

A Research on Self-Directed Professional Development of a Teacher of TESOL in Chinese Context

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Abstract - Nowadays, it is urgently imperative to call for more teachers' active commitment to their self-directed professional development. Based on inductive-inferential approach and narrative-analytic approach, this paper is designed to observe and analyze a one-year programmer for self-directed professional development of the author, a teacher of English for Chinese learners, with herself as source and critically reflective learning, reflective teaching and action research as the major procedures. The result establishes the validity, reliability and feasibility of this programmer for the individual teacher concerned and some certain implication for teacher education and training.

Index Terms - self-directed professional development, critically reflective learning, reflective teaching, action research

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of teaching as a profession in the 1960s and the emphasis on teacher professionalization thirty years later by UNESCO, the whole globe is in unprecedented want of a team of highly qualified teachers expected to assume responsibility for their own professional development. In contrast with the indispensability and urgency of professional development, Reference [1] and Reference [2] highlight the unsatisfactory teacher quality in China, exemplified by the universally overfull workload, unoptimizable distribution of teachers of different ages, deficiency in their pedagogical theory learning and in competence for scientific researches among the EFL teacher at college level. Yet according to Reference [3], it is equally depressing to find the "similar but more unsatisfactory situation among the high school EFL teachers". Sensing the sharp contrast between the urgent needs of and the current undesirable situation directed at teacher professional development in the past century, Reference [2] stresses that "The study on the teacher professional development should be one of the major tasks for the theoretic study on the foreign language teaching" (p.2-7).

2. Professional Development for Language Teacher Home and Abroad

The late 1990s witness an intensifying interest in this field abroad; in terms of language teaching, the Cambridge Books for Language Teachers serve as a starting point for a systematic study on this subject and a shift of the focus from the language learners to language teachers, whose role in teaching and learning are gaining more recognition. Specifically speaking, Reference [4] supplies us the language teachers not simply with relevant theories but also with individualized examples on how certain language teachers are

gradually engaged in this process, including what they have done and in what way those teachers grow in their profession. Research on this kind of self-directed professional development is by no means easy task and entails utmost efforts and follows in some way the procedures of action research since it is in some respect a macro action research directed at the solution to larger issues like professional development rather than specific problems arisen from local teaching practices. The following parts shows a case study of how the author, namely, Kathy, conducts her self-directed professional development, taking the procedures of action research, that is, problem identification, plan of action, process of action, evaluation and reflection, plan for the next circle.

3. Problem Identification

In order to find problems about deficiency in individual professional development, two questionnaires about teachers' professional development are answered and the result, as well as Kathy's self-awareness, showed that Kathy extremely agreed that researching and teaching are supplementing each other and am attaching the same importance to the research and teaching, that the studies on the professional development are urgent and necessary, that she loves teaching and doing the scientific researches and hope they can help promote her professional development and facilitate her students' learning. Kathy also knew her advantages, disadvantages and difficulties in conducting the self-directed professional development project.

4. Plan of Action

The plan of action is to carry out a one-year programme for self-directed professional development of a teacher of English, with the researcher herself as source and critically reflective learning, reflective teaching and action research as the major procedures. The plan of action covers teaching portfolio and teaching diaries; interview, surveys and questionnaire; verbal report and reflection; bloc and exchanges of ideas with other in-service teacher; audio tape recording and transcript; critically reflective learning of theoretic and research literature and reflection; action research and case study.

5. Process of Action

Limited by the capacity of the paper, the researcher can only present some procedures of the whole research, including teaching journals or diaries, audio tape recording and

transcription, and critically reflective learning.

A. *Teaching journals or diaries*

A journal or diary is a teacher's written accounts in which the teacher makes an honest and open report of what happened in a lesson. The teacher can also write about his or her personal response to teaching events in a journal, which may involve private feelings. However, according to Kathy's reflection on the current model of teaching journal, it is preferable to add some reflection a few days later about what to do to tackle the problems mentioned in the journals and how to do it. Here is an example.

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From their delightful response towards our frequent but sporadic study I took it granted that they are sure to enjoy and love this class. Everything went the way round, though, to my great shock. I stopped when it became increasingly obvious that the students failed to follow me and what's worse was that they were reluctant to co-operate with me. During the break, I discussed with some of them and discover that they don't highly value a systematic study of word-building on the grounds that it is considered tough and impossible to relate the meaning of the root with that of a word. It seems now tough for me to give up my well-prepared and long-awaited teaching of word-building.

Kathy's reflection and action:

Word-building and root learning seem to engage my students when only a few roots are dealt with but later it turns out to confuse them when it comes to a systematic study which requires ample time and preparation. I sometimes overestimate my students and eagerly force them to accept what is virtually beyond their current level; accordingly, I focus on a regular study of word building and try to connect it with the study of new words and phrases. Over time, they seem more proficient in handling this strategy and more exercises about it are assigned to consolidate, during this process, I also see to it that most students are able to tell me how to learn specific words with what they have learned. Definitely the result come out fine and more delightfully, some of my students even explore out a rule for them after trials that word-building can also be used for distinguishing the differences of confusing words with similar forms, which is some good news for their improved autonomous learning.

B. *Audio tape recording*

The advantage of audio tape recording is that it is comparatively easier to carry out. Another advantage of recording a lesson is that it allows choice of focus. An additional advantage is that the recording can be replayed and examined many times and can capture many details of a lesson that cannot easily be observed by other means.

The experiences that Kathy tape recorded her classes in the three successive months of the programme and transcribed these classes but the transcription filled her with tremendous frustration in that she found, shamefully, that she spoke nearly Chinese most of the time in three classes and what's worse among the English sentences she spoke, there was little fluent

and native English. She also noted some uncertainty, plausibility or even errors without any awareness at that time. Then she reflected on and analysed these three lessons according to the transcription, to take as an example, here is some reflection and analysis for Class one:

One of the problematic aspects is that Chinese pervades 90% of the classes. The students and I do not bother to speak or listen to English. It is not that I did not wish to speak English in English classes from the outset but that I did try to speak but a majority of the adult students felt very hard to follow me and then I spoke Chinese after English but I soon found that it took twice of time as I planned and all the things seemed out of plan so I gave up any intention of speaking English.

After that, Kathy has consciously paid great attention to the language she uses in class, starting from the easier sentences in a clearer way to make her understood, in addition, she improve the amount of English input to help the students with their listening.

C. *Critically reflective learning*

A critically reflective learning of theoretic and research literature and successive reflection are undoubtedly essential and compulsory for one's professional growth. It requires systematic critical reflection and research after the learning, a critical and dynamic distinction of what differs the context set in the literature from the local one and then competence to take accordingly varied methods in applying the theories to the teaching practices. It might be more admirable for the teacher to reach original hypothesis and test it by means of the students' feedback, which is central to the success of teaching. Here is an example of how Kathy conducted critically reflective learning in her teaching

Literature Extract

After diagnosing anxious behaviour, language teachers can act accordingly to reduce anxiety. Teachers can use any or all of the following suggestion including encouraging moderate risk-taking and tolerance of ambiguity in a comfortable, non-threatening environment.

Kathy's reflection and action:

This piece of suggestion goes in accordance with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which proposes that affective factors can have a strong influence on FL learning and a helpful way of conceptualizing that influence is to regard affect as a "filter" through which FL input has to pass before it is acquired. Students are generally afraid of making mistakes so it is important to let them realize it is no big deal and mistakes actually help the students grow and I usually take pains to find out what is worth praising in their answers and diminish their embarrassment by humour. Over time, they seem to enjoy taking risk and even offer me their ideas beyond my expectation. Once they enjoy the classes in a more refreshing and relaxing way and are able to see their anticipation bring more than their silence, everything goes on in a more favourable way.

6. Evaluation and Reflection

Since this research is predominantly a qualitative one, the ways of collecting data include interpretative account based on a large amount of observation, analysis and reflection, is with some quantitative techniques such as questionnaires and evaluation adopted herein to enhance its validity and reliability, which are to be discussed in depth. With this research programme for self-directed professional development coming to its end one year later, the question of what changes in Kathy as a teacher have taken place is now be inspected and analysed. The following three parts as listed as evidence including (a) aspects of changes concerning her attitude toward professional development by contrasting pre-programme and post-programme results of the same questionnaire by Jia Aiwu; (b) her narrative about the professional advances after this self-directed professional development.

A. *Aspects of changes concerning attitude toward professional development*

The results of the pre-programme and post-programme results of the same questionnaire show the advances in Kathy attitude towards professional development after this self-directed professional development project. To begin with, one of the advances is displayed in that fact that she improves a lot as far as teaching and research is concerned, specifically, she no longer depends on the empirical summary of her teaching experiences as the major research methods and turns delightfully to more scientific research methods like reflective teaching and action research and she seems to attach due importance to the conception on the language and teaching as well as the attributes to the English teaching as foreign language and integrates the learning strategies and teaching strategies in her teaching. Another noteworthy advance is that she can see in herself renewed cognition in her self-worth and significance in her teaching.

B. *Kathy's narrative about the professional advances*

Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. Kathy's narrative about the professional advances after this self-directed professional development is presented as qualitative evidence in addition to what can be seen from the above table as quantitative evidence.

1). *About the conception about attitudes towards teaching*

This programme enables her to take on a new recognition about the conception about and attitudes towards teaching, as is shown as follows.

I did not realize that only those with professional proficiency and skills are competent to teach before this programme. But it now seems to me that we are the ones to determine whether the students are doing well in study and to help them out of the frustration due to the previous unsuccessful attempts and to determine whether they are being led to a road of self-autonomous learning. So I keep telling myself that I am to be responsible to all the audience in front of me each time I am entering the classrooms.

2). *From teacher-centred teaching to student-centred teaching*

One year is sufficient to see her classes shifting from teacher-centred ones to student-centred ones. And the details can be found in the following narration:

I used to take it for granted that teachers are indisputably the one to dominate and control the whole classes, with the teachers dictating and instructing and the learners listening and note-taking. But this experience with a private educational institutes totally changed my mind and my teaching style because I find these adult learners in my class wish for an interactive student-centred class and are most willing to cooperate with me and we seem to be advancing towards a healthy, open and positive class culture, which brings me tremendous contentment and a sense of self-accomplishment, seeing the advances for both the learners and myself.

3). *About the self-assurance in teaching*

The self-assurance of the teachers is definitely a prerequisite for the success of the teaching and professional development so it is most delightful for Kathy to find the enhancement of the self-confidence in teaching:

The change in self-assurance incarnates in the fact that I am no longer the green hand who might go too anxious to sleep in those days right before new classes, who might keep complaining while teaching and working. Instead, I begin looking forward to a new course and meeting my new students or even with new challenges and I find myself now smilingly obliging to and tolerant of my students and indulging in the tremendous merriment that this job might bring me. Isn't this a most delightful and satisfactory advances for any teacher?

7. Plan for the Next Circle

After this circle of action research for professional development, Kathy wishes to conduct the second circle in a collaborative way and in a much more steady class in a polytechnic college, where she is going to work as a full-time teacher and planning to experiment by persuading the whole team of language teacher or even more teachers later to participate in this self-directed professional development programme. More active team participation is supposed to entitle me with an overview with this programme in perspective.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is an indisputable fact from the above two parts of evidence that Kathy has highly benefited from this self-directed professional development so that the result of this programme is thought to be satisfactory, making it safe to say that this programme is individually valid, reliable and feasible. According to the research method of this research, inductive-inferential approach, one of the most adopted and the most familiar methods in educational researches, in which different forms of random sampling are carried out, intended to draw a statistically representative sample of a population that is too large to be studied as a whole and it is expected to

provide some new perspectives for pre-service teacher education in normal universities where cultivation of self-direction in those pre-service teachers' professional development.

References

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