hastily carrying out the activation part.

Again, P1 mentioned a gap between the lesson objectives and actual content delivery. She used to think that she could integrate all four skills successfully. But what she found was: one of the skills remained missing in the observed classes:

"In our lesson objectives, we are supposed to teach four skills together. But, in the videos that I observed, all the four skills I could not cover in one class. It was may be like one skill was missing" (P1)

Further, an observable dissonance between belief of language teaching and classroom practices was identified by both of the participants. P1 stated that since she believed the eclectic approach was the most effective teaching style, she prepared her lesson plans with the principles of that approach. However, after reflective observation, she found that the Grammar-translation method (GTM) was the only dominant pedagogical approach throughout her classes. Similarly, P2 used to think that her classes were based on Communicative approaches but the observed classes added to her frustration as she noticed that she actually applied GTM only.

Another recurrently found theme in the data analysis is the novice teachers' gradual awareness of the immediately resolvable problems and further researchable issues. In the first online meeting on *Zoom*, as the participants attempted to prioritize their positive findings more, there were fewer self-initiated suggestions that would contribute to further development. However, when gradually they started to understand the nature of dialogic

reflection, they could contribute more consciously and autonomously. For example, P2 pointed out two issues related to her classroom behavior and practice:

"I used long pauses when I didn't get appropriate word. I should avoid those long pauses and use some fillers like 'well' instead. May be I should increase my vocabulary stock." (P2)

"I did not start with a warm-up activity as I forgot. I should use warm-up activity... it helps to engage the class." (P2)

Here, she not only mentioned the problems but also gave solutions which indicates that she already knew how to address those issues. The problem only persisted because she was unaware of it before observation.

Therefore, it can be argued that, the participants' gradual exploration of the potential nature of their classroom problems proliferated their awareness of categorizing and prioritizing those autonomously for getting logical solutions.

Discussion

Identifying teachers' strengths and points of improvement is one of the predominant tenets of video-mediated self-reflection (Gun, 2010; Phan, 2017) that assists new teachers in building confidence in their own teaching practices. It is evident in the educational discipline that observation of video-recorded classes can "shift the focus of reflection from teacher action and pedagogy to student learning and interaction" (Körkkö et al. 2019, p. 24). It is well supported by studies that self-observatory video reflections widen the scope of beginner teachers to gain exploratory insights into their weaknesses in teaching and ways to improve those (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013). For novice teachers, it is very important to recognize and understand their weaknesses and scopes of improvement which would help them to be "more seasoned" (Rahman et al., 2020, p. 9) teachers in the future. In this respect, the findings of this study reestablish the claim that video-oriented reflection can be advantageous for new teachers to link between theory and practice (Keppens et al. 2019) so that they can easily locate any discord between them. Moreover, in the latter part of the discussion, both of the participants presumably deviated from their previous beliefs

as they admitted that for teaching in a large class, GTM was more suitable. This point supports Erkmen's (2014) argument that novice teachers' beliefs are "susceptible to change" (p. 110).

Again, the participants' reflective observation reasserts that beginning teachers are "rules-driven" and unable to "select a plan of action for each situation" (Miles & Knipe, 2018). It is also supported by Meyer's (2004) contention that new teachers rely on given lesson frameworks without being intuitive. Therefore, one of the advantages of video-mediated self-reflection is that it works as "another pair of eyes" (Farrell, 2011, p. 266) and allows the observer to concentrate not only on the teacher but also on classroom management and interactional patterns. Therefore, it can be opined that self-reflective observation of one's own class may help the teachers to notice any incongruity which can be within the reach of the teachers to solve immediately and individually. Just because of the absence of noticing that, the mistakes used to occur recurrently. This discovery reasserts Marsh and Mitchell's (2014) proclamation that video-based classroom observation can develop teachers' capability of reflection and increase their ability of 'noticing'.

Further, the participants' gradual progression could be located from the structural and thematic differences between their talks in the two discussion sessions and form their own acknowledgment. For instance, in the first discussion session, the teachers used long pauses and fillers which seemingly represented their confusion and hesitation, and repeated self-corrections disclosed their discomfort to talk about their negative aspects. They were more comfortable in projecting their strengths and it reasserts the contention that at the beginning stages of reflection, novice teachers prefer to promote a positive self-image (Akbari, 2007; Mann & Walsh, 2017). Additionally, in the first session, there were more descriptions of incidents which were later replaced by evaluative discussion in the second one. This finding is also supported by Eröz-Tugva's (2012) research where a noticeable difference was located between two sessions of reflective observation as the participants' talk moved from descriptive to more analytic and critical.

Therefore, in line with the arguments presented in the introduction, it can be stated that there was an initiation of the process of becoming a *pedagogical artist* is already noticeable in novice teachers as, through the practice of dialogic reflection, they have shown the traits of acquiring “insight, sympathy, tact, executive power[s]” (see: Introduction) that reinforce their metamorphosed ‘teacher’ identity.

Conclusion

The present study discloses that, after the practitioners’ engagement with reflective self-observation and collaborative discussions, they became more confident of their strengths, conscious of their weaknesses, and self-sufficient in deciding which point(s) of improvement should be prioritized for further consideration. Therefore, it can be argued that a more confident, self-aware (Eröz-Tug̃a, 2012), and autonomous (Gun, 2010) teacher-self can develop from a vacillating, confused, and student-oriented self which is representative of the novice teachers’ self-transformation through reflective practice (Geng et al. 2019). In line with the qualities of an artist, the reflective practice also facilitated the novice pedagogical artists to develop the qualities of being introspective, insightful, compassionate, and self-sufficient through which they could negotiate their professionally required disposition and eventually reconstruct their identity. As a component of continuing professional development, if beginner teachers keep up nurturing and flourishing the principles of dialogic reflection, it will minimize the possibility of committing the flaw of being doomed by professional stagnation and maximize the potential of becoming proficient practitioners.

The findings of the study also imply that video-mediated dialogic reflection helps novice teachers in noticing their own strengths and weaknesses and enables them to reflect, discuss, and improve their classroom techniques. Therefore, the research recommends that video-mediated dialogic reflection should be incorporated as a component of teachers’ professional development in the teacher education and training sector of Bangladesh and similar contexts.

Although it is not possible to provide the teachers with a complete understanding of reflective practice in two discussion sessions, this study underscores at least some of the distinctive features of novice teachers' transformation through dialogic reflection. For a wider understanding and a more comprehensive and generalizable result, further exploratory and longitudinal studies are required in this discipline.

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