

Teacher Development as Reflective Practitioners

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain the manner in which novice English teachers develop their cognition and action such as teaching styles through reflection. Korthagen (2001) defined reflection as the mental process of trying to structure an experience, a problem, or existing knowledge or insight.

The study was conducted based on the results of a pilot study. The participants were novice English teachers from a junior high school. This study was based on the ALACT model (Action, Looking back on the action, Awareness of essential aspects, Creating Alternative methods of action, and Trial). In order to observe the development of the teachers' cognition and action, two forms of reflection—a teaching journal and a reflective dialogue—were used. The teaching journal, which was maintained by each teacher provided teachers with a written record and allowed them to reflect on their thoughts about teaching. A reflective dialogue between a novice English teacher and a researcher was conducted to share the contents of the teaching journal. The results show that reflection through the use of a teaching journal and a reflective dialogue encourages teachers to improve their teacher cognition and action.

1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, a considerable number of studies on reflection have been done in teacher education. Although these studies have been important, it was not made clear how a teacher develops through reflection. Therefore, the current study focused on the cyclical process of practice and reflection.

2 Literature review

Schön (1983) proposed a theory of reflective practice in order to train teachers to be reflective practitioners. He claimed that a practitioner could uncover and analyze the tacit understandings that grow up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice and make new sense of the uncertain or unique situations that he/she experiences through reflection.

3 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted using a web questionnaire, which is a public domain tool available through Google Docs, to determine what kind of problems novice Japanese teachers of English experience in organizing and teaching junior and high school classes. Once the form was created, the author obtained a URL that respondents could use to access the questionnaire. The URL was sent to the participants via email. After they finished the questionnaire, the data was automatically collected and sent to the author.

The participants were junior and high school teachers of English and were randomly chosen. It was conducted in the native language of the participants. The questionnaire items were as follows:

1. Gender
2. How long have you been working as a teacher of English?
3. What grade do you teach?
4. What kind of problems do you have teaching English?
5. With whom do you discuss the problem in order to solve it?
6. What makes you choose the person?

Responses from 17 English teachers were collected. The descriptions from teachers who had been teaching a minimum of three years were observed about difficulties that both they and their

students have experienced; however, inexperienced teachers only answered their English ability and explored their teaching style. This study focused on inexperienced teachers. It is necessary to examine in more detail how novice teachers encounter and recognize problems in the classroom.

4 Aim of study

The purpose of this study is to clarify the manner in which novice English teachers develop their cognition and action such as teaching skills and style through two types of reflection.

5 Methodology

5.1 Participants

The participants were two novice English teachers in the same public junior high school. One participant was female, and one participant was male. The male participant was teaching eighth-grade students. The female participant was teaching seventh-grade students and was working with an assistant language teacher (hereinafter, ALT).

5.2 Procedures

This study was based on Korthagen's ALACT model. Korthagen (1985) developed this model, which includes five phases of the ideal process of experiential learning that alternates between action and reflection (see Figure 1).

An interview regarding teaching plans was conducted with the novice English teachers before teaching their class on a particular day, and then the researcher observed their class. After the class, the two teachers wrote in their teaching journal, and a reflective dialogue was provided. This procedure was repeated five times from June to July of 2013. Both methods were conducted in the native language of the participants.

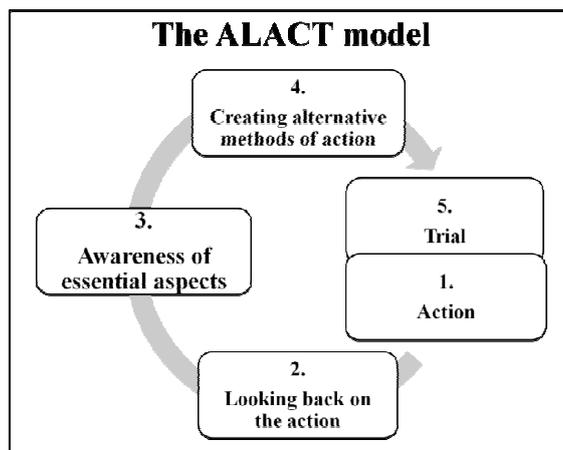


Figure 1: The ALACT model

5.3 Methods of Reflection

5.3.1 Teaching journal

The teaching journal, which was maintained by each teacher, provided teachers with a written record and allowed them to reflect on their thoughts about teaching. The contents of the teaching journal were as follows. This format was based on Barfield (2003) and Farrell (2007).

1. What did I do in the class?
2. How do I feel about what I did in today's class?
3. What was/ was not successful?
4. How can I change?

5.3.2 A reflective dialogue

A reflective dialogue between a novice English teacher and a researcher was conducted to share the contents

of the teaching journal. Schön (1987) created “the ladder of reflection,” which is a model of a reflective dialogue between a supervisor and a student. He categorized the rungs of the ladder of reflection in the following way:

1. Designing.
2. Description of designing.
3. Reflection on description of designing.
4. Reflection on reflection on description.

A reflective dialogue between a researcher and a teacher was promoted through going up and down the rungs of the ladder of reflection.

5.4 Analysis

Text mining and an analysis of written data were conducted for each teaching journal using *IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys* (see Figure 2). Text mining enabled the discovery of new or unexpected ideas and provided a common framework for the analysis of the participants’ reflections as follows:

1. The teaching journal and description of the interview data were analyzed as text data.
2. Categories were created based on frequency, synonyms, and word co-occurrence, and necessary lexical information was interpreted using statistical data mining.
3. Additional information was extracted from the sensitivity analysis and the text mining of existing data.

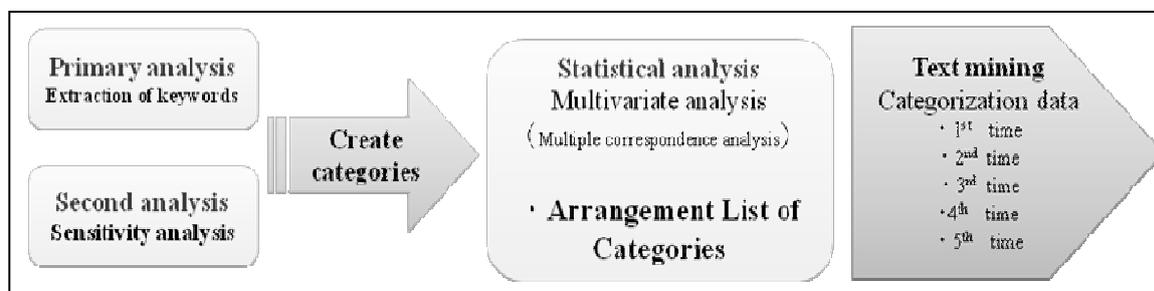


Figure 2: The flowchart of the analysis of the teaching journal.

Data mining is the process of analyzing data from different perspectives and summarizing it in useable form. It allows researchers to analyze different data dimensions and categorize and summarize the relationships among extracted categories as identified. Sensitivity analysis is a method of predicting the outcome of a decision when the situation outcome is different from the key outcome predictions. Text mining is the computerized discovery of new, previously unknown information by automatically extracting information from different written resources.

6 Results and Discussion

6.1 (1) What did I do in the class?

This is the first result from the teaching journal (see Figure 3). The word co-occurrence of “song” was such as song & greeting & introduction & oral. In the cases of “phonics” and “greeting”, each of the word co-occurrence was phonics such as phonics & song & greeting & introduction & oral and greeting like greeting & introduction & oral. The categories of “greeting 2”, “review 2”, and “song 2” were indicated in the teaching contents from a male teacher.

Categories	Bar chart	Percentages
song		80.0
phonics		80.0
greeting		60.0
review		40.0
oral		40.0
introduction		40.0
greeting 2		40.0
review 2		40.0
song 2		40.0
silent		40.0
Number of times		

Figure 3: Categories: What did I do in the class?

Table 1 shows the data from the reflective dialogue.

Table 1: Responses: What did I do in the class?

The word co-occurrence	Participants & Entry	Participants responses
song	M (3rd)	We sang a song and reviewed infinitive.
phonics	F (3rd)	After singing a song and studying phonics, we read a textbook and studied new words.
greeting	M (1st)	I said hello to everyone and asked the day, the date and the weather.

6.2 (2) How do I feel about what I did in today's class?

Figure 4 shows the second result of the bar chart of categories by frequency. The category of “student 2” was indicated in the teaching contents from a male teacher.

Categories	Bar chart	Percentages
think		80.0
can		80.0
student		60.0
time		40.0
cannot		40.0
just		40.0
student 2		40.0
find		40.0
today		40.0
observe		40.0
previous lesson		40.0
Number of times		

Figure 4: Categories: (2) How do I feel about what I did in today's class?

The data from the reflective dialogue is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Responses: How do I feel about what I did in today's class?

The word co-occurrence	Participants & Entry	Participants responses
think	M (4th)	I think today's class was terrible for the students because I just failed to carry out my teaching plan and forgot the material.
can	F (2nd)	Some students hesitated to sing a song. I was worried about them. So I decided to make a worksheet about a song including some tasks. I hope students could enjoy

and concentrate on it.

Figure 5 shows the arrangement of the list of categories. Dimension 1 assigns a positive meaning to the right side and a negative meaning to the left side. Dimension 2 assigns many words to the upper area and a few words to the lower area. Each circle was marked as the extracted categories by the number of times.

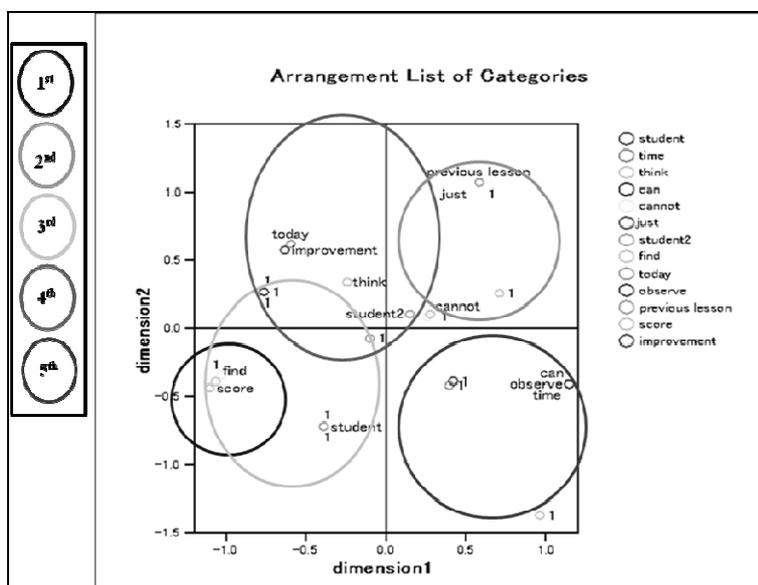


Figure 5: Categories arrangement, marked by number of times.

From above, each time the teachers wrote in their reflection journals, the categories were increased. It seems that each teacher gained a better understanding of effectively presenting content and developing efficient teaching methods.

6.3 (3) What was successful?

This is the third result (see Figure 6). The word co-occurrence of “student” was like student & better. In cases of “today” and “can,” the word co-occurrences were today such as today & doing & students and can like can & student & better & think & success. As mentioned before, the category of “student 2” was indicated in the teaching contents from a male teacher.

Categories	Bar chart					Percentages
student						75.0
today						75.0
can						75.0
think						50.0
better						50.0
do						50.0
student 2						50.0
success						50.0
Number of times	3	5	2	4	1	

Figure 6: Categories: (3) What was successful?

The data for the female teacher’s responses in reflective dialogues is shown in Table 3. She began to use the information to improve her teaching skills after the third entry.

Table 3: Responses: (3) What was successful?

The word co-occurrence	Participants & Entry	Participants responses
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student & today	F (1st)	Every time we reviewed, students did it orally. But today I asked them to write the answer. It was the first time to do so. I hope students got a better understanding.
can	F (3rd)	I could give instructions to students in English if I compared previous lessons with today's lesson.

Figure 7 shows the arrangement of the list of categories. Each circle was marked as the extracted categories by the number of times.

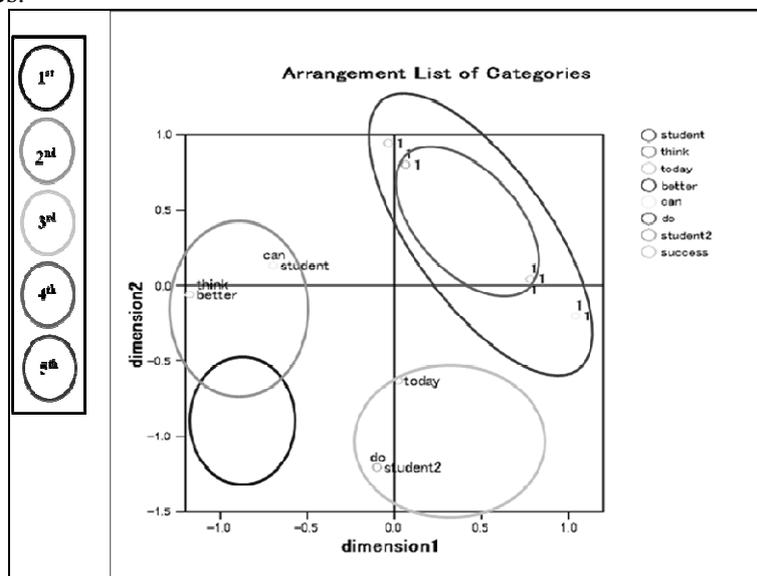


Figure 7: Categories arrangement, marked by number of times.

The teachers had difficulties in identifying successful teaching techniques.

6.4 (3) What was not successful?

Figure 8 shows the categories by frequency. The word co-occurrence of “student” was like student & introduction & oral & tt. The word co-occurrence of “students” was extracted with “tt,” which means team teaching. As previously mentioned, the female teacher was working with an ALT.

Categories	Bar chart					Percentages
student	[Bar chart showing 80% of 100%]					80.0
doing	[Bar chart showing 80% of 100%]					80.0
situation	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
tt	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
oral	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
introduction	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
fail	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
good	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
procedure	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
can	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
time allocation	[Bar chart showing 40% of 100%]					40.0
Number of times	3	5	2	4	1	

Figure 8: Categories: (3) What was not successful?

The data from the reflective dialogues is shown in Table 4. The male teacher identified unsuccessful teaching behaviors independently by reviewing his reflections.

Table 4: Responses: (3) What was not successful?

The word co-occurrence student & doing	Participants & Entry M (1st)	Participants responses I made a worksheet including many questions and wanted to ask the answer. But I realized I did not have time to do so. So I just finished explaining infinitive. Moreover, I could not walk around the classroom and check what students were doing in today’s class.
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Figure 9 shows the arrangement of the list of categories. Each circle was marked the extracted categories by number of times.

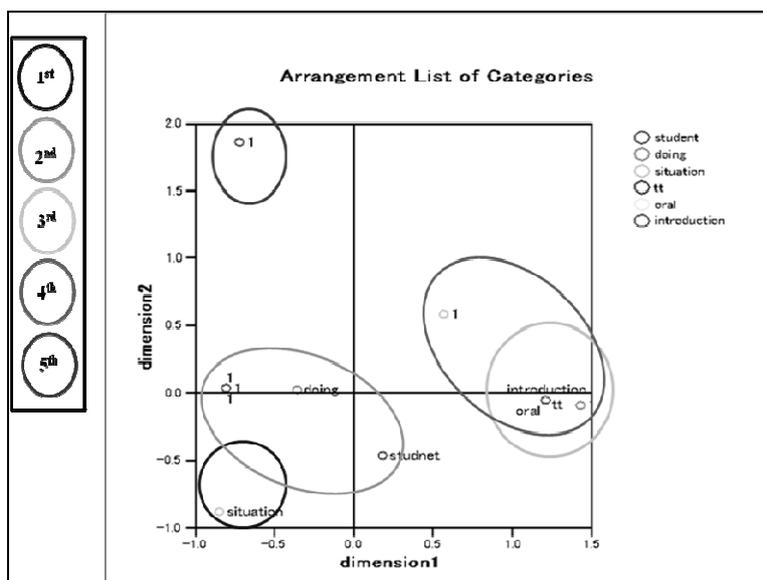


Figure 9: Categories arrangement, marked by number of times.

No significant change was found in the results. It may be natural that the novice teachers experienced anxiety regarding teaching throughout the study.

6.5 (4) How can I change?

This is the final result from the teaching journals (see Figure 10). The word co-occurrence of “student” was like student & observe & situation.

Categories	Bar chart					Percentages
observe	█	█	█	█	█	60.0
student	█	█	█	█	█	60.0
doing	█	█	█	█	█	60.0
variation	█	█	█	█	█	60.0
challenge	█	█	█	█	█	60.0
situation	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
want	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
game	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
power	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
increase	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
do not	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
more	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
writing	█	█	█	█	█	40.0
Number of times	3	5	2	4	1	

Figure 10: Categories: (4) How can I change?

The data from the reflective dialogues is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Responses: (4) How can I change?

The word co-occurrence	Participants & Entry	Participants responses
student	M (4th)	I asked the students to use a dictionary, but it was a simple activity. I think it was boring for them just to check the new words. So I should have prepared some activities using a dictionary.
game	F (4th)	We played a game with simple rules. Next time, I want to change it and add some difficult rules to it for the students. I have been working with an ALT teacher, so I am going to ask her opinion how to play a game.

Figure 11 shows the arrangement of the list of categories. Each circle was marked as the extracted categories by number of times.

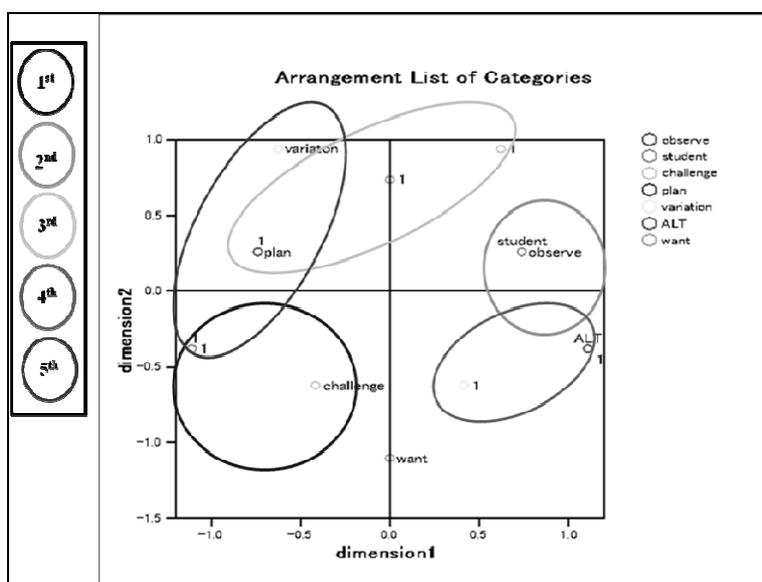


Figure 11: Categories arrangement, marked by number of times.

Both teachers identified which activities they want to change and explored their teaching methods

The results show that reflection through the use of a teaching journal and a reflective dialogue encourages teachers to increase their teacher cognition and action such as teaching skills and styles.

Writing a teaching journal helps teachers evaluate and analyze their classes individually. Some statements indicated that teachers tried to organize their next class based on their reflection. Needless to say, the teaching content affected all the entries in the teaching journal. Moreover, each teacher introduced the same activities that their students had already done in previous lessons. Therefore, the results and description fluctuated or remained comparatively stable, accordingly.

A reflective dialogue induces teachers to challenge their own practices and gain an in-depth insight of their classes. Their thoughts and reflections can create a positive change in their teaching method. Novice teachers face new challenges in the first year of teaching. Therefore, these teachers can gradually improve their teaching skills through reflective dialogues.

7 Conclusion

This study examined the manner in which novice Japanese English teachers modify their cognition and action through two types of reflection: teaching journals and reflective dialogues. Teaching journals and reflective dialogues assist teachers in improving their teaching skills and methods. Verbalization, that is to say, writing a teaching journal and talking in reflective dialogues, can deepen a teacher's understanding of his or her own classes.

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