DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.204

Enriching Instruction via Sustained Self-Observation

Christopher Miller
Daeil Foreign Language High School
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3760-7803

Abstract

The benefits of recording teacher performance for purposes of reflection and analysis has long been recognized in ELT (see Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Farrell, 2015) and in general education (see Tripp, 2010). Between June 5th to November 22nd 2024, I engaged in self-observation with subsequent reflection and analysis of a blend of audio and video recordings from 15 different lessons. I will discuss the procedures for engaging in self-observation and subsequent reflection, perceived benefits of sustained self-observation, modifications of teaching performance partially triggered by the act of self-observation and the limitations of such an approach. Perceived benefits included greater awareness of multiple aspects of teaching performance, activating and strengthening professional knowledge bases, creating a space for reflection and making implicit theories explicit.

Keywords: *s*elf-observation; reflective practice; recording; teacher development

Introduction

This paper will qualitatively analyze a series of 15 recordings of the author's teaching practice during 2024. The author will list a series of self-perceived benefits derived from engaging in self-observation, provide illustrations of shifts in personal teaching practice which aligned with core professional teaching values espoused by the author and consider more broadly how the sustained practice of self-observation impacted the author's teaching performance. The latter portion of this paper considers the limitations of both this particular study and engaging in sustained forms of self-observation.

I currently work primarily as a "conversational English teacher" at a Foreign Language High School in South Korea. I have held the position of head teacher of Native English teachers at this institution since 2015. This has afforded me a degree of flexibility in designing my curriculum and selecting course materials. Student levels range widely. In any given class, learners range from advanced (due to several years of study abroad) to false beginner. Unfortunately, no precise data was available when I inquired about the range of student proficiencies with my supervisors. Class size ranges between 11-13 students. I am required to teach the exact same 50-minute lesson 10 times, thus once each for my 10 different groups of learners during the academic year. This reality provided me with an incentive to record my lessons. It enabled me to make immediate adjustments to my instructional delivery and teaching materials and subsequently be provided with a forum to check (albeit subjectively) if my alterations were of any use.

Thus, to put it simply, my primary motivation to record my lessons and engage in self-observation was to deliver a "better" lesson that was informed by my previous experience. Stated more formally, I used self-observation to engage in more focused forms of deliberative reflection and technical rationality (Valli, 1997, p. 75). The self-observation recordings essentially served as a form of prompting for both reflection and modification of practice.

Some may ask what does "better" mean? This is a question of values. In brief, my core teaching values include: a) clarity; learners should be able to understand the teacher, expectations should be easy to comprehend; b) minimize non-essential teacher talk; c) provide learners with an incentive to listen when the teacher does in fact need to talk. This could be done with relatively simplistic strategies, such as word-gapping a handout which learners fill in while the teacher lectures, or communicating essential information (such as grading criteria for an assignment, etc.) in the form of a dictation; d) keep learners cognitively, behaviorally and emotionally engaged as much as possible (see Theuma, 2017, p. 181 for further discussion of the varieties of learner engagement). These teacher values likely had a significant influence on what I consciously attended to while engaging in self-observation and any subsequent modifications of my instructional practice. I wish to stress that while these beliefs were likely implicitly held during the period of data collection, I did not explicitly engage in self-observation with a deliberate focus on these core values.

Literature Review

The value of recording, whether via audio or video, one's teaching performance has long been recognized in ELT and more broadly in general education (Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Farrell, 2015; Tripp, 2010). Tripp (2010) performed a meta-analysis in conjunction with a multiple case studies research project focused on a group of seven teachers' experiences with video recording and meeting as a group over a period of several months. The results indicated that viewing and reflecting on their personal videoed teacher performances helped a) focus analysis, b) see their teaching from a new perspective, c) trust the feedback they receive, d) feel accountable to alter their teaching practice, e) remember to put changes into practice and f) notice professional progress (p. 53). Tripp argues that video recording of teacher performance has certain built-in mechanisms which serve to motivate change in a teacher's performance: "teachers continually talked about trusting video analysis feedback more than previous feedback methods they had used." Brinko (1993, 579) reported that feedback is most effective when teachers view the source as credible," and "feedback is more effective when it contains irrefutable evidence" (as cited in Tripp, 2010, p. 97).

Frameworks for Reflection

Emerging from a variety of disciplines, several frameworks for engaging in reflection, which self-observation can help stimulate, have been in circulation since the 1930s. Such frameworks can help a practitioner to devise more systematic and sustainable forms of reflection. Reproduced below are several frameworks which may serve as entry points for more detailed forms of reflection for the interested reader. All frameworks cited below appear in Farrell (2015).

I hesitate to provide any advice or guidance related to using reflective frameworks that exist in the professional literature. This is because I have not implemented any framework precisely in the spirit or method as intended by the initial authors. Nevertheless, I believe it is good to be aware of these frameworks and I leave it up to the reader to customize the frameworks reproduced here to develop a personalized approach. Regarding evidence-based forms of reflective practice, I would emphasize to any readers that it is best to start *anywhere* and to do *anything* and develop from a place where you feel comfortable. There is little need to stress over where to focus attention. Especially in the early stages, it is crucial to just get started. As Gillie Bolton writes: "In reflective practice no detail is too trivial or insignificant to write, think and talk about" (Bolton, 2018, p. 114). Mandated and compelled forms of reflection

are unlikely to be effective or sustainable. Sometimes these frameworks, which often call for "research", "hypothesis testing", and to "re-theorize" can intimidate the harried and less experienced teaching practitioner. In my experience, doing an imperfect form of sustained reflection is far superior to more rigorous methods which are less likely to be sustained. As Schön emphasized, sometimes we must choose between "rigor or relevance (Schön, p. 42)." I feel Harwood's (2022) reminder about how teachers can adapt materials similarly applies to reflective frameworks: teachers can add, delete, modify, or resequence the frameworks (p. 141).

Table 1.
John Dewey's Model of Reflective Inquiry (1933)

Sequence	Keyword	Further Description
#1	Suggestion	Notice an issue in your classroom that you consider problematic.
#2	Intellectualization	Transform this issue into a problem to be solved.
#3	Guiding Idea	Form a hypothesis as to the root cause of the issue—use it to "guide observation and other operations in the collection of factual material."
#4	Reasoning	Consider possible solutions for the problem.
#5	Hypothesis Testing	"the testing can be by overt action or in thought (imaginative action) …"

Note: All quotes from Farrell, 2015

Table 2.
Zeichner and Liston's 5 Dimensions of Reflection (1996)

Sequence	Keyword	Further Description
#1	Rapid Reaction	"Something happens and a teacher acts instinctively. The teacher is immediate in reflection and action."
#2	Repair	"The teacher pauses for thought about what happened. May try to repair the situation. This is more thoughtful reflection-in-action."
#3	Review	"The teacher takes time out (hours or days) to reassess the situation."
#4	Research	"A teacher researches the situation in all its forms (systematic). This is more systematic and deliberative reflection-on-action."
#5	Re-theorize/ Research	Re-evaluate the situation based on prior experience and research, and consideration of multiple research paradigms. Should be viewed as a long-term process.

Note: All quotes from Farrell, 2015

Table 3.
Korthagen: ALACT (1985)

Sequence	Keyword
#1	Action
#2	Looking Back on Action
#3	Awareness of Essential Aspects
#4	Creating Alternative Methods of Action
#5	Trial

Table 4.
A Simpler Method for Engaging in Reflective Practice (Farrell, 2015)

Sequence	Keyword	Further Description
#1	Problem Identification	"A doubtful situation is understood to be problematic."
#2	Generating Solutions	"Possible solutions are generated."
#3	Testing Solutions	"The refined idea is reached, and the testing of this refined hypothesis takes place; the testing can be by overt action or in thought."
#4	Learning from Reflecting	"The reflective process leads to an enhancement of the teacher's understanding used to give meaning to the professional context in which the problem was identified."

Note: All quotes from Farrell, 2015

Research Questions

1) What were the benefits of engaging in self-observation?
2) Are alterations in teaching performance, triggered in part by self-observation, connected to the self-observing teacher's professional values?
3) How did self-observation through recordings impact my teaching performance?

Methodology

My "methods" were simply to listen to the audio recording and note anything I would like to change. At the start of this exploration into my teaching practice, I did not document the total number of recordings, however, I have engaged in self-observation for at least 15 classes starting on June 5th, 2024 until November 22nd, 2024. I either made changes to existing materials while listening to the audio or immediately after and when appropriate I would make a memo about various behavioral changes I as a teacher hoped to implement in subsequent teaching performances of the same lesson.

Starting on September 3rd, my approach changed and became somewhat more sophisticated. This was facilitated by the President of the Seoul Korea TESOL chapter organizing a 'reflective roundtable' for a future academic conference. I subsequently became the primary organizer of that roundtable session. As I felt I would need to have concrete experiences that I would have to articulately relate, I began taking somewhat detailed notes during and after listening to the audio recordings which I continued to record on an approximately weekly basis. Notes were not compiled in a precise or systematic manner, as I did not enter into this period of self-observation with a specific area of focus. Following my unstructured note-taking during the self-observation, these were typed out in a word processor (Google Drive). Taking a more open-ended approach allowed for flexibility of attending to issues which became salient to myself through the process of engaging in self-observation. Areas of focus ranged from student interaction, problematic utterances, "issues," "solutions" (when applicable!), and "comments." Thus, I compiled somewhat extensive notes for 10 lessons related to self-observations identified in this article. The length of the written reflections ranged from 443 (Sept 10) to 2226 words (Sept 23). In my experience this process of compiling notes, while adding approximately an hour to the process of reflective self-observation per self-observed lesson, nevertheless helped to focus my attention on areas of concern. All recordings

were audio-only, except for the final recording of the 2024 academic year, which occurred on November 22nd. The process of observing recordings, adjusting materials, and typing out reflective notes rarely took more than two hours per self-observed lesson, and often significantly less time was required.

Additionally, all materials produced for the lessons in which I engaged in self-observation were extensively reviewed. The reasons for doing so were to note emergent patterns (Dick, 2001, p. 3). Also, more precisely, I wished to note what personally innovative instructional strategies that did emerge during the performance of self-observation were actually integrated into subsequent lessons (see Table 6 for a list of instructional shifts that were repeated multiple times in the lessons contained in the data collected for this study).

Notably absent in my methods was the use of collaboration. While the potential benefits of collaboration for self-observation or reflection have been noted (see Godinez Martinez, 2022, 88). I deliberately did not seek any form of collegial input related to self-observation and the data considered in this study. As Godinez Martinez also notes, "disposition/readiness [to engage in reflection], flexibility and openness to collegiality" are prerequisites to derive benefits from teacher reflection. In the absence of such traits, competitiveness and susceptibility to groupthink are among the potential undesirable outcomes (Godinez Martinez, 92-95). Previous attempts initiated by myself in my current workplace to implement a peer observation program were met with what I perceived to be a tepid response. My perceptions were later explicitly confirmed during informal interaction with colleagues. I believe that mandated reflection can lead to counter-productive outcomes. Thus, using my professional judgement, I decided not to engage with immediate colleagues in a structured, semi long-term cycle of self-observation and inquiry.

Table 5.
Recorded lessons: Dates and Themes

#	Date	Lesson Theme
1	June 5	Movie Taglines
2	June 6	Woodstock 1999
3	June 14	Song + Vocabulary-Green Day *When I Come Around*
4	Aug 20	Dilemmas part 1
5	Aug 27	Dilemmas part 2
6	Sept 3	Dilemmas part 4
7	Sept 10	The Physical Message (part of a larger unit on presentation skills)
8	Sept 23	Audience Engagement (part of a larger unit on presentation skills)
9	Sept 26	Script Feedback + Revisions (part of a larger unit on presentation skills)
10	Sept 30	Bill Burr on Steve Jobs (**note**: not a part of the formal curriculum as this lesson occurred the week before midterm exams and teachers were instructed to engage in lighter activities with no connection to assessment)
11	Oct 31	Beatles *Revolution*-Vocabulary Focus
12	Nov 1	Beatles *Revolution*-Culture and Song Background Focus
13	Nov 8	Bob Marley *War*-Vocabulary Focus
14	Nov 21	Bob Marley *War*-Culture and Song Background Focus
15	Nov 22 *	Grand Master Flash and the Furious 5-*The Message*-Vocabulary Focus

*This was the only lesson which was video recorded. All lessons previous to November 22nd indicated here were audio-recorded.

Table 6.
Instructional Shifts Triggered by Self-Observation that Aligned with Core Teaching Values

Personal Teaching Value	Illustration of Enrichments of Teaching Performance for Subsequent Performances of the Same Lesson (Following the Initial Recording)	Date of Recording
Clarity	• Enriching visual cues through a PPT about assessment expectations	Sept 23
	• Simplifying and illustrating, via written input, task expectations for a mini-storytelling task based off of a lesson-relevant picture	Nov 1
	• Adding pictures to visually support a brief teacher anecdote illustrating themes related to the lesson objectives	Nov 1
Minimizing Non-essential Teacher Talk	• Deleting a teacher display question that was likely outside of students' range of awareness (Question: Who else promoted non-violence in 1968? Answer: MLK)	Nov 1
	• Consistently adding visual written support for a) lesson objectives, b) pre-task instructions, c) models ("worked examples") of task performance	Multiple Times
	• Deletion of a statement that created confusion among students (discussion prompt→"What makes you feel close to the edge?" …teacher statement (prior to discussion about personal difficulties): "and I challenge you not to say test")	Nov 22
Providing an Incentive to Listen to Teacher Talk	• Whispering the final part of an interactive lecture related to audience engagement during public speaking→ "call back"	Sept 23
	• Providing absurd suspense: claiming I have a medical condition, later revealed to be amnesia as a ploy to have students retell key ideas related to appropriate posture in public speaking, a form of "control the teacher (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 108-109)"	Sept 10
Engagement (Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioral)	• Greater incorporation of visual thinking strategies (Donaghy, 2021); cognitive and behavioral engagement	Multiple Times
	• Decision to extend planning time in which learners silently completed a survey with their personal answers prior to engaging in a mingling task; cognitive and behavioral engagement	Oct 31
	• Providing learners with a series of preview questions which included photo illustrations discussed with peers related to instruction related to aspects of bad posture during public speaking; cognitive and behavioral engagement	Sept 10

Results

Research Question #1: What were the benefits of engaging in self-observation?

The benefits were many and varied. I will provide a brief explanation of the benefits I believe I derived from sustained self-observation and illustrate those benefits when possible or appropriate.

A space and reason for sustained concentration and reflection on a lesson.

By establishing a weekly habit of viewing my performance, I established a space – a set aside block of time each week – to focus on my recent professional experiences. By recording myself, I took my experience and turned it into an artifact. This facilitated analysis and alteration of learning materials. In many respects, observing your own teacher performance is a type of stimulated recall project. While listening to the audio, a multitude of opportunities to enrich my materials became apparent. For instance, since I teach mixed-level classes, I would often try to elicit learner's prior knowledge before providing more detailed instruction when providing learners with topic-related vocabulary. Initially, I simply provided the terms and in pairs had learners either guess or explain what the terms meant. After reflecting, most likely motivated by listening to the audio of my teaching performance, I recognized that little shifts, such as adding guided questions, highlighting prefixes and suffixes on instructional materials (i.e. the PowerPoint), providing pictures, or providing sentences with the keyword embedded in a larger context were able to help elicit responses from learners without me needing to directly explain much of anything to learners.

An incentive to "improve."

I became increasingly more excited about teaching and viewing my recording on a weekly basis. As I attempted to illustrate in the previous example, self-observation either provided me with novel insight or activated prior knowledge which pushed me to try to have the best lesson (note, not curriculum or assessment procedures) I could at that particular time. Tripp (2010) reports similar motivational shifts in her research. Here is one participant from Tripp's research: "Knowing that you're going to be video recorded again, and you have to watch it again, I think it makes me more apt to change" (p. 66). Tripp later comments "Each time teachers recorded a lesson, they wanted to see improvement" (p. 85).

Activation of inert knowledge and strengthening of professional knowledge.

As a part of my professional development mix, I often read professional books. One such book, *The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teachers* included an article by Brian Tomlinson. Tomlinson (2022) emphasized that learners and teachers actively reinterpret materials, often in ways that are different from what the original designers of the materials intended. It was an interesting point, but one that didn't have much immediate relevance to my professional context. However, I appreciated Tomlinson's point more thoroughly after engaging in self-observation of the lesson recorded on September 30th. The lesson made use of a brief video from a well-known American comedian and he finished the short clip with this utterance (in reference to Steve Jobs): "…you'd think I was trashing the President." Later in that lesson, I provided learners with a worksheet making use of that slang term. The gist of the opinion-gap discussion task was: "Does celebrity X deserve to be trashed or not?" The Korean language uses the noun form of "trash" to deliver a harsh insult to another person. When listening to the audio recording of the lesson, I was surprised to discover that several learners were using trash nearly exclusively as a noun (with utterances such as "he is trash"). This is despite the fact that my written materials and aural input for that lesson

exclusively used trash as a verb. Obviously, some degree of L1 interference was at play and made me reflect on the need to be sensitive to how the L1 can influence how learners make use of materials.

As mentioned in the methodology section, starting on the lesson recorded on September 3rd, post self-observation, I would type up reflective notes related to the self-observation experience and include a "comments" section related to various issues I noticed. This was a somewhat deliberate choice. It has long been understood that elaboration promotes "learning" and long-term memory storage (see Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Equally uncontroversial is that connecting new information to prior knowledge helps promote learning (see McTighe & Silver, 2020 for a brief argument and an array of learning activities illustrating the principle). Those two beliefs informed my post-observation written reflections. To be explicit, I would try to connect my more recent experiences embedded in recordings of my teaching performance to prior conceptual knowledge I have accumulated over my career. Additionally, I tried to make similar connections to what I deemed to be relevant personal or professional experiences. I calculated at least 43 explicit connections to my professional knowledge base in my reflective entries, including generally well-known concepts in the field of education, such as referential and display questions, ungermane cognitive load (Clark et al., 2006), planning time (Ellis, 2003, p. 109); principles communicated by well-known ELT presenters, such as Marc Helgesen's principle for delivering quality presentations ("one idea, one slide"; Online Teachers in Japan, 2020) among many others. I also calculated 10 connections I made to personal experiences or non-professional sources, such as how a transition into an activity (returning scripts to students) made use of a rhetorical move from a Winston Churchill speech that a former colleague used to quote around the office where I work ("What I hold in my hands…"). Additionally, I wish to emphasize that all notes were compiled on the day of the audio recording and were not modified subsequently.

Though modestly speculative, it seems a fair argument that written reflection, especially when coupled with self-observation, is highly likely to strengthen pre-existing knowledge bases. As I engaged in written reflection, I literally and demonstrably activated and elaborated on knowledge I was previously acquainted with. Furthermore, I was able to link professional knowledge and experience with personal forms as well. It is not difficult to imagine how such deliberate forms of conscious processing of professional experience and knowledge may result in more integrated and robust forms of understanding of professional concepts and knowledge.

More refined levels of awareness.

Tripp speaks of a saturation point in her multiple case studies. She comments "After repeating the analysis three times with the same codes, the teachers felt they had 'improved enough' and were ready to move to another aspect of their teaching" (2010, p. 83). As mentioned, my process of sustained self-observation was far from rigorous, but a similar "saturation point" manifested itself. I noticed that my awareness and focus would shift. For instance, just focusing on my spoken output, early in the process of listening to audio recordings, I was concerned with my rate of speech and "garbage words." As I continued week in and week out with recording, my attention shifted to concerns such as wondering if it is problematic that I occasionally use reduced forms? Then I began to wonder if I am using vocabulary above many learners' level.

Observing the classroom recordings allowed me to "listen in" to student interaction after the fact (i.e. during the activity of self-observation) in a way that I was unable to during the actual lessons. The process was quite illuminating. For example, it made me more aware of the

potential pitfalls of relying on peer scaffolding to assist with instruction. During the November 8th recording, prior to a listening task, I had students do a series of inductive activities focused on topic-related vocabulary. One lexical item was "second class citizen." An advanced learner explained to the best of his ability what second class citizen meant to a less proficient learner. In the recording the less proficient learner responded "like lower," to which the more proficient student responded "yes." Reflecting on that interaction, I was left wondering, had the less proficient learner conflated the lexical items lower class and second class? Should I *always* supplement inductive activities with explicit vocabulary instruction to minimize misunderstandings? I started to recognize that I have a bias. I tend to want to nearly eliminate all forms of lecture in front of students, hence a preference, especially as it pertains to lexical instruction, for inductive activities, conducted primarily through peer interaction. Nevertheless, without some form of concrete delivery of information (however condensed) or direct monitoring and intervention by myself in the role of a teacher, learner misunderstandings may develop and persist.

Making implicit theories explicit.

Meade and Meriman (1992) state "the process [of using video as a stimulant for reflection] helped make the teachers' implicit theories about teaching explicit" (as cited in Tripp, p. 36). Observing myself, I gained a deeper appreciation for the rationale I used when modifying my materials. I provide a simple illustration in the next paragraph based on the November 1st recording.

Without getting too deep into the context, learners during this section of the lesson were exposed to different viewpoints in left-wing politics in America in the late 1960s. The reading text which students engaged with had the well-known quote from the Beatles' song "Revolution": "If you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't gonna make it with anyone anyhow." After students finished the reading I tried to convey verbally how shocking it was to "normal" Americans to see people in New York City walking around carrying a banner with Mao Zedong. I perceived many learners to have a puzzled look on their faces while I verbally shared this short anecdote. While listening to the audio recording, it was obvious to me that the materials should have included an image of what I was trying to convey. Subsequently, I added an image to my PowerPoint of people in New York City carrying a series of large pictures of "Chairman Mao." When I showed that image in subsequent performances of this lesson, many learners let out a slight gasp of surprise. At that moment I believe I had both emotionally engaged (Theuma, 2017) learners in a way that my exclusively verbal anecdote had failed to and also made the content of the lesson clearer. Though these details seem minor, especially in a conversational English class, it is important to remember that these shifts I have attempted to explain here are informed by principles and guidelines circulating in the educational literature. For example, in this "Chairman Mao" anecdote my change in materials was informed by an awareness that we are a visual species. As Theuma (2017, p. 181) states: "70% of the sensory receptors in the body are found in the eye."

Research Question #2: Are alterations in teaching performance, triggered in part by self-observation, connected to the self-observing teacher's professional values?

This question requires interpretation. Ultimately, no causality between self-observation and modifications in practice can be definitively established. Nevertheless, through analyzing journal entries and modified materials I feel it is justified to claim that many of the instructional shifts that I felt compelled to make in subsequent performances of identical lessons related to

the recordings under consideration in this study were heavily influenced by my espoused values (Bolton, 2014, p. 29).

One shift related to the aforementioned espoused professional value of clarity is more consistent use of providing written, visual supports when delivering instructions and clarifying task expectations. Previously, I would often orally deliver instructions. Given the range of listening proficiency among my learners, listening to audio recordings of my teaching performance made me sensitive to the drawbacks of that pedagogical move. Namely, I would often repeat myself to ensure learners understood (this was true even when coupled with comprehension-checking questions) and less proficient students would often seek clarification from their peers about task expectations. Through the process of performing consistent self-observation, I began to become motivated to consistently provide written instructions to learners, often on a Powerpoint slide (see Figure 1 for an example taken from the Nov 22 recorded class), as well as a written worked example illustrating how I expected learners to perform the task (see Figure 2 for an example taken from the Nov 21 class). These were not wholly absent previously in my teaching, but the experience of listening to audio recordings created a felt need to consistently supplement the delivery of instructions and communicate task expectations with written and visual supports.

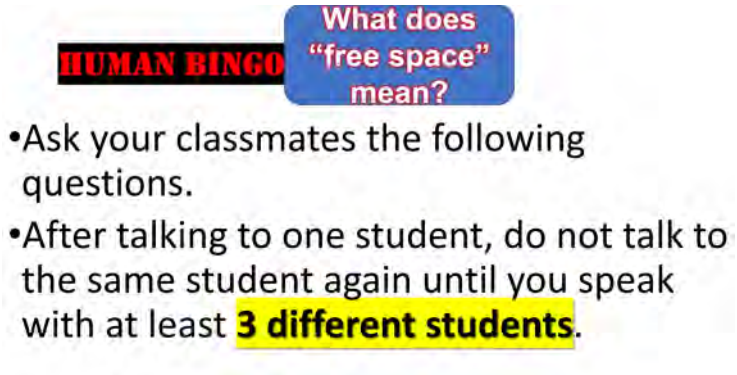

Figure 1.
Visual support to more efficiently deliver instructions and task expectations

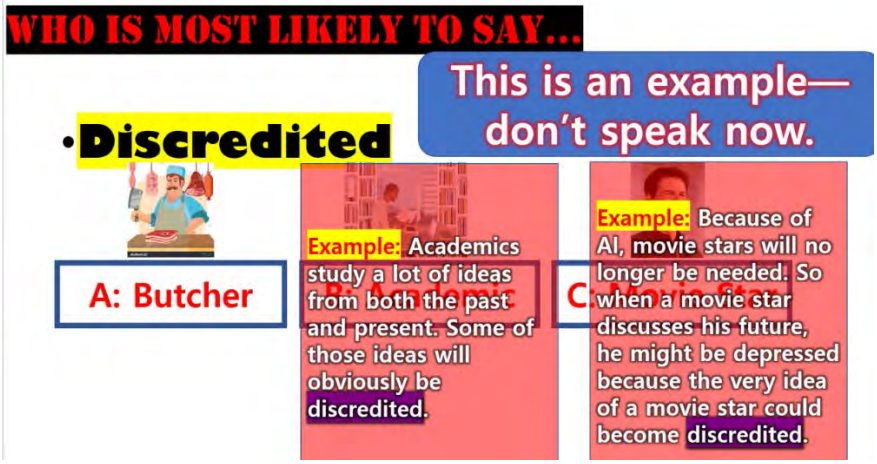

Figure 2.
Illustration of a "worked example"

I, at times, removed non-essential teacher talk for subsequent performances of the same lesson. For instance, in the recording of the November 1st lesson I asked students the display question "who else promoted non-violence in 1968 (the lesson was focused on the Beatles' song *Revolution*)?" Only one student was able to provide the answer I intended (Martin Luther King Jr.). Significantly, the one student who was able to answer the question had spent considerable time outside of South Korea. I decided it was confusing to students (related to the espoused value of clarity) and would reduce their speaking time (related to the espoused value of minimizing non-essential teacher talk) for me to repeat that question in subsequent performances. Table 6 provides additional illustrations of instructional shifts triggered (partially) by self-observation which aligned with core teaching values.

Research Question #3: How did self-observation through recordings impact my teaching performance?

Recording lessons and engaging in self-observation had a variety of impacts on my teaching performance. Some of the most salient include an increased use of visual elements, more productive methods to get students to engage in planning time (Ellis, 2003, p. 109), clearer use of language, and a greater variety of instructional strategies, especially related to comprehension checking.

Greater use of visual elements.

Previously in this article, I have alluded to greater use of visual scaffolding to deliver instruction, communicate expectations of task performance, and promote inferring of meaning of recently introduced vocabulary items. In addition to those instructional shifts, I began to incorporate questions that required students to analyze visual imagery and draw their own interpretations (see Figure 3 taken from a modified lesson based on the June 10th recording) related to the image. I made deliberate use of what Clark and Lyons refer to as "signals" in images (Clark & Lyons, 2004, p. 67) to draw student attention to features of the image under consideration. For example, in a lesson modified from the June 10th recording, I added signals to the image (see Figure 4 taken from a lesson modified based on the June 10th recording) to direct student attention. In the initial recording of that lesson, the signals were absent, which necessitated additional oral teacher explanation. Such additional explanation is problematic as it a) increases teacher talk time and b) may not be comprehended by lower proficiency students. Following self-observation, I often added visuals to PowerPoints to further scaffold teacher oral input to aid student comprehension. This is illustrated in Figure 5, in a slide taken from a modified lesson based on the September 3rd recording.

Figure 3.
Increased use of imagery coupled with questions to sustain student engagement.

Figure 4.
Use of signals to reduce non-essential teacher talk and heighten clarity of input for learners with weaker listening proficiencies.

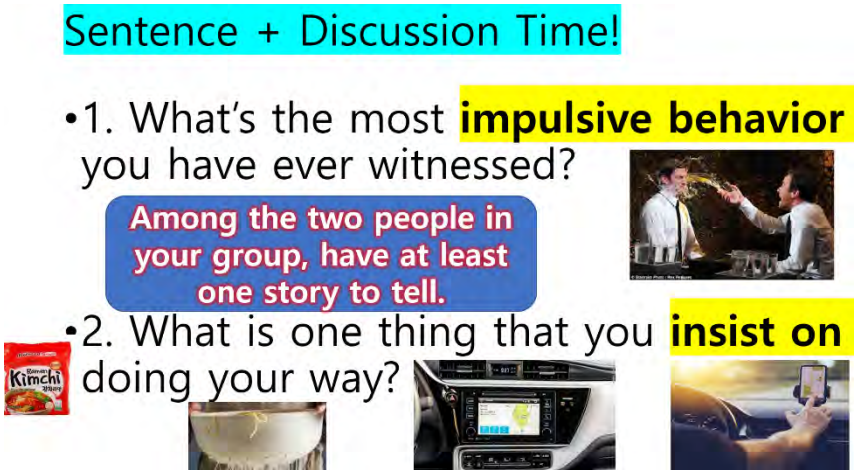

Figure 5.
Increased use of visuals motivated by self-observation to aid student comprehension of teacher oral input.

More productive methods to get students to engage in planning time.

There is robust support for the benefits of having students engage in planning time prior to task performance (Ellis, 2003, p. 109). Previously, often before a discussion prompt, such as an opinion gap, I would often instruct students to brainstorm or free write on the topic for a set number of minutes (often 2 or 3 minutes). I would model expectations. With my group of high school learners, I often had the feeling that my learners were not engaging in planning time in a wholehearted manner. Nevertheless, I persisted with the strategy, believing that output will be enhanced if learners have some additional time to consider the topic prior to oral interaction regardless of their behavior during the designated planning time. In part due to greater incorporation of visual thinking strategies (Donaghy, 2021) and reflection triggered by self-observation, I began to appreciate that learners in my professional context are more productive during planning time when precise targets of performance are communicated in advance. On the November 21st lesson, rather than having students choose between freewriting or brainstorming in advance of a discussion, I specified that learners need to write three sentences

both describing the image and explaining their feelings in relation to the image (see Figure 6 for an image taken from the November 21st lesson materials). I soon came to believe that precise guidelines should accompany most, if not all, forms of planning time I instruct learners to engage in.

Figure 6.
Self-observation helped motivate a shift to providing learners with more precise guidelines when engaging in planning time

Clearer language delivered to students.

One instance is from the lesson modified from the September 30th recording. In the recorded lesson I gave learners in pairs a discussion prompt related to a controversial series of Apple advertisements from the late 1990s. My initial prompt was "does this advertisement offend you?" Listening to the recordings I was disappointed with student output. Learners would often answer "no." They found it difficult to justify their answers. Thus, I decided to change the prompt to "Is this poster appropriate or inappropriate?" Generally, students responded that they considered the advertisements inappropriate and in my opinion were able to provide a partial justification for their opinions (I do not have recordings to provide data on this claim unfortunately).

Greater variety of instructional strategies, especially for comprehension checking.

I frequently make use of pyramid procedures to check learner comprehension. Pyramid procedures refers to the process of having learners consider their response to a teacher prompt alone, then in a small group setting, and finally in a whole class setting (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 124). One unfortunate exception is at the very beginning of a lesson. At that time, perhaps due to a desire to quickly move beyond prior content, I have tended to often ask review questions to the whole class and let volunteers answer. On the September 3rd lesson, I observed that only the higher level students were volunteering answers during the opening segment of the lesson. This outcome seems equal parts predictable and undesirable in hindsight. However, it serves as a reminder of the need for principled strategies at all stages of a lesson. I also recognized that my use of whole class questioning and instructional strategies most typically did not engage the entire class. Thus, during many of my whole class segments of instruction many students were, at least for brief stretches of time, not behaviorally engaged. I attempted to remedy this perceived problem (i.e. limited student engagement during whole class segments of instruction) with a variety of instructional moves. These included use of hold-up cards, one word summary (mediated with individual student mini-whiteboards to allow for simultaneous engagement by all learning dyads; see Himmele & Himmele, 2017, p. 176) and kinesthetic approaches (see Kuczala & Lengel, 2017). Related to kinesthetic approaches, whereas previously I may have overused display questions at the start of a lesson, I began to deliver

statements to students, such as I did in the lesson recorded on the November 21st. In pairs, students would stand up and signal their view on a specified statement (i.e. true or false).

Discussion

Self-observation triggered a desire to modify my lesson materials. What consistently impressed me about the process of self-observation was the tendency to either "discover" personally novel teaching strategies, such as the shift in how I implemented planning time following the November 21st recording; or a strong desire to enrich my materials (such as a greater use of visual elements to direct attention or to clarify expectations). Awareness of the principles and techniques that informed many of the modifications to my teaching performance I made during this period of self-observation were already personally known prior to engaging in sustained self-observation. I believe I did engage in wholehearted lesson planning before initially teaching the lessons under consideration in this study. Nevertheless, despite possessing a thorough knowledge base and exhibiting sincere effort, I was unable to envision these enrichments prior to engaging in self-observation. In that sense, performing the act of self-observation itself served as a catalyst for inspiration to enhance the lessons I delivered. Nevertheless, despite my previous post-lesson reflections, I still was not able to perceive during lesson planning the value of adding many of the enrichments that I ultimately did add post self-observation.

What might account for this heightened appreciation of instructional possibilities? I can only offer speculations. It is well-understood that humans seek to find a justification for personal investment of resources. This can have harmful consequences, as illustrated in the well-known psychological phenomenon of the cost-sunk fallacy. However, it can also motivate a teacher who engages in self-observation. Did the fact that I chose to invest approximately 1-2 hours weekly to engage in deliberate forms of self-observation and reflection compel me to find a "payoff for my investment" in the form of modified and what I believe to have been improved teaching performance?

Additionally, self-observation is performed in a manner which is inherently less cognitively demanding than the actual delivery of teaching performance. Self-observation does not require monitoring the behavior and performance of many students. It doesn't require the online processing of formulating utterances intended for public consumption. Nor does it require the prioritizing that is essential when classroom time is limited. This can allow for fuller concentration on one's teaching performance while engaging in self-observation and the appreciation for opportunities that were not fully perceived either while lesson planning or during actual teaching performance.

Furthermore, self-perceived mistakes are documented (in this study, examples include the use of questions that are excessively difficult for students, such as a display question I asked related to Martin Luther King Jr. in the November 1st recorded lesson and the initial habit of orally delivering instructions prior to a task). When a self-perceived mistake occurs, yet is not documented, it is easy to forget, distort or minimize the magnitude of the issue. However, when the mistake is documented, it becomes easier to analyze, consider alternatives and hence implement modifications in future teaching performances.

Limitations

I have engaged in limited forms of sustained self-observation (up to six lessons over the course of one semester, see Miller, 2016) nearly a decade ago and intermittently since then. While recognizing the utility of the exercise at the time, I was not as intensely impressed by the experience compared to my self-observation practices in 2024. What changed? Likely the accumulation of a large amount of experience and professional knowledge. Thus, I am left with the suspicion that reflective practice in any form, while useful for all wholehearted, open-minded and responsible practitioners (Dewey, 1933, as quoted in Farrell, 2015, p. 13) is of greater benefit for those who are both more informed and experienced.

Future studies involving self-observation could incorporate input and insight from interested colleagues. I previously stated the reasons for not involving immediate colleagues. However, through professional organizations, such as Korea TESOL in my local context and their affiliated special interest groups (SIG), most notably the Reflective Practice SIG, there is the possibility of finding a community willingly interested in engaging in community-based forms of self-observation. On the surface, the potential benefits are numerous, including access to different perspectives, a limiting influence concerning personal biases and general communal support. However, this writer cautions those interested in pursuing a community-based form of self-observation to try to implement Gebhard's advice: "follow agreed on rules that aim at nonjudgmental and non-prescriptive discussion (Gebhard, 2005, p. 12).

Many of the alterations to practice identified in the present study center around modification of the instructional materials or methods to clarify expectations to students. However, important dimensions of instruction were not considered. For instance, methods for delivering oral corrective feedback (see Ellis et al., 2006) were not considered in this study. Likewise, during-class teacher intervention strategies concerning substandard learner performance and learner misunderstanding of expectations were not considered in the present study. Future inquiry cycles making use of self-observation could seek to observe and collect data on those dimensions of practice using a tally count method (Farrell, 2015). Future inquiry cycles involving self-observation could make use of an evaluative checklist, either constructed alone or as part of a collaborative team, as suggested by Godinez Martinez (2022, 94).

Much of the reflection considered during the present study is focused on areas of practical and technical reflection (see Butun Ikwuegbu & Harris, 2024). Emancipatory (ibid) or critical reflection are absent. This follows a familiar pattern in the literature, in which the critical dimension is considered with much less frequency (Anani Sarab & Mardian, 2023). Future inquiry cycles utilizing self-observation could seek to explore possibilities of influencing areas that go beyond mere instructional delivery occurring during class time. Such possibilities include the contemplation of more suitable content for the learners, principled modification of course objectives and selection of tasks and activities.

Self-observation, while undeniably illuminating for dimensions of classroom management and the communication of expectations to learners, has a restricted utility. Recordings of individual lessons have, almost by definition, a narrower focus than the goals for a course curriculum. Recordings can provide excellent feedback on the performance of a teacher in delivering instruction, monitoring aspects of student performance, and providing learners with opportunities for engaging instruction and activities during class. However, as Wiggins and McTighe (2005) artfully describe in *Understanding by Design*, effective teachers competently address three overarching features of instruction. First, competent teachers are

capable of establishing suitable performance or understanding goals. Secondly, they are able to devise valid assessments. These two features subsequently serve to structure the third aspect of teaching, classroom activity. Thus, in Wiggins and McTighe's framework, classroom instruction is the final component of successful teaching. A teacher can masterfully perform the final component and still have grave deficiencies related to the first two items in course design. In that sense, an excessive focus on recordings of teacher performance at the level of the individual lesson may take away from a teacher's ability to more soberly reflect on the adequacy of course objectives and assessment choices.

The generalizability of the claimed benefits pertaining to self-observation in this study are quite limited. As an experienced educator with over a decade of experience in the same institution, I possess a certain degree of social capital and trust from my supervisors. Thus, modification of materials or even modification of the curriculum, if communicated prior to the start of a semester, has rarely been a problem for myself. These factors contributed (and still contribute) to a greater sense of teacher agency (Priestley, et al., 2023) for myself. Additionally, during the period of data collection, I only had to teach two different lessons per week (excluding afterschool classes). That afforded considerable time for reflection and lesson preparation. Teachers with a heavier "prep load" may find it challenging to reflect after engaging in self-observation and to devote time to modifying materials. Butun Ikwuegbu and Harris (2024) argue that heavy workloads can negatively impact teacher agency. On a somewhat related note, Anani Sarab and Mardian (2023) argue that school climate can influence a teacher's ability to reflect.

Conclusion

I have attempted to relate my experiences related to self-observation of my teaching performance for 15 lessons recorded between June 5th through November 22nd, 2024. Sustained self-observation served to heighten awareness of self-perceived deficiencies and activated prior knowledge which ultimately motivated me to make a wide array of individually minor, but overall substantial changes in my teaching. I found the process extremely invigorating. Schön's words quoted below from *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) resonated deeply with me as I engaged in sustained and more evidence-based forms of reflection. Thus, I close with his words. I hope those unacquainted with sustained evidence-based forms of reflection may begin to appreciate the promise of continual forms of self-observation:

> When practice is a repetitive administration of techniques to the same kinds of problems, the practitioner may look to leisure as a source of relief, or to early retirement; but when he functions as a researcher-in-practice, the practice itself is a source of renewal. The recognition of error, with its resulting uncertainty, can become a source of discovery rather than an occasion for self-defense. (p. 299)

References

Anani Sarab, M.R., & Mardian, F. (2023). Reflective practice in second language teacher education: A scoping review. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 49*(5), 768-784. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2022.2152316

Bolton, G. (2018). *Reflective practice: Writing and professional development*. Sage.

Brinko, K.T. (1993). The practice of giving feedback to improve teaching: What is effective?, *The Journal of Higher Education*, *64*, 574-593. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1993.11778449

Butun Ikwuegbu, Z., & Harris, R. (2024). Reflection and agency: The experiences of English language teachers in Turkiye. *Reflective Practice, 25*(2), 101-116. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2024.2304849

Clark, R.C. & Lyons, C. (2004). *Graphics for learning: Proven guidelines for designing, and evaluating visuals in training materials*. Pfeiffer.

Clark, R. C., Nguyen, F., & Sweller, J. (2006). *Efficiency in learning: Evidence-based guidelines to manage cognitive load.* San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Craik, F.I.M. & Lockhart, R.S. (1972). Levels of processing: A framework for memory research. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, *11*, 671-684. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371(72)80001-X

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Dick, B. (2001). Making the most of emergent methodologies: a critical choice in qualitative research design. A paper prepared for the Association for Qualitative Research conference, Melbourne, 5-7 July. https://www.aral.com.au/DLitt/DLitt_P48emerg.pdf

Donaghy, K. (2021, November 5th). Developing visual literacy in the language classroom [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWyOljiolYE

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford.

Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 28*(2), 339-368. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263106060141

Farrell, T. (2015). *Promoting teacher reflection in second language education*. Routledge.

Gebhard J. (2005). Teacher development through exploration: Principles, ways, and examples. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, 9*(2). https://tesl-ej.org/ej34/a4.pdf

Godinez Martinez, J. (2022). Action research and collaborative reflective practice in English language teaching. *Reflective Practice, 23*(1), 88-102. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2021.1982688

Harwood, N. (2022). Research in materials development: What, how, and why? In Norton, J. and Buchanan H. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teachers* (139-154). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/b22783

Himmele, P. & Himmele, W. (2017). *Total participation techniques: Making every student an active learner* (2nd ed). Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kuczala, M. & Lengel, T. (2017). *Ready, set, go!: The kinesthetic classroom 2.0*. Corwin.

McTighe, J. and Silver, H. F. (2020). *Teaching for deeper learning: Tools to engage students in meaning making*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Miller C. (2016). Professional reflection through self-observation. *The English Connection*, *20* (4), 16-18. https://koreatesol.org/sites/default/files/pdf_publications/TECv20n4Winter2016web_0.pdf

Nation, P. & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891704

Online Teachers in Japan. (2020, September 2nd). Presentations that don't suck joy and energy [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsFiX6SNAvM

Priestley, M., Alvunger, D., Philippou, S., & Soini-Ikonen, T. (2022). Curriculum making and teacher agency. In R. J. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Erkican (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (4th ed.)(pp. 188-197). https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.03030-X

Richards, J.C. & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667169

Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237473

Theuma, J. (2017). Cartoons and comics: communicating with visuals. In Donaghy K. and Xerri, D. (Eds.), *The image in English language teaching* (pp. 179-188). ELT Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/The_Image_in_English_Language_Teaching.pdf

Tomlinson, B. (2022). The discipline of materials development. In Norton, J. and Buchanan H. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teachers* (pp. 3-16). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/b22783

Tripp, T. (2010). *The influence of video analysis on teaching*. [Doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University]. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3561&context=etd

Valli, L. (1997). Listening to other voices: A description of teacher reflection in the United States. *Peabody Journal of Education, 72* (1), 67-88. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7201_4

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed). Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

About the Author

Christopher Miller has worked as a classroom instructor for nearly two decades across three continents. He has taught grades 5-12. He holds an MSEd from Shenandoah University. He is a strong supporter of reflective practice and believes that little can be learned, either as a professional or a learner, in the absence of lived experience which has been adequately processed. You can contact Christopher at: chriskotesol@gmail.com

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Robert Dickey and the anonymous peer reviewers for their extensive feedback on the manuscript, as well as suggesting additional relevant literature to review. Thanks to the 1000s of students I have instructed during my time at Daeil Foreign Language High School. Their excellent attitude during class time has inspired me to refine my teaching practice over the years.

Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.