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Reflection in EFL In-service Journal Writing: The Teachers, the Tutors and the Researchers

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Abstract

A common goal of many pre-service and in-service programmes is to develop "reflection" or a particular awareness about teaching that may be translated into continually improving practice. In 1994 the Institute of Language in Education (now incorporated into the Hong Kong Institute of Education) introduced a curriculum-wide journal writing activity into their 16-week teacher education in-service programmes. Two hundred and seventy-nine primary and secondary teachers of English, including panel chairs and content area specialists, along with 23 tutors participated in the activity. This report describes the observations of the teachers, tutors and researchers derived from questionnaire data and presents a critical analysis of the reflective elements in their journals. The results indicate that the two investigative approaches yielded different insights into the nature of reflection. The participants felt that the dialogue journal writing served as an impetus for reflection and deepened their thinking, but the analysis indicated variation in the types of reflection done by teachers and tutors on different courses. The implications of these findings on the role of reflection in teacher education are discussed.

Introduction: The Impact of the Reflective Teaching Movement

The reflective teaching movement in education has focused on both micro and macro goals. Micro goals are evidenced in the development of specific teaching formats, skills, and strategies (Cruikshank, 1985; Cruikshank & Applegate, 1981), and in techniques for the supervision of teachers (e.g. Proctor, 1993). The broader issues of teacher empowerment and decision making, school culture, climate and organisation (e.g. Schön, 1983) and curriculum change (e.g. Brubacher, Case & Reagan, 1994) exemplify macro goals. Teachers have begun to acknowledge the important role of reflectivity in professional development programmes for teachers (e.g. Birch, 1992; Freeman, 1992; Lange, 1991; Richards, 1991; Schön, 1987) and in-service courses. Focus has been on the identification of teachers' personal knowledge, metaphors and belief systems in theory building (e.g. Tan, 1993) and on the development of pedagogical knowledge in teachers (Shulman, 1987). The courses and programmes have ranged from short intensive in-service type courses (e.g. Jarv

1992) to longer pre-service (e.g. Chen & Seng, 1992; Porter et al, 1990; Pultorak, in-service teacher education programmes (Ho & Richards, 1993; Roe & Stallm). The development of reflective teaching has also been the subject of many investigations using qualitative approaches, such as case studies (e.g. Johnston, 1992) and writing (Bailey, 1990; Chen & Seng, 1992; Cruickshank, 1985; Proctor, 1993) and dialogue journal writing (Brock, Yu & Wong, 1991). Research on teacher and teacher professional growth and development have generally included reflective journal writing as a core component (see Kagan, 1992 for a review of related studies).

It is believed that reflecting on one's practice through different professional development activities, such as writing or talking about what one has done in school, does not automatically result in teachers being "better teachers" (Calderhead & Gates, 1992). This belief, as well as some approaches to the reflective movement, have been criticised (Gore, 1987; Ross, 1992; Zeichner, 1987). Some inquiry-oriented approaches to teacher development, for example, have shown little impact on teachers' reflection (Zeichner and many teacher education programmes fail to show that an emphasis on reflection is effective (Korthagen, 1993). Other educators contend that the field has gone too far in accommodating the reflectivity movement and that the movement has led to "accommodation rather than transformation of teacher education programmes" (Ross, 1992, p.180). Some educators (Horvath (1995), for example, believe that educators have tended to limit definitions of teaching by leaning toward reflectivity or moving towards the art or the intuition of teaching. The reflective teaching movement in other words has not adequately addressed the need for both craft and technical skills and knowledge in defining expertise. Some educators contend that reflective teaching "is not a real possibility in schools as they are not well organised, managed and governed" and that reflective teaching will not become a widespread phenomenon until there is some reorganisation (Skrbic & Ware, 1992, p.208-9). For reflective teaching to become a reality then, schools need to allow individual teachers and groups more time for planning and deliberating about teaching. This could only be achieved when there is some restructuring in the ways in which the school schedules the use of teachers' time outside the classroom.

Despite the criticisms, however, there have been reports which suggest that reflective journal writing has changed teachers' thinking, beliefs, and practice by encouraging more critical reflection and the adoption of more effective teaching techniques (e.g. Husaker & Johnstone, 1993). Teacher development courses and research activity, as well as the development of multiple ways of fostering reflection to transform practice (e.g. Lockhart, 1994; Zeichner, 1987; Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Wellington & Anderson, 1991). But while there has been increased activity in studying and applying reflective practice, some would contend that definitions of what reflection is and how it manifests itself are still unclear (e.g. Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Approaches to Interpreting Teachers' Reflections

Recent journal articles and edited works on reflection in educational contexts provided useful summaries of the plethora of approaches to defining and looking at reflection (e.g. Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kremer-Hayon, Vonk & Feilcke, 1993; Valli, 1993; Wellington & Austin, 1996). There is no unanimity on what reflection is or the ways in which it presents itself. Reflection appears to be a special kind of problem solving and thinking about an issue with some view towards improvement. Dewey's (1916, p.9) definition is that reflection is 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 conclusion to which it tends." Schön (1987) connects reflection to action while it is happening and after it has happened, Calderhead (1989) notes its close relationship to knowledge and beliefs, while Zeichner (1983, p.6) sees reflection as the examination of moral, ethical and political issues that are a part of teachers' practice. The transformative power of reflection in adult learning is elucidated further by Mezirow (1991, p.99) as a "cyclical dynamic in intentional learning, problem solving and validity testing through rational discourse." The critical reflection of self provides yet another dimension to reflection as seen as "constructive self-criticism of one's actions with a view to improvement" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p.35).

In educational writings, such as journals, personal letters and stories of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Grimmer & Erickson, 1988), the literature shows a variety of approaches to reading and interpreting reflection. These approaches can be described both in analytic or holistic terms. The creation of hierarchies and categories characterise quantitative or more empirical-analytic social scientific ways of studying reflection, while more dialectic approaches, such as looking at the different voices presented in the role of learners (e.g. Kreeft Peyton & Staton, 1993) and the role of audience and socio-cultural impact (Axler, 1994; Grimmer & Erickson, 1988), characterise the holistic paradigm.

Researchers working in the empirical-analytic domain have characterised different levels of reflective activity. Van Manen (1977) described three levels of reflectivity: practical/technical; social or political; and moral or ethical. Mezirow (1991) also conceived of levels of reflection and characterised them as content, process and premise reflection. An alternative approach to conceptualising reflective practice is by non-hierarchical categories which focus on elements that play significant roles in fostering reflection and reflective practice. Brubaker & Reagan (1994, p.21) cite the work of Sparks-Langer & Colton (1991) who argued for three elements in teachers' reflective thinking: the cognitive which is concerned with knowledge; the critical which examines the social and moral; and the narrative which has to do with teachers' narratives. Zeichner and Liston (1985) look at different discourse types, such as factual discourse which relates to what takes place; prudential discourse which includes reasons offered; and critical discourse which offers justifications for pedagogical activities.

In second language educational contexts in Hong Kong, Ho and Richards used a categorical approach to identify traits of reflectivity in their graduate students. They identified different topics and issues that teachers wrote about (e.g. theories, approaches and methods) and then categorised them as reflective or descriptive. They also looked at whether their teachers on an in-service course changed in their degree of reflectivity over time. Kember et al (1996) used a case study approach and multi-site analysis to investigate how critical reflection was fostered in five professional degree programmes through journal writing and follow-up discussions. These approaches used in different contexts reflect the multiple ways researchers have sought to study the reflections of teachers. Many of these studies, however, are written from the researcher's point of view.

In this paper we will present insights on reflection from a study of the use of journal writing in in-service teacher education programmes for primary and secondary English teachers in Hong Kong. Our investigation uses an empirical-analytic approach which highlights the researchers' and the participants' perspectives. This approach draws on existing research (e.g. Ho & Richards, 1993) while offering a new perspective on the dialogic nature of journal writing in a 16 week in-service ESL setting for teachers who were temporarily released from their own schools. Our purpose was to investigate the nature of teachers' reflection on their own reflections with their tutors in this unique setting and to deconstruct these teachers' reflections from different vantage points.

The Context for the Dialogue Journal Writing Experience

In February 1994, the Institute of Language in Education (ILE) had 279 primary and secondary teachers enrolled in its 16-week in-service refresher courses sponsored by the Hong Kong Government. The courses were on the teaching of English as a second language for primary and secondary teachers, and the use of English as the medium of instruction in content areas of secondary schools. A fourth course was designed for English as a second language chairpersons from secondary schools. On hand to guide the teachers through the courses were 23 tutors.

Prior to the arrival of the teachers, a team of "Journallers" was formed to develop a proposal for a journal writing experience for the coming courses. Members of the team subsequently participated in several discussions on the feasibility of incorporating journal writing activity into the various courses and on whether or not journal writing should be considered a course requirement. After many deliberations, the staff agreed to pilot this activity and to make journal writing a requirement for the successful completion of the respective courses. Guidelines and supportive documents were developed and made available to the staff. These guidelines included an introduction to the purpose and educational value of the journal writing experience, suggestions for getting started, and a reference list. Distributed to the staff were guidelines for teachers, a pre-journal writing questionnaire and a checklist to assist teachers with starting. This journal writing activity was described to the faculty as a constructive, non-judgmental and collaborative relationship between the tutor and the

At the end of the 16 weeks, teachers and tutors responded to different post journal writing questionnaires and then signed release forms if they agreed to have their journal writing responses entered into our study.

Method

The Subjects

Table 1 outlines the number of teachers on the four courses. There were a total of 23 group tutors involved on these courses, each taking a group, the majority of whom were involved in the journal writing activity.

Table 1 The Number of Teachers on the Four Courses

Course Type	No. of Groups	Total No. of Teachers
Primary	7	83
Secondary	7	90
English Medium	5	54
Panel Chairs	4	52
Totals	23	279

Teachers' and tutors' questionnaire data

Teachers' and tutors' views on the journal writing experience were collected from a post journal writing questionnaire for teachers (see Appendix 1) and tutors (Appendix 2). The questionnaires were similar in design and contained both multiple choice and open-ended questions. Out of the 23 group tutors on the four courses, 15 (65%) returned the questionnaire. A total of 214 teachers out of 279 (77%) responded to the post-journal writing questionnaire. These teachers represented all the four courses in this study.

Journal writing data

Of the 279 teachers on the four courses, 78 (28%) voluntarily released their journal and tutor responses for this part of the analysis. These 78 teachers, representing the four courses, submitted a total of five hundred and twenty (520) separate journal entries. Due to the volume of contributing entries, it was decided to randomly select, for analysis, 130 (25% of these journal entries which represented proportionally the full range of submissions by 78 teachers from each course group (Table 2).

Eighteen of the 23 tutors (78%) representing the four courses agreed to have their journal responses analysed. A total of 226 responses were submitted and of that number 25% (57 responses) were randomly selected for analysis.

Individual journal entries selected were then analysed by types of themes or topics.

within each entry. A particular entry may include more than one theme, further classified by theme type, length, reflection type and whether or no tutor's comment or response. Selected tutors' responses went through a sin and analysis procedure.

The table below shows the number of groups on each course who were their journal entries for analysis, the number of journal entries submitted b the number of entries selected for analysis which was proportionate across 1 courses. The secondary course is relatively under-represented but we can willingly submitted by the teachers.

Table 2 Teachers' Journal Data

Course Type	No. of Groups	No. of Groups Represented	No. of Journal Entries Submitted	No. of J Selected
Primary	7	7	239	
Secondary	7	3	175	
English Medium	5	4	28	
Panel Chairs	4	4	78	
Totals	23	18	520	

Development of classification schemes

Several readings of all the journal entries took place prior to the de classification schemes. Theme types were derived from the entire data po on samples of data representing the broad range of teachers and tutors. were devised for the analyses of teachers' entries and tutors' responses in t of the content of the entries (Table 3) and the responses (Table 5), and the evident (Table 7). Consideration was also given to the length of entries panel of three raters was used to test the fit of the theme types over a period followed by tests of inter-rater agreement on the data selected for the ana was calculated using Fleiss's multiple rater Kappa (Km) (Fleiss, 1971). / was computed which suggests a moderate level of agreement between the

Results

The reporting of the results will cover three areas: (1) the nature of journal entries and the tutors' responses; (2) the degree and types of reflec entries and the tutors' responses; and (3) the benefits of the journal writin

The content of the journal entries & responses

Teachers' entries

The teachers' post journal writing questionnaire returns provide data on the themes these participant teachers thought they wrote in their own entries while the entry analyses give information on the actual number of such themes in their entries as by the raters. The 2 sets of data generally show compatible information. For example, majority of the teachers said that their entries were course related (45%, Appendix 1, C 8) while the entry analyses show that 68% (Table 3) of the themes were of this nature. A high number of entries devoted to course related matters allowed one of our purposes to be fulfilled. This purpose as stated in the guidelines was to "provide a means of identifying variables that are important to the success of the Institute's courses." From our engagement in this journal writing activity, we know that the teachers were responding to issues such as the tutor's style of teaching as well as the organisation and management of the course. These journal entries provided valuable feedback to individual tutors as well as to the course leaders and course co-ordinators.

It was also expected that many of the journal entries would be teaching related. However, teachers themselves indicated that their second priority of entry theme was in this area, as was found by the raters (19%). Journal writing is also a very personal activity and the teachers thought that their entries were related to personal growth, but our analysis indicates that only 6% of the themes were related to personal/professional growth. There is thus some discrepancy between the teachers' own observation and the raters' analysis. This may be attributed to the fact that different definitions of personal growth were applied by the teachers and the raters.

It is surprising that more entries were not related to theories given the high number of plenaries on the course which explored content related theories. It could be that teachers were including theories under the broad umbrella of teaching related entries or that they did not consider them interesting enough to write about.

Table 3 Teachers' Journal Entries Themes

Theme Types	Description of Journal Entries	No. of Teachers Indicating Themes in Their Entries	No. of Themes Identified
General course related topics	Entries related to the organisation and management of courses, tutors' lectures and tutorials	96 (45%)	161 (68%)
Teaching related	Entries that were teaching related (about their own teaching situation/problems, concerns, colleagues, administrators etc.) and course related school based work	58 (27%)	44 (19%)

The content of the journal entries & responses

Teachers' entries

The teachers' post journal writing questionnaire returns provide data on the nature of the themes these participant teachers thought they wrote in their own entries while the journal entry analyses give information on the actual number of such themes in their entries as verified by the raters. The 2 sets of data generally show compatible information. For example, a majority of the teachers said that their entries were course related (45%, Appendix 1, Question 8) while the entry analyses show that 68% (Table 3) of the themes were of this nature. A high number of entries devoted to course related matters allowed one of our purposes to be fulfilled. This purpose as stated in the guidelines was to "provide a means of identifying variables that are important to the success of the Institute's courses." From our engagement in this journal writing activity, we know that the teachers were responding to issues such as the tutor's style of teaching as well as the organisation and management of the course. These journal entries provided valuable feedback to individual tutors as well as to the course leaders and course co-ordinators.

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Theories & policies	Entries that were related to the theories/policies discussed in the seminars, restating and discussing application levels in terms of practice	9 (4%)	15 (100%)
Personal/ Professional growth	Entries that were personal/professional growth related (e.g. goal setting, going back into the past, describing their status at present, establishing needs, self-efficacy etc.)	47 (22%)	15 (100%)
Others	Other categories	4 (2%)	3 (100%)

Tutors' responses

How did tutors view the nature of their own responses to the teachers' journal e From the tutors' post journal writing questionnaire (Appendix 2) data returned by 15 23 tutors involved in the journal writing experience, we found that all 15 considere responses encouraging and supportive; 14 also said that they were questioning to sti thinking and 14 also stated that they gave their own opinions or talked about the experience. Thirteen tutors regarded their responses as empathising. 11 said th responded selectively while 4 said that they responded holistically meaning that the very general non-specific comments to what had been written (see Table 4).

Table 4 Tutors' Perceptions of the Nature of their Responses

Nature of Tutors' Responses	No. of Tutors
encouraging and supportive	15 (100%)
questioning to stimulate thinking	14 (93%)
giving own opinions/talking about own experience	14 (93%)
empathising	13 (86%)
responding selectively	11 (73%)
responding holistically	4 (27%)

Table 4 above summarises this questionnaire data and shows the numbers and perc of tutors who believed that their responses fell into the categories shown. The percen Table 5 indicate the actual number of tutor responses of the said nature. This analysis c what the tutors said. They did respond in the ways they indicated. For example, mos said they used "questioning to stimulate thinking" and the analysis confirms this, s that 12% of the tutor responses were of this nature; all tutors said that they were "enco and supportive" in responding and 12% of the responses analysed were considered s tutors said they were "giving own opinions/talking about own experience" and 19% responses analysed were found to be of this nature (see Table 5).

Table 5 Tutors' Response Type

Response Type	No. of Tutor Response
No response given to the journal entry	57 (25%)
Acknowledgement of what was submitted. Declaration, restatement of what was done, confirmatory overtones of what was submitted	31 (14%)
Questioning to stimulate thinking	27 (12%)
Encouraging and supportive, empathising statements, confirms for the teacher the action/thinking and provides suggestions for self-improvement/self-esteem, descriptors used	28 (12%)
Opinion/experiential sharing	43 (19%)
Referrals - directing/guiding to other tutors, books or articles	6 (3%)
Recommending - specific strategies/methods for changing/improving practice or thinking/behaviour, giving advice	24 (11%)
Self-reflecting - reflecting openly on one's own teaching or thinking, introspecting	4 (2%)
Clarifying/explaining - informing, providing background information about the course	6 (3%)

The degree and types of reflection

Teachers' views

One of the aims of introducing journal writing at the ILE was to encourage teachers become more reflective through journal writing. When offered a range of possible descriptions of their journal writing experience, 60% of the teachers chose "a somewhat reflective experience" (Appendix 1, Question 3). Teachers also enjoyed the journal writing activity; 39% indicated that they had enjoyed the activity to a full extent, 43% to some extent and 18% to a limited extent. It is clear that the majority of them found it a worthwhile activity becoming more reflective and that they enjoyed it.

Tutors' views

Nine tutors out of 15 (60%) also considered the journal writing activity to be "a somewhat reflective experience" (Appendix 2, Question 4) for the teachers, indicating that the aim was achieved to a certain extent. This claim is further supported by the fact that 1 tutor selected "to a full extent" and 12 tutors "to some extent" in response to the question on the extent to which they considered that journal writing helped stimulate reflection for the teachers (Table 6).

When asked whether the journal writing activity stimulated reflection on tutors' professional development as teacher educators, the responses show a slightly different picture. One

selected “to a full extent” but only 8 tutors selected “to some extent” while 5 tutors a very limited extent” and 1 tutor even opted for “to no extent”, though she pointed this did not mean that she did not reflect at all. It seems therefore that tutors generally see the activity as more productive of reflection for the teachers than for themselves.

Table 6 Degree of Reflection for Teachers and Tutors

	Tutor Reflection (No. of Tutors)	Teacher Reflection (No. of Teachers)	Teacher F (No. of Tu
to a full extent	84 (39%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%
to some extent	91 (43%)	12 (80%)	8 (53%
to a very limited extent	39 (18%)	2 (13%)	5 (33%
to no extent	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%

Analysis of reflection type

The analysis of the journal data revealed four major types of reflection which are listed in Table 7 below. When we analysed the different themes in each journal entry and response, our findings indicate that the majority of teacher entries and tutor responses were of reflection type 1 (91 or 38% for teachers; 56 or 33% for tutors) and type 2 (101 teachers; 85 or 51% for tutors). Table 7 gives a summary of the findings. Examples of reflection types are given in the section that follows Table 7 using the teachers’ own words.

Table 7 Reflection Types for Teachers and Tutors

Reflection Type	No. of Teacher Theme Entries	No. of T Theme I
Type 1: factual recount, restatement <i>Entries that give factual observations, restatements of what has happened, descriptive statements of what has occurred, simple recount, or procedural statements about one’s teaching</i>	91 (38%)	56 (33%)
Type 2: reasons and explanations <i>Entries that offer explanations, convey desires/goals or association, begin to offer reasons or explanations but which are not elaborated upon and show limited connections to one’s own experiences of learning/teaching</i>	101 (42%)	85 (51%)
Type 3: extended elaboration <i>Entries that indicate further elaboration of type 2, further analysis of WHY something has happened, exploring further the situation/theme/idea by showing a deeper search for explanations/solutions but in a limited context (for example restricting oneself to the immediate classroom or school context)</i>	46 (19%)	24 (14%)

<p>Type 4: problem solving <i>Entries that indicate how something can be done by developing merging theories and practices, exploring what one can do to transform one's practice, noting contradictions and conflicts in one's thinking, explicitly providing/developing ones' own definitions/theories of the WHAT by considering broader contexts and applications (e.g. historical, social, cultural)</i></p>	<p>2 (1%)</p>	<p>3 (2%)</p>
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Examples of types of reflection

Type 1 Factual Recount

I feel exhausted as well as enjoyable this week. We have many things to do. Schemes of work lesson planning and resources. During these workshops and plenary sessions, we have to think lot, to discuss a lot and try our best to find materials. Though we complain sometimes, we learn co-operation and get more familiar with each other. It often happens that Monday is the heaviest day of the five. It is better to have independent study time on Monday because we still have the holiday mood.

Primary Teacher (Theme: General course related, Length: 4-7 lines)

Type 2 Reasons and Explanations

During the past week we had a series of talks on "lesson observation" and "appraisal interview" which were supposed to be the pair-work activity. My school does not push chairpersons to do it as a must. However, I can foresee that this kind of activity will be more trendy. It's Chinese culture to believe that both lesson observation and appraisal interview are treated as a violation of individualism and independence. My experience has told me that it can be tough. Nevertheless it's worthwhile to do so for the sake of school development and one's self learning. What I have in mind is I should start with something small ----- expose myself and let my colleagues know my teaching way.

Panel Chairperson (Theme: General course related, Length: 4-7 lines)

Type 3 Extended Elaboration

I was interested to read your reaction to A's lectures. Many participants have commented that they've enjoyed these sessions. I have a questions to pose to you. If a lesson is boring, does that necessarily mean that the teacher is not a good teacher? In other words, in every teacher's life will there be times when the subject matter is dull so is the lesson dull? Or should a "good" teacher be able to make "dull" materials interesting. What do you think?

Tutor's Response (Theme: Questioning to stimulate thinking, Length: 4-7 lines)

Teacher's response to the tutor

From the last journal, I think I must explain more. Of course we can't say that if a lesson is boring,

*the teacher is not a good teacher. It is because to teach successfully is not the only c
measure a good teacher. Also, the teacher's personality and his or her sense of resp
could be taken as the point to consider. I admit that when the subject matter is dull, the le
be dull. But we as teachers must always take the active way to motivate our pupils to lea
again take A as an example. Phonology is actually a dull subject matter but he always
active way to guide us to learn, his teaching materials are well-prepared. In his lecture, r
are attracted by his humour and we don't feel bored any more. Actually different pec
different personality one can do and that does not imply that the other can do the same.
important for us to reflect on our method of teaching all the time.*

Primary Teacher (Theme: Others, Length: half page)

Type 4 Problem Solving

*The Education Department is working on the right path by encouraging schools to adopt
in mother tongue. However, it allows schools to make their own decision on either using
or English as the teaching medium. As an experienced teacher, I have discussed this is
many colleagues and other concerned personalities and we can easily point out the contr
Firstly, most parents would definitely support English teaching. So, the practical but shor
school principals surely must select English teaching as they are afraid that their sch
become second rate ones if they choose Chinese...To a small extent this dilemma might be n
Firstly, the Education department could carry out an extensive propaganda campaign co
the positive results of introducing mother tongue education by using different media and or
seminars and talks to the education organisations and especially the principals and tea*

English Medium Teacher (Theme: Theories and Policies, Length: full page)

When all the responses to reflection are considered, the variable nature of re
becomes obvious. Both tutors and teachers agreed that journal writing is a stim
reflection but more so for teachers than for tutors. Closer scrutiny of the analyses s
that the types of thinking teachers were doing are more closely connected to their prof
development.

Discussion

The combined insights of the tutors' and teachers' questionnaire results .
researchers' analyses of this journal writing experience point to some interesting fi
One area where there is agreement from the three vantage points is on the natur
journal entries. The tutors, teachers and researchers indicated that the experience gave e
important access to feedback on their course but to a lesser extent on specific teaching
issues and language teaching and learning theories and policies. This probably has
do with the institutionalisation of the course and its removal from the school setting th
the content of the course. Within the institution, teachers are more apt to respond to insti
matters such as the organisation and the day to day events on the course and not nec

the course content. The setting is also unique for the teachers in that they are together for the full 16 weeks away from their school. If the course were situated in a school setting with teachers able more quickly to apply the theories and practices, the nature of the journal writing entries might be very different. This is evidenced in the Ho and Richards (1993) study where teachers who were part time evening students wrote about problems faced in their teaching and the approaches they used. The novelty of the journal writing experience could also be another factor influencing what teachers wrote as this type of activity was a first for the majority of the teachers.

On the issue of reflection, the viewpoints of the three sets of observations begin to diverge and this may be due in part to the general and more specific ways of looking at reflection. Both teachers and tutors were working with the broad goal of "developing more reflective teachers" when they responded to this question. From the teachers' questionnaire the journal writing experience did serve to deepen teachers' thinking and increased their critical and reflective thinking but the extent to which this actually occurred could not be deduced. This may be due to the design of the questionnaire or to the lack of a clear definition of what is reflection or even the complex nature of truly defining reflection. Ho and Richards (1993) found that some teachers were more reflective in their outlook than others.

The tutors also concur that the experience served as a vehicle for stimulating reflection for the teachers with the majority of the tutors believing that this occurred to "some extent". However, for the tutors themselves, the extent to which they reflected was more varied with slightly more than half to "some extent" and slightly less than half to "a very limited extent". Tutors may be more critical of "reflection" and what it is and may feel that the activity was less critically engaging. It could also have something to do with the groups that tutors worked with and with the finding that most teachers wrote about the course rather than theories and practice which may encourage deeper reflection from the tutors' point of view.

From our analysis we have found that the types of thinking teachers were doing were closely related to their course type. The difference in the types of reflective statements produced by secondary and primary teachers may have something to do with their professional training. Secondary teachers on the whole have more advanced professional training than the primary teachers and they also have greater autonomy in the schools. All this leads to greater confidence in what they write, how much they write and how they write. Also the demands of the courses were different for the secondary and primary teachers. For many of the primary teachers the successful completion of the course afforded them credits toward a BA degree but this was not the situation for the secondary teachers as many of them already possess bachelors' degrees and some masters' degrees. All this may account for the differences in what they wrote, how they wrote and the length of what was written. The differing results on reflection indicate problems with definitions and also ways of approaching reflection from different viewpoints.

There is common agreement among tutors and teachers on the impact of the writing experience at the interpersonal and personal level. This factor was not a feature of the researchers' analysis and could help with furthering insights in this area in future research. However, both teachers and tutors were in full agreement that journal writing helped develop better understanding of each other and that the experience promoted their personal and interpersonal development. However, one important observation is that the journal writing experience had no impact or saw no change for many teachers in their beliefs. This is due to the limited time factor and personality factors. Hatton and Smith (1995) point to many of the problematic issues in studying reflection in teacher education. Among these are the beliefs that teachers need time to reflect, they need a certain degree of competence in teaching to be able to question and they need to be beyond survival in their own teaching. The personality factors of introspecting and sharing one's writing with one's teacher coupled with all the demands of writing in a second/foreign language are also impacted upon teachers' journal writing experience.

Limitations of the study may be found in the types of questions set in the questionnaire instruments used, with an over-reliance on multiple-choice question types. The data have been enriched by the use of interviews. Interviews would have allowed us, for example, to explore the extent to which teachers felt empowered as a result of the journal writing activity to change or transform their classrooms.

Related benefits of journal writing

A number of additional, incidental benefits of journal writing can be identified from this study.

A form of interpersonal communication

10 out of 15 tutors (67%) thought that journal writing was a form of interpersonal communication between themselves and their teachers. Journal writing served as a medium for establishing understanding between tutors and teachers as well as providing a channel for feedback (including complaints) on the course.

A medium for documenting changes in teachers' thinking

Teachers were asked to comment on any changes in their thinking as a result of journal writing (Appendix 1, Question 12). About a quarter of the teachers (26%) reported an increase in critical and reflective thinking about their own teaching and pupils' learning; some felt that they had begun to think more deeply about English language teaching and curriculum renewal in Hong Kong; others (5%) felt that they could articulate their thoughts better as a result of the activity.

It is interesting to relate these results to those of Ho and Richards (1993) who concluded that, with their in-service MA teachers, there seemed to be "no great change in the c

critical reflectivity” that the teachers engaged in over an extended period of time. What they found was that teachers who had shown evidence of critical reflectivity did so from the very onset of the course and continued to reflect this throughout the course.

Sharing of journal entries

Tutors were encouraged to establish an atmosphere in which teachers might share their journal entries with each other. This required a great deal of sensitivity to the dynamics of the group as well as to individual needs and was met with varying degrees of success with different groups. What emerged was that just over half of the teachers did share their entries with someone other than their tutor but usually this someone was another teacher in their group with whom they felt comfortable. This led to a spontaneous development of collegiality among the teachers concerned which was an important incidental benefit of the activity.

Development of teachers’ writing

In order to free teachers from any restrictions which may have hindered their freedom of expression and to help tutors keep focused on the development of reflectivity rather than on the development of the teachers’ writing skill, tutors were encouraged not to treat this experience as a “writing proficiency” exercise. Nevertheless, several teachers perceived changes in their writing and in their thinking as they engaged in journal writing. Many indicated that they had welcomed the chance to practise writing in English which they would have had little opportunity for in their day to day professional duties. Twenty-five teachers (12%) felt that they had become more fluent; and 10 (5%) had improved their ability to express themselves better. Other second language researchers have also documented the benefits of developing students’ writing through journal writing (Kreeft Peyton et al, 1993). This language development was a natural by-product of the journal writing experience.

Extensions to the EFL/ESL classroom

When asked whether teachers would use journal writing as a vehicle for developing reflections about learning with their own students, 95 primary and secondary teachers (44%) stated that they would.

Journal writing was seen as a way of helping students to become more reflective and independent in their learning (22 teachers), as a valuable source of feedback on their teaching (15 teachers), as a means of giving them better knowledge of their students (13 teachers) and as beneficial to shy students who were too anxious or too reluctant to participate in class, but who might find journal writing an alternative channel for communicating with their teacher and developing confidence (5 teachers).

Conclusion

An examination of reflection from the different vantage points of the teachers revealed

some similarities and differences in the nature of reflection. Teachers and tutors afforded personal yet broader interpretations of reflection which proved to be meaningful at the individual level. The researchers' analysis used a micro approach to apply to the whole group and this yielded different dimensions which were not picked up in the macro based questionnaires. Both approaches have their strengths and limitations and offer compelling insights into teachers' reflection. Researchers need to consider broadening their conceptualisation of reflection and the ways in which they study it so that it represents all parties fairly despite the host of complexities.

Journal writing has been a worthwhile and positive experience for most of the teachers. They have indicated that they enjoyed the experience which increased the depth of their reflection and that it should be included in future courses. Many teachers also indicated that they would adopt this practice with their students. Journal writing also encouraged the teachers to share their thoughts and ideas, and provided the tutors and course leaders with feedback on their work. The following excerpts taken from the teachers' questionnaire support these findings:

When I read the tutors' responses, I feel that I am not alone in my teaching career and that more can be done to improve my own teaching.

At the beginning I focused on aspects of the course, such as seminars and the tutors' presentation, but later I related the course to my own teaching and my own learning, especially my learning strategies.

There was a chance for more reflective thinking and revaluation. After all these years of teaching some things need to be put back in their right perspective.

One EMI teacher reported this comment:

At the beginning the concept of EMI was confused to me and I was also doubtful about the workability of such a thing. Through the journal my tutor gave me a clearer picture of the background and what to expect.

As a result of this experience another teacher stated:

I have paid more attention to the educational developments in Hong Kong... My views on education have been changing from being very pessimistic to being optimistic.

Future research would be needed to explore further the connections between the tutor response and the teacher's type of reflection. More follow-up longer term work would be needed to pursue this. Hunsaker and Johnston (1992, p.366) in a review of the literature cite numerous studies which demonstrate that when given time and support to reflect on the teaching teachers get better at reflecting which often results in change in their beliefs and teaching practice.

Further research is also needed to explore the extent to which this journal experience may have affected the practice of the teachers. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1992) suggest that “we do not accept the implication that exists throughout much of the literature that teachers’ actions are necessarily better just because they are more deliberate or more reflective or because they have reflected on them. As researchers we now need to go beyond “reflection” to transforming the reflection into meaningful and deliberate action”. As Ross (1994) reminds us, the success of reflective teacher education programmes cannot be measured by the number of individuals who become “competent reflectors” but in its effects on the classrooms and schools in which classrooms and schools operate. Transforming our everyday classroom practice is the ultimate aim of reflective practice as Bartlett (1990, p.267) states:

Asking ‘what and why’ questions gives us a certain power over our teaching. We claim that the degree of autonomy and responsibility we have in our work as teachers is determined by the level of control we can exercise over our actions. In reflecting on our actions, we begin to exercise control and open up the possibilities for transforming our everyday classroom life.

Note

This report is based on the Journal Writing Colloquium which was given in December 1994 at the International Language in Education Conference at the University of Hong Kong. The presenters included the authors, Maria Axler, Judy Keung, Michael Murphy and Harris who is now deceased. The writers gratefully acknowledge the help of Jacquelyn and John Sachs for statistical analyses, Alice Chow for coding, Norman Bird for advice and Maria Axler, Cynthia Leung and Belinda Ho for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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Appendix 1

Post Journal Writing Questionnaire for Teachers

This questionnaire is meant to stimulate reflection on the process of journal writing any insights that you might have gained from the activity. Please circle or write you response for those questions that apply to you. Many thanks for your cooperation.

Course: EMI EP ES ESP

Sex: Female/Male

Age: _____

No. of years teaching: _____

1. The journal writing activity was meant to stimulate reflection about your teach what extent would you say this goal was achieved for you?
 - A. To a full extent
 - B. To some extent
 - C. To a very limited extent
 - D. To no extent

2. To what extent did you enjoy the journal writing activity?
 - A. To a full extent
 - B. To some extent
 - C. To a very limited extent
 - D. To no extent

3. How would you describe your journal writing experience?
 - A. Meaningful/rewarding
 - B. A somewhat reflective experience
 - C. Done as a course requirement
 - D. A form of interpersonal communication
 - E. A new experience
 - F. Others (please specify) _____

4. Was this your first experience in journal writing?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

5. To what extent did the pre-journal writing questionnaire serve as a stimulus journal writing?
 - A. To a full extent
 - B. To some extent
 - C. To a very limited extent
 - D. To no extent

13. Would you use journal writing as a vehicle for developing reflection about learning your students? Please explain.
14. Should we include journal writing on our next ILE course?
 - A. Yes
 - B. NoWhat advice would you give us?
15. Other comments on your journal writing experience.

Appendix 2

Post Journal Writing Questionnaire for Tutors

This questionnaire is meant to stimulate reflection on the process of journal writing and tap any insights that you might have gained from the activity. Please circle or write your honest response for those questions that apply to you. Many thanks for your cooperation.

Course Tutor: EMI EP ES ESP

1. The journal writing activity was meant to stimulate reflection about practice. To what extent would you say this goal was achieved for the majority of your teachers?
A. To a full extent
B. To some extent
C. To a very limited extent
D. To no extent
2. Did you receive journal entries regularly from your teachers?
A. Yes
B. No
3. If yes to the previous question, approximately what percentage of your teachers submitted journal entries?
A. 100%
B. 75%
C. 50%
D. 25%
4. How would you characterise the journal writing activity for the majority of your teachers?
A. Meaningful/rewarding
B. A somewhat reflective experience
C. Done as a course requirement
D. A form of interpersonal communication
E. A new experience
F. Others (please specify) _____
5. What was the nature of your involvement in the journal writing activity? Select any that apply.
A. Writing responses
B. Encouraging teachers to write
C. Making use of prompts
D. Making use of the pre-journal writing questionnaire
E. Keeping a journal myself
F. Non-involvement
G. Others (please specify) _____

6. To what extent did your involvement in journal writing stimulate reflection about your development as a teacher educator?
 - A. To a full extent
 - B. To some extent
 - C. To a very limited extent
 - D. To no extent
7. If you responded to teachers' entries, how would you characterise the nature of your responses. Select all that apply.
 - A. Questioning to stimulate thinking
 - B. Encouraging and supportive
 - C. Holistically
 - D. Selectively
 - E. Giving my opinion or telling about my experience
 - F. Identifying or showing empathy
8. Do you think that the decision to make journal writing activity a part of the course requirement was a good one?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

Please explain your answer.
9. Did you share the contents of teachers' entries with others? Please explain your answer.
10. Did you share your responses with persons other than the teacher(s)? Please explain your answer.
11. How did the addition of journal writing to the courses impact upon your work at the ILE?
12. How did the addition of journal writing impact upon ILE courses?
13. What aspects of the journal writing activity did you find enjoyable?
14. What aspects did you find least enjoyable?
15. Would you engage in such an activity again? Or would you encourage others to try it?
Please elaborate.
16. Should journal writing be included in future ILE courses?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

What advice would you give?
17. Other comments on the ILE journal writing experience.