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An Investigation of Guided Teacher Reflection with Novice and Experienced Language Teachers to Foster High-Leverage Teaching Methods

Abstract

In language teacher education two areas are largely under-researched: the stance of the reflective practitioner with respect to critical analysis of language instructional moves (ACTFL's high-leverage teaching practices-HLTP) and the ability of language teachers to model student learning strategies. The study focuses on the viability and fine-grained analysis of reflection on practice and efficacy in modeling linguistic expectations and language use. The focus is on both novice and practicing teachers.

The notion of reflection as a primary driver of cogent teaching of language is problematized in this study where teachers take part in an intensive training program while co-teaching language to young learners. Utilizing video and written reflections on lessons taught, the project sought to identify key areas that emerged from these sources. The primacy of oral language use by students and teachers' ability to model the HLTP they reflect on are discussed.

Description of Study

Subject/Problem

This study focuses on teachers, asking if assuming a reflective practitioner stance fosters high leverage teaching practices (HLTP) which enable students to learn languages to a higher proficiency criterion. HLTP are fundamental and are "critical to helping students learn important content" (TeachingWorks). These practices include explaining and modeling, eliciting and interpreting, among 19 other practices. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has taken these practices and incorporated them into the Language Teacher Standards (Glisen & Donato, 2016). TESOL stresses the importance of HLTP and is calling for more research focus on teacher education in teaching EFL and ESL (Farrell, 2017).

This investigation critically examines the role of reflection as an avenue to teacher improvement. Using data from two semesters of a language teacher education course, we examined the impact of written reflections done immediately after teaching in community classrooms. Twenty-four novice and experienced teachers engaged in an intensive hybrid teacher training course of online and on-site learning. The on-site program purposefully pushed the teachers' thinking and actions, to move their beliefs and pedagogical thinking by using a reflection template.

The aim of the study was to investigate the utility of guided teacher reflection in fostering novice and experienced LCTL teachers' pedagogical knowledge (PK). By quantitatively analyzing reflections, we were able to see where teachers focus attention—as indicators of their PK base and how these indicators align with HLTPs. In particular, we focused on the difference between novice and experienced teachers in how they demonstrated their PK written reflection. Special note was made of the sociocultural context in which the instruction took place. The post-teaching written reflection templates served as a locus for further constructing participants' pedagogical knowledge base in relation to HLTPs.

The research questions asked:

1. What is the range of categories of pedagogical knowledge demonstrated among the novice and experienced teachers in the language education course?
2. What are the most frequent emergent categories of pedagogical knowledge reflective of HLTPs demonstrated in written reflections?
3. What is the difference in the PK categories between novice and experienced teachers?
4. How did site-responsive collaborative teaching facilitate or hinder the teachers' pedagogical knowledge development and self-efficacy?

Design/ Procedure
Of the 24 teachers, eight teachers (4 novice; 4 experienced) were chosen for closer analysis. The eight teachers' written reflections (six written reflections per teacher; 48 full page written reflections in total) were analyzed closely in order to identify the emerging categories of pedagogical knowledge. The qualitative analysis of the data was done in four stages and followed by descriptive statistics of the number of categories and subcategories that emerged to compare with HLTPs. The qualitative data analysis followed 5 steps. (1) Free coding to note emergent themes of pedagogical knowledge; (2) Consensus drawn from the emergent themes and Gatbonton's (1999) categories; (3) Four-phase iterative coding process using *Dedoose* software: (a) establishment of main categories, (b) notation of subsets of the data, (c) interrater reliability (further calibration), (d) coding of the entire data set; (4) polishing definitions of emergent categories and subcategories; (5) final calibration: revisiting data, definitions, and categories to compare with HLTPs. Two raters worked on the data entry and met six times to compare their independently entered data and emerging categories and to calibrate their approaches and come to consensus. In only two cases was there disagreement which was resolved by agreeing on a redefinition of three categories.

Analyses and Findings
Experienced teachers tended to focus primarily on their own efficacy in positive, confirmatory terms, whereas novice teachers' subcategories indicate that they tended to notice student behavior**s** in negative terms which impacted their judgement of their own efficacy. For both novice and experienced teachers, attention to assessment (least frequent category) was overridden by frequent concerns related to the immediate need to address student behaviors and a desire to engage in effective teaching strategies. This was at the cost of assessing evidence of the children's language learning, i.e., oral proficiency growth, which fell into the least frequent category. This is of great concern if communicative language use is the goal and formative assessment of learners' progression is not a fundamental component in building oral language proficiency. Modeling of language was rarely cited by either novice or experienced teachers in their reflections, nor were learning strategies addressed. A closer analysis is still ongoing to discern the parallels to high-leverage teaching practices in these teachers' pedagogical knowledge and awareness.

Teaching requires a highly calibrated orchestration of skills, awareness and judgements. Reflection and reflective practices take time to learn and foster but it is apparent from the data that a guiding reflection template of focused and shifting questions tailored to arising needs, emerged as a necessary tool to push PK and reflection into research-based understandings and practices. However, reflection alone without bringing teachers themselves in on the problem-solving cycle, falls short. Novice and experienced teachers working together on the co-construction of actionable knowledge-building and strategic teaching is one way to make use of what each has learned through reflection and to translate it into actionable and cohesive teaching strategies. Whether these constitute what the profession calls HLTPs is yet to be critically examined.

Selected REFERENCES

Gatbonton, E. (1999), Investigating Experienced ESL Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge. *The Modern Language Journal, 83*: 35–50. doi: 10.1111/0026-7902.00004.

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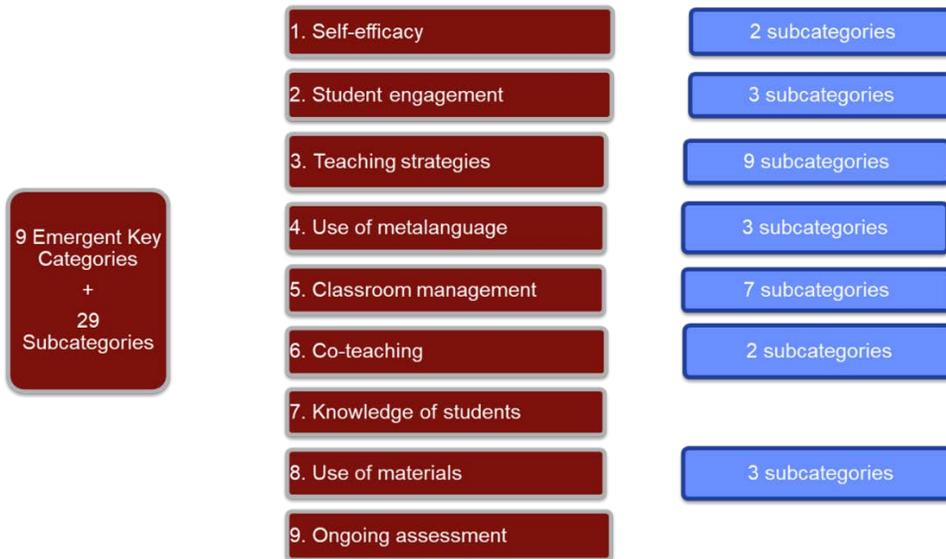
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Potential Areas of Future Collaboration with Faculty from UW & SoE:

Second/World/Foreign language teacher education has evolved over the past few decades and include my work in Language Teacher Education. I have done research and teacher training in the following areas: –Teacher training for pre-service and in-service language teachers (ELS, EFL and World languages) --Professional development of experienced teachers internationally for global/international teaching --Teacher thinking and reflection; reflective practice; teacher cognition; teacher identity --Language instruction in immersion (Dual language, partial immersion) contexts; --Heritage language learners and refugee learners; communicative language teaching (CLT) --Strategies-based language teaching for autonomous language learning by students

Appendix   Selected findings:

RQ: 1 Main Categories & subcategories [rank ordered ~ frequency]

9 Emergent Key Categories + 29 Subcategories

1. Self-efficacy — 2 subcategories
2. Student engagement — 3 subcategories
3. Teaching strategies — 9 subcategories
4. Use of metalanguage — 3 subcategories
5. Classroom management — 7 subcategories
6. Co-teaching — 2 subcategories
7. Knowledge of students
8. Use of materials — 3 subcategories
9. Ongoing assessment

RQ 2: Frequency Distribution of Categories for Novice & Experienced Teachers