Enhancing Teachers' Professional Development through Reflective Teaching

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Abstract—Teachers are one of the crucial factors for educational development and reform effect. Reflective teaching plays a significant role in foreign language teachers' professional development. This paper firstly reviews the domestic and foreign researches on reflective teaching and teachers' professional development, then practically explores the contents, process and specific operational methods of reflective teaching, and finally illustrates the effect and significance of reflective teaching with a case study.

Index Terms—reflective teaching, professional development, foreign language teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

China owns the world's largest number of foreign language learners, and its foreign language teaching reform has always been a hot issue of educational reform, the effect of which also becomes a significant and heart-tugging focus. Nevertheless, for a long time, the academic research in foreign language education has mainly been focusing on the theories and techniques of foreign language teaching, such as teaching approaches, learning strategies, textbook compilation and curriculum revision, etc. Researchers are keen to study teaching contents (what to teach), teaching methods (how to teach), but few consider the teaching subject (who teaches). With the focus of foreign language teaching transformed from language to pedagogy, some important factors in foreign language teaching, such as foreign language teaching education and teachers' professional development, have drawn unprecedented attention, the research of which has been gradually deepened—from the construction of foreign language teaching theory and the training of teaching skills to the study of teachers' prior knowledge structure, thinking pattern and their acquisition of teaching capability, namely, the research on teaching thinking (Gan, 2000). As a way of "learning to teach", reflective thinking supplies a flow of fresh water for the professional development of foreign language teachers. This paper firstly review the domestic and foreign researches on reflective teaching and teachers' professional development, then practically explores the contents, process and specific operational methods of reflective teaching, and finally illustrates the effect and significance of reflective teaching with a case study.

II. REVIEW OF REFLECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Cruickshank and Applegate (Kathleen M. Bailey, Andy Curtis & David Nunan, 2004) defined reflective teaching as "the teacher's thinking about what happens in classroom lessons and thinking about alternative means of achieving goals or aims". It is a means for teachers to think, analyze and objectively judge their classroom action. Based on their teaching experience, teachers find problems in real practice, then seek strategies and solutions to solve the problems through thoroughgoing consideration and observation, in order to improve their teaching.

Barlett (1995) listed eight principles in his Teacher Development Through Reflective Teaching to provide guidance for teachers' reflective teaching. The principles are as follows. 1) Problems being reflected must be closely associated with social environment. 2) The teacher must be interested in the problems to be solved. 3) Problems must be raised by the teacher himself, that is, they come from teacher's own teaching practice. 4) Reflection on the problems should encompass the teacher's solution in his own environment. 5) The ownership of setting the problems and solving them goes to the teacher. 6) The information of the problems should come from the teacher's teaching experience. 7) The teacher's view point should be tested in teaching practice. 8) Once the teacher's view proves to have stood the test of practice, it must be put into effect. Bartlett's view emphasizes the importance of action in reflection.

Wallace (1991) uses a 'reflective model' to demonstrate teachers' development of professional competence:
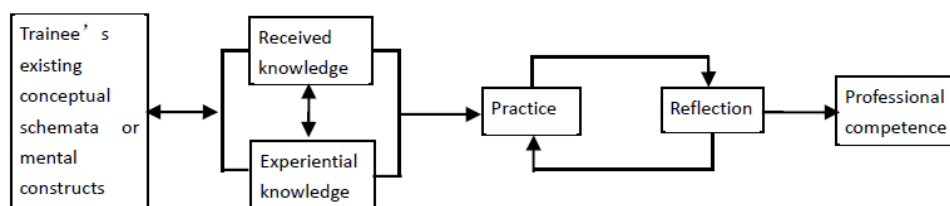
Figure 1. Reflective model of professional development (Wallace, 1991)

According to this model, received knowledge and experimental knowledge are two premises of reflection, which must be applied to teachers' teaching practice. Teachers benefit from practice if they keep on reflecting on what they have been doing. Reflective teaching is an ever-developing process full of a great amount of systematic observation, arduous exploration and rational selection, in which the teachers are both professionals and researchers. With teaching and research advancing side by side, teachers' teaching competence will be improved and their professional development can be attained.

Influenced by the development of foreign language education abroad, Chinese scholars and researchers began to pay close attention to professional development of foreign language teachers. From April 2001, School of Educational Science of Capital Normal University used international theories and experience in teacher education for reference, set up a serious of teacher developing schools in Beijing. One of its purposes is to establish a new developing pattern which is full of teachers' initiative, and which integrates teaching, research and learning. The Research Centre of Courses and Foreign Language Teachers' Development of Zhe Jiang Normal University dedicates itself to the exploration of language teachers' development mechanism and social textual environment. The Centre's main research fields include the relationship between courses and teachers, teachers' professional self-identity, reflective teaching, exploratory teaching, action research, and so on.

Reflective teaching and teachers' professional development have become the focus of foreign language research. Foreign language teachers collect specific contents in their teaching and classroom activity, analyze and think about them so that they can check up on their teaching attitude, beliefs, judgment and teaching practice, and finally reflect rationally on their teaching activity, adjust their beliefs and revise their teaching methods. Teachers benefit from this process in that they develop their competence by taking efforts, making themselves live up to the hopes of society and successfully deal with the challenges from test institution, course setting and teaching methods.

III. THE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF REFLECTIVE TEACHING

A. Objects of Reflection

Foreign language teachers have a wide range of objects to reflect on, which are interrelated and can be simply classified into teachers' beliefs and teachers' practice. To be specific, teachers can carry out reflection in the following four aspects.

1) The students: As foreign language learners, students' cognition and acquisition of second language deserve teachers' reflection and study. Teachers should find out students' interest, need, cognition, learning strategies, etc, reflect on them based on their teaching practice.

2) Teaching beliefs: Different teachers hold different teaching beliefs due to their various learning experience and teaching experience. Reflection on teaching beliefs doesn't mean to change their prior teaching beliefs, but to reflect from both subjective and objective perspectives in order to make clear the positive and negative factors in their beliefs. They can try to ponder over their teaching beliefs by asking the following questions: *What are the sources of my teaching belief? What do I believe about teaching? How does my belief influence my teaching?*

3) Teaching practice: Teachers are not only knowledge transmitters but also analyzers of students' needs, researchers of learning activities, guides for students, classroom managers, organizers and participants. All these roles provide rich contents for teachers' reflection. For instance, in classroom teaching, as managers and participants of class, teachers should reflect on teacher-students interaction, students-students interaction, teaching procedures, teaching methods, variety of activities, classroom environment/atmosphere, etc. They should reflect on whether these elements have achieved the expected effect, if there are discrepancies, what are the causes, how to improve that situation.

4) Methods and process of making decisions: Making decision is the prelude of teaching practice. According to Charles (2006), the process of making decision consists of three stages, namely, planning decision, interactive decision, evaluation decision, which correspond with the three stages of teaching—preparation, implementation and summary. In the preparation stage, teachers have their own understanding of instructional goals, descriptions of course and language contents, learning materials. They make their own decision when setting teaching objectives. However, all these objectives may not be completely achieved and the activities designed may not be carried out as expected, so teachers should evaluate after class which activities are effective, which need improvement. They can ponder on questions like *Was this lesson successful? Why or why not? What were the strengths and weakness? Were all the students involved in this lesson? Did it meet the students' needs? Should I change my teaching methods?* etc. That is the evaluation stage.

B. Process of Reflective Teaching

Experts have different ideas on the general process of reflective teaching. Eby (Xiong, 1999) believes that reflective teaching consists of eight phases, namely, observing the class, raising questions, collecting data, analyzing data, making judgments, considering alternative strategies, and implementing plans. Pollard (2006) believes that reflective teaching contains seven phases, which are reflection, planning, preparation, action, data collection, data analysis and evaluation. The author of this paper divides the process of reflective teaching into the following four phases.

1) Identification of a problem: Teachers should raise their awareness of finding out problems in their practice, which is the starting point of reflective teaching. They should take a questioning and 'problematising' stance (Burns, 2011) towards their teaching, review and question their teaching routine, their assumptions about their teaching approaches, their learners, their teaching contexts, or the philosophies or values that motivate what they do in the classroom (Burns, 2011), in order to identify problematic situations or issues worthy of investigation.

2) Observation and analysis: Once the problem is identified, we come into the phase of observation and analysis. Firstly, teachers should collect data, especially those concerning their own teaching practice, through consulting literature, observing class, discussing, interview, questionnaire, video recording, and so on. Then they should reflect on themselves critically, including their philosophy, practice, beliefs, values, attitude and affection. Finally, they should analyze the causes of the problem and learn from others experience.

3) Re-generalization: After analyzing causes of the problem, teachers should review their teaching activities, paying attention to two aspects: teaching activity itself and students. Teachers must re-examine their philosophy on which their teaching activities are based, look for new ideas and strategies to solve the problem, on the basis of which formulate new assumption and new plan for action, thereby improving their teaching practice, forming new educational philosophies and solving problems. In addition, teaching practice is established on the close concern about and research into students. In other words, teachers should observe students' behavior and develop teaching programs and classroom environment consistent with students' developmental pattern. Therefore, as the manifestation of teaching effect, students' performance and learning outcome can serve as the basis for teachers' reflection and their later teaching.

4) Actual verification: In this phase, teachers put the assumption and plan worked out in the previous phase into teaching practice and verify their reasonableness according to the teaching effect. New problems may occur in this process and they can be the content of a new cycle of reflective teaching. The cycles might continue till the problem is solved to the teacher's satisfaction. In this process, teaching practice can be improved and teachers can attain their self-development.

In short, in the process of reflective teaching, teachers should construct initiatively based on their prior knowledge and teaching experience, take in new skills, techniques and theories. While reflecting on their own teaching behaviors comprehensively, teachers will gain experience from the teaching subject, teaching objectives and teaching aids, as well as from the pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching sectors to mature themselves. In the process of transforming teaching thoughts and values into teaching behaviors, teachers experience cyclic reflection to become conscious and effective reflectors, thereby promoting their professional growth.

C.   Strategies of Reflective Teaching

1) Teaching journal: Teaching experience is the main content of the journal. Richards. J and Lockhart, C. (1996) suggest that teachers record their feelings about what happened in class, describe things that are significant to teaching, take down the problems worth investigation and the solutions in the teaching journal. For instance, while the teacher is reviewing classroom teaching, he/she can reflect on the following questions: Did the use of second language take up the whole class? Is it beneficial to the students? In which case should I correct students' mistakes? etc. Jarvis (1992) pointed out that inferior journals are those which simply list what happened in class and those which generally summarize the whole teaching process. Those which are favorable for solving problems, seeing new teaching ideas and legitimizing own practice are regarded as remarkable journals. Writing journals can stir teachers' insight into teaching and expose the problems in teaching, providing favorable preparations for making plan of improvement. However, teachers differ in their ability of reflection, so it is very necessary to offer training to develop their reflective ability. For example, teachers can be asked to analyze several different teaching journals and find out the reflective sentences in them, or they may be assigned reflective tasks, so that they can make sense of how to write teaching journal.

2) Observation: Teachers can observe each other's class and mutually analyze their teaching practice. To be specific, they can learn how their colleagues arrange their teaching procedures, how they manage their class, how they teach students, how they tackle sudden matters to ensure that the class can continue smoothly, how the students react to the teacher, how is the relation between teacher and students. They may also pay attention to the frequencies of the teacher's and students' classroom behaviors: students' frequency of using mother tongue, the teacher's frequency of using target language, students' frequency of answering teacher's questions voluntarily, boys' and girls' respective frequency of participating in group discussion, teacher's frequency of asking general questions and special questions, etc. Such an observation is different from traditional ones, in that the latter's only purpose is to check on the quality of teaching, it is merely a form of teacher assessment. While the former is a means of collecting information or data—while observing class, the teacher take down the problems they find out, discuss them with their colleagues after class, propose measures for improvement and eventually get self-development. Teachers can learn a series of teaching methods and approaches through observation, and apply what they learned into their teaching practice. Therefore, learning teaching approaches is the main purpose of observation, and 'how to teach' is its focus. Nevertheless, some

problems cannot be observed directly through observation, so it's necessary to go through the surface and carry out deep exploration as to 'why' the teacher did so.

3) Teacher assessment: Teacher assessment is similar to observation. It does not focus on the 'right' or 'wrong' in the teaching, but it requires the observer to pay attention to the teacher's teaching throughout the class, helping the teacher to improve his/her teaching through a cycle of observing, analyzing, evaluating, improving and practicing. Fantini (Xue, 2010) put forward six items for teacher assessment, namely, interpersonal relation; cultural and intercultural knowledge, language and linguistic knowledge, language acquisition and learning, language teaching, professionalism. By assessing teachers in terms of these six qualities and proposing improving measures, teachers can better develop their teaching skills and their professional competence can be enhanced. Another form of teacher assessment is collecting students' feedback to teachers teaching. Internet teaching assessment is a very convenient form, which provides significant information for teachers to reflect on their teaching

4) Questionnaire: Foreign language teachers can design questionnaires in a planned way and with particular purposes. The contents can be concerned with teachers (such as teaching approaches), or students' attitudes, affections, learning strategies and linguistic knowledge. The subjects can be some students, or a whole class of students, the whole grade or even the teacher's colleagues. The interval between questionnaires is decided by the teaching progress. Through effective questionnaires, teachers can keep abreast of students' development and revise teaching plans and rate of progress accordingly, reflect on their teaching practice in order to carry out further research and improve their teaching strategies.

5) Micro-teaching: Teachers can record a certain process or aspect of teaching chosen by themselves as the object of reflection and then observe and analyze the recording as an observer so as to work out countermeasures to the problems. Such a vivid material can provide a detailed feedback of the whole classroom teaching, stimulate teachers' reflective thinking, encourage them to sum up the success and failure in their teaching. With such a detailed and vivid material, teachers can turn to others for analysis and explanation. In addition, teachers can record slices of others teaching relative to their reflection, observe and analyze carefully, find inspirations in them, based on which they can further their reflection.

6) Action research: Action research is related to the ideas of 'reflective practice' and 'the teacher as researcher'. It involves taking a self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to exploring teacher's own teaching contexts and intervening in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice (Burns, 2011). It typically involves four broad phases in a cycle of research, namely, planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The first cycle may become a continuing, or interactive, spiral of cycles which recur until the action researcher has achieved a satisfactory outcome and feels it is time to stop. Action research is an effective approach to teachers' professional development, since compared with traditional teaching practice, it conforms more to research norms, it attaches more importance to the value of theories in research, and it puts more emphasis on collaboration.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF REFLECTIVE TEACHING

As a teacher of English culture, the author of this paper carried out a case study on a colleague's English culture class. We want to find out some problems in our teaching in order to promote the development of our teaching and research.

1) Background: Traditional English culture class is full of teacher's explanation and students' reading, without adequate opportunities for students to communicate in target language. There is no real communication in such a kind of class. If students have more opportunities and time for communication in target language, their comprehensive ability to use the language can be improved. However, what are the features of discourse in college English culture class? How about the teacher's and students' respective percentage of speaking? How do teacher and students repeat their utterance? How does the teacher ask questions? The researcher carried out an empirical study on the above questions from the perspective of classroom discourse analysis.

2) Subjects: The subjects of this research are 43 grade three English majors, among whom there are 5 boys and 38 girls, with their ages ranging from 20 to 23.

3) Research method: Questionnaire and case study are the frequently used methods in classroom teaching research. In order to get a thorough and authentic reflect on the discourses in English culture class, we used case study as our method and the teacher's and students' talk in real class was recorded with a tape recorder. All the tapes were transcribed and analyzed immediately after the class.

4) Data collection and analysis: The process of recording lasted 50 minutes and therefore we got a class discourse record of 50 minutes. As the objective of this research is to describe the communication process in English culture class, only the quantity and percentage of the variables were analyzed, which manifested the situation of classroom discourse communication.

5) Result and discussion: Multimedia is used in English culture class. The teaching objectives of that class is for students to understand American values and beliefs in success, get to know Bill Gates' family background and spirit, to be able to comment on Bill Gates' characters. Students' reading skills, listening skills, speaking skills and imagination were expected to be improved. Analysis was carried out in three perspectives: a. The teacher's and students' respective time duration of discourse: The teacher's discourse occupied 35 minutes, while the students' discourse only took up

approximately 15 minutes. b. The quantity of words in teacher's and students' discourses: the quantity of words in teacher's discourse took up 69.6% of all the words, the students' took up 30.4%. c. Teacher's use of two kinds of questions (display questions and referential questions) is analyzed in detail. Display questions are those that the answers are already known to the teacher and they are used for checking if students know the answer, too (Wang, 2000), for example, *What contributions has Bill Gates made to the personal computer industry?*. Genuine questions are questions which are used to find out new information and since they often reflect real contexts, they are therefore more communicative (Ur, 1996), for example, *From both Henry Ford and Bill Gates, can we find some common traits that contribute to the formation of giants in industry?* The purpose of asking display questions is to practice language, making the students grasp the language knowledge to be learned, most of which are declarative knowledge. While the purpose of raising genuine questions is to seek different information, which require that students express in their own language, transforming declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1987).

Display questions		Genuine questions		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%
16	69.6%	7	30.4%	23	100%

Figure 2. The proportion of display questions and genuine questions in teacher's discourse.

The data in figure 1 indicate that the teacher raised much more display questions than genuine questions. Through an interview with the teacher and the students we find: there is insufficient opportunity for students to use language creatively, and students are "not very interested" in answering display questions. They considered display questions "very easy", while genuine questions "challenging", and "favorable for cultivating creative thinking", and "they can reflect individuality and meet the individual's need for communication". Some students even hope that the teacher can design some activities such as debate, simulation and improvisation to raise their interest.

Reflection comes naturally based on the above result and analysis: teaching should be guided by constructivism. Inspiration, exploration, collaboration, share and discussion should be used more than inculcation when teaching new knowledge, so that students can be involved in the process of knowledge construction, instead of being offered conclusion by the teacher.

The above case study suggests that teachers can improve their teaching practice and achieve better teaching effect via observation of teaching process. At the same time, their understanding of foreign language teaching can be deepened.

Reflection is a significant basis for teachers' professional development. For foreign language teachers, reflective teaching is not only the basis for them to make teaching plans and decisions for action, but also beneficial for them to strengthen their exploration ability, to raise their ability of supervising teaching, to improve their awareness of self-reflection and to construct new teaching beliefs and concepts.

1) Reflective teaching makes teachers re-identify their roles. With the constant development of society and education, teachers' roles are taking on a tendency of transforming from knowledge transmitters to teachers with multi-roles. Foreign language teachers should play nine different roles according to different teaching situations: controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, resource-provider, facilitator, guide and researcher (Wang, 2000).

2) Reflective teaching helps teacher achieves the transformation of teaching beliefs. Teaching beliefs are influenced by one's learning experience, knowledge structure, teaching context and teaching experience, and they in turn influence teacher's judgment on a certain problem, and further influence his/her decision in classroom teaching, teaching procedures, teaching behavior, assessment, error correction, and almost all the aspects concerning language teaching. Actually, only by internalizing those scientific theories and accurate beliefs extracted from practice, can teachers teaching skills and reflective ability gradually get improved. Hence teachers can make clear what beliefs are favorable for language teaching, what are unfavorable, so that we will adhere to those which conform to learning laws.

3) Reflective teaching promotes the combination of theory and practice. By reflecting on not only their teaching beliefs, interest, motivation and morale, but also their teaching methods, materials and media, teachers either query or evaluate their teaching effect, and then correct the inappropriate teaching action according to the result of reflection. In reflection, teachers study the teaching objects, grasp students' individual difference, and properly apply the result of reflection to their teaching, so that they can carry out classroom teaching with better teaching practice, students' creative thinking can be inspired, and the expected teaching effect can be achieved. Through this process, teaching based on experience is changed into reflective teaching.

4) Reflective teaching improves teaching and research skills. Teaching is a complicated process, in which teachers apprehend teaching context and reflect on their own cognitive process. They analyze and evaluate their teaching plans, teaching behavior and their influence on students. They explore and ponder over the teaching phenomena which seem ordinary to others. They reflect on and judge their teaching practice, take efforts to exploit resources, learn from others' strong points to offset their weaknesses. They integrate the merits of different methodologies and develop their own teaching methods based on the context where they teach. Therefore, their teaching skills can get constant improvement. In addition, reflective teachers always pay close attention to the academic development, collect feedback information, reflect on, query and deeply analyze and evaluate teaching practice, constantly thinking about teaching strategy at a higher and more macro level, pursuing the rationality of teaching process.

V. Conclusion

Efficient foreign language teaching is both a science and a professional pursuit. To achieve self-development and improve professional competence, foreign language teachers must have diversified and open thought, correct and innovative educational beliefs, critical spirit, perseverance and strong affection for students.

As the main researchers and practitioners, foreign language teachers should base their research on classroom teaching, reflect on their teaching beliefs, making cognition scientific, teaching process communicative and teaching methods dynamic, and promoting their constant professional development via recording lessons, publication reading, teacher mediation questionnaire, case study, diary writing, teaching assessment, in-service training programs, conferences, seminars and short courses.

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