

<p>Novice Teachers and Reflective Teaching <i>Some Practical Suggestions</i></p>			<p style="text-align: center;">Linguistics</p> <p>Keywords: novice teachers, effective teaching context, reflection, professional teacher, etc.</p>
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<p>Abstract</p>			
<p>The 21st century developments have reflected the need of the society to change. These changes have affected people’s perception of life. Education, one of the most important concepts in people’s life has developed rapidly and has changed the concept of traditional classroom in a more learner’s concept. The learner pre-counts what the priorities are and what to study. Then, it remains to the teacher to help learners meet the goals. In an EFL/ESL class, the teacher focuses on creating the right atmosphere of learning. All the teachers despite being senior or novice, time after time want to know if they are ‘good’ teachers, in other words if they are professional and effective. Teacher’s practice is directly connected to what happens in the class or in other words to reflective teaching. Reflection on what is taught and how is taught is something they they need to do. Observation, reflection, action research, analyzing, and evaluation are some steps through which the teaching process goes. However, What is reflective teaching? What are some concerns of novice teachers? How to improve teaching? What practical ways should teachers use to have reflective teaching? These are some research questions that this paper brings in focus, from theory to practice. The paper is based on observations of novice English teachers’ classes in the secondary and high schools in Vlora, Albania. It was found that novice teachers face some problems due to no-experience, no-reflection. This paper attempts to bring in focus the importance of reflective teaching. In this paper, some suggestions for foreign language teachers to practice reflective teaching will be presented. Reflective teaching is one of the keys to become a professional teacher.</p>			

I. The Importance of EFL Teacher Training

Teacher training has been recently one of the main concerns in foreign language methodology. Apparently, this is not a matter of one language class but subject to professional development. Teaching languages especially English has become an important issue for teachers’ training. Teachers try to get themselves involved in different trained courses offered. Professional teachers exploit every possibility to become more professional. The teaching goal is to meet student- priorities. The well-defined curriculum is implemented in a language classroom to make learning more adoptable and accessible for learners. *What about novice teachers? How are they trained professionally? What practice do they do before beginning their career?*

Viewing the importance of teacher/s role in a language class, reflecting upon teaching becomes a necessity. Novice teachers get some training at the last year of studies (*Master students of English, Albanian context*). Novice teachers usually experience some problems during the first year. There are different factors that affect their teaching experience such as *anxiety, motivation, large classes, mixed ability classes*, etc. Exploiting means and possibilities to give opportunities to students to practice language in the classroom is one of the teacher’s tasks. Having a clear picture of what is wrong is the first thing that a teacher should do.

Firstly, teachers should think of how to become more professional. Nowadays, when technology is used in every step of everyday life, teachers may use the net to get informed about different things.

By using internet teachers can read online teachers' journal, different portals that offer lesson plans, activities to teach skills, language games or materials to teach different language levels and age. While thinking about ways of reflecting they may be different such as *taking notes*, *observations*, *continuous students' feedback*, *open classes*, etc. To become professional teachers may consider how some means may help them become professional.

Teachers may reflect upon teaching - taking in consideration in what ways the following can help them develop professionally.

- *teaching journal*
- *materials development*
- *feedback from colleagues*
- *learner feedback*
- *seminars and workshops*. Richard & Renandya (2002)

English teachers whenever they are, in the last decade as it was mentioned above, have tried to find ways to be connected and to be informed about new methodologies. Each teacher tries to benefit from each other's experience. Internet websites like *TESOL*, *IATEFL*, etc., offer to teachers opportunities to be informed and share opinions. Teachers' journals, blogs or newsletters help English teachers to become more professional.

II. Reflective Teaching Practice: English Classes context

Recently, reflective teaching practice has become an important issue of teachers' professional development. According to Richard (1996) *reflection or 'critical reflection'*, refers to an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose.

English teachers can take part in different training -courses or classes to learn and reflect about their own teaching. If it is not done teachers do not get experience, their classes become boring, and they do not bring something new.

From the experience, we can say that to become professional English teachers need to:

- *Interact with each other,*
- *exchange experience,*
- *write their own experiences in teacher's journal,*

- *take part in workshops, conferences and seminars,*
- *reflect through feedback,*
- *pass from the stage of practitioners to that of professionals.*

There are different studies about the importance of reflective teaching in EFL/ESL classes such as the writings of Schon (1987). “*Educating the reflective practitioner,*” Zeichner & Liston (1996). “*Reflective teaching: An Introduction*”, Boud & Walker (1998). “*Promoting reflection in professional courses: The challenge of context.*” Richards (1990).” *Beyond training: approaches to teacher education in language teaching*”, Richards & Lockhart (1996). “*Reflective teaching in second language classrooms,*” etc.

According to Hatton & Smith (1995), there are four levels of reflective activity:

- *Descriptive writing – unreflective description of the event or activity, with no attempt at an explanation or justification,*
- *Descriptive reflection – reflecting on an event or activity, with an attempt to provide a possible explanation or justification for a solution, usually one only,*
- *Dialogic reflection – reflection from a time perspective, an inner dialogue, an investigation of various solutions and assumptions,*
- *Critical reflection – considering a wide spectrum of historical, cultural and sociopolitical aspects of the context involving moral judgment, besides considering the immediate implications of the case.*

The task of the teacher is to help the language learner master his/her language skills. In such context, being a professional is primarily a teacher’s task.

III. Methodology

This paper is based on the experience and observations of novice English language teachers. The observation included 10 novice teachers at the secondary and high schools in Vlora, Albania. We got report from questionnaires and teachers’ interviews. The problems of novice English teachers are almost the same.

- *The first problem was managing the classroom, this due to large number of students (30-45).*
- *The second problem was how to begin and end a lesson, this due to a not well- prepared lesson plan (lack of practice experience).*
- *There were other problems such as anxiety, non-motivated students, and mixed ability classes. All this things confused them.*
- *The teachers were asked about their experience. However, from the questionnaires teachers responded that none of them kept record of their classes, or peer- observed other senior colleagues, or kept diaries.*
- *Fewer of them used the net to download activities for their own students.*

- *Novice teachers were limited in using additional materials in their own classroom.*
- *They did not take feedback from their own students.*

IV. Practicing Reflective Teaching: Some Suggestions

The task of the teacher is to help the language learner acquire and use the language in meaningful contexts. A novice teacher should take time to put in practice what he/she has learned during university studies. The teacher's task primarily is to develop student's communicative competence. The teacher has different roles in a language class. The teacher should have effective teaching classes, thus to become an effective teacher. According to Westwood (2008), effective teachers have tended to reveal that they:

- *show enthusiasm*
- *have well-managed classrooms*
- *provide students with the maximum opportunity to learn;*
- *maintain an academic focus;*
- *have high, rather than low, expectations of what students can achieve*
- *are business-like and work-oriented*
- *involve all students in the lesson*
- *use strategies to keep students on task, motivated and productive*
- *impose structure on the content to be covered*
- *present new material in a step-by-step manner*
- *employ direct (explicit) teaching procedures when necessary*
- *use clear instructions and explanations*
- *use a variety of teaching styles, methods and resources*
- *frequently demonstrate appropriate task-approach strategies*
- *monitor closely what students are doing throughout a lesson*
- *adjust instruction to individual needs, and re-teach content where necessary*
- *provide frequent feedback to students*
- *use high rates of questioning to involve students and to check for understanding*
- *differentiate their questions according to students' ability*
- *spend significant amounts of time in interactive whole-class teaching; but also use group work and partner activities when appropriate.*

Taking in consideration all these to become an effective teacher means to be professional. To be professional novice teachers need to reflect upon teaching. The teacher assists and monitors the students' progress frequently, for this reason the teacher himself/herself must first be professional than ready to teach. *One can be a reflective teacher using different teaching approaches, including self-observation and other observation, team - teaching, and discovering teaching by writing.* Richards (1990) To overcome such difficulties we suggested to the teachers the following ways to reflect upon their teaching to become more professional.

Some Practical ways to promote reflective teaching:

– Taking notes while- teaching

Teachers can improve teaching strategies if they take notes while teaching, taking in consideration how learners respond to the class context referring for example to: *explanation, questioning, instructions etc.*

– Being observed by other colleagues

Sometimes teachers are too proud to think about such experience. They do not want the other colleagues to observe them. However, observation would help them. At the end of each observation, teachers may ask questions to their colleagues such as *Did you like it? What was wrong? How can I improve?* etc., in connection to methodology, students' interaction etc.

– Observing colleagues' classes

If you are a novice teacher and base your teaching just on a three to four months of teaching practice, than do not worry. There is nothing wrong if you ask one of your colleagues to observe your classes. This would help you to reflect, evaluate and improve.

– Taking frequently students' feedback

Feedback is that teaching ingredient that without it teachers would not success. Continuous feedback from your own students would help you improve methodology. You can ask your students when you explain (*Did you understand?*), while assisting and monitoring them (during course assignments) or when giving homework.

– Writing about teaching- experience

English teachers may keep a diary where whenever possible can write about experience in a certain class. The teacher may write about how he/she felt, did the students understand the lesson or were they satisfied. Using this type of reflection would certainly help them to become more professional. According to Powell (1985), *personal written documents are a conventional method of teaching, the significance of which is recognized by practitioners.*

– Video-recording of English classes

Using video -recording help teachers reflect better. After the class that they experienced, teachers may have a look at how was the teaching class and what they have just experienced, etc. Teacher can stop the video at any moment and take notes. This way would certainly help them reflect upon the teaching problems.

Conclusions

EFL/ESL teachers, being professional or novice, need to be trained continuously. To become a professional, novice teachers need to focus on reflective teaching. In student-centered classes, the teacher's task becomes important. He/she has to transmit knowledge to the learners.

Teachers should constantly develop not only their knowledge of the subject matter, but also their knowledge of pedagogy. Richard & Renandya (2002)

From the observations and suggestions, we can say that reflective teaching is the key toward successful and effective English class. English teachers should be aware about the importance of reflective teaching. Teachers should be actively involved in training courses and should exploit every opportunity to improve methodology in the language class. Continuous feedback would help them improve strategies. From the activities mentioned above, teachers involve themselves in reflective teaching practice. Teachers become aware of the reflective teaching and their capacity to improve towards professionalism.

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