The Second ELT Forum March 2016
Expertise Enlightenment

Approaches to Classroom Investigation in Teaching

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Overview

Investigation Procedures of Classroom Teaching:

1. Observation
2. Audio & Video Recordings
3. Teaching Journals
4. Surveys & Questionnaires
5. Lesson Reports
6. Action Research
1- How can teachers develop a deeper understanding of their teaching?

2- How can they gather fuller information about classroom experiences for self-evaluation?

3- Define the following:
   Reflection
   Reflective Teaching
Reflection

The process of thinking back on and considering experiences, in order better to understand the significance of such experiences. Reflection is thought to be an important component of learning in teacher development and is often a focus of teacher development activities.
Reflective Teaching

An approach to teaching and to teacher education which is based on the assumption that teachers can improve their understanding of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching experiences.

In teacher education programmes, activities which seek to develop a reflective approach to teaching aim to develop the skills of considering the teaching process thoughtfully, analytically and objectively, as a way of improving classroom practices.
Procedures used in self-evaluation

Teaching Journals

Lesson Reports

Surveys & Questionnaires

Action Research

Observation

Audio & Video Recordings
1-What is your experience of exchanging class visits (Inter-visitations) with your colleagues? Was it a positive or negative experience? Why?

2-What kinds of useful information about teaching could be gathered through observation?

3-Why are some teachers often reluctant to take part in observation?
Observation involves visiting a class to observe different aspects of teaching.

Two different purposes of observation:

- Gathering information about teaching (peer observation)
- A way of evaluating teaching
Guidelines for peer observation - Principles

General principles:

Observation should have a focus (What to observe)

The observer should remain an observer (no intervention to be able to observe everything)

Observers should use specific procedures (concentrate on the focus)
Guidelines for peer observation - Procedure

- **Arrange a pre-observation orientation session.**

- **Identify a focus for the observation, e.g.,:**
  - Teacher’s time management
  - Student’s performance on tasks
  - Questioning techniques
  - Classroom interaction

- **Arrange a post-observation session.**

- **Suggested procedures**

- **Carry out the observation to collect data.**
Topics suitable for classroom observations

- Teacher’s use of questions
- Teacher’s time management
- Students’ performance of tasks
- Time on task
- Teacher’s action zone
- Use of the textbook
- Pair and group work
What are the advantages and disadvantages of the presence of a video camera in the classroom?

What aspects of a lesson can be captured through an audio recording and what cannot?

Audio and Video Recordings of Lessons

Task 2
1. The fullest account of a lesson is obtained from an actual recording of it using an audio cassette or video recorder. It’s a reliable source.

2. One of the advantages of recording a lesson is that it allows choice of focus.

3. Other procedures obtain subjective impressions of teaching and by their nature can capture only recollections and interpretations of events and not the actual events themselves.

4. The recording can be replayed and examined many times and can capture many details of a lesson that cannot easily be observed by other means, such as the actual language used by teachers or learners during a lesson.
A journal is a teacher’s written response to teaching events.

Keeping a journal serves two purposes:

Events and ideas are recorded for the purpose of later reflection.

The process of writing itself helps trigger insights about teaching.

Writing in this sense serves as a discovery process.
What kinds of issues and concerns are useful to focus on when keeping a journal about your teaching?

Who do you think should go through your teaching journal? Why?
Many different topics from classroom experiences can be explored through journal writing like...

- Personal reactions to things that happen in the classroom or in the school
- Questions or observations about problems that occur in teaching
- Ideas for future analysis or reminders of things to take action on
- Descriptions of significant aspects of lessons or school events
Such topics could include the following:

- Evaluations of lessons taught, that is, focusing on what worked well, what didn’t work well
- Changes made to a lesson plan
- How errors of grammar or pronunciation were dealt with
- Vocabulary problems that occurred during a lesson
- Problems encountered and how the teacher responded to them
- Problems the teacher feels he or she has to overcome
- Ideas that occurred concerning how to make better use of a reading text
- How the teacher dealt with classroom management problems
- How the teacher deals with students who continuously speak in their native language during class
- How to deal with different cultural groups within one class
The following procedures are recommended for keeping a journal:
(Bailey 1990; Porter et al. 1990; Walker 1985)

1. Set goals for journal writing

2. Decide who your audience is (yourself/peers/supervisor)

3. Make entries on a regular basis, such as once or twice a week, or even daily if possible. It may be useful to spend 5 or 10 minutes after a lesson to write about it or record it.

4. Review your journal entries regularly. What might not have been obvious when written or recorded may later become apparent. As you review your journals, ask yourself questions like these:
   - What do I do as a teacher?
   - What principles and beliefs inform my teaching?
   - Why do I teach the way I do?
   - What roles do learners play in my classes?

5. Evaluate your journal writing experience to see if it meets your goals
Keeping a journal can also be beneficial when one or more colleagues share their journals and meet regularly to discuss them.
Today I gave my class a reading activity which focused on skimming.

I gave them an article to read called "Study Paints Grim Picture" and asked them to skim through the article to identify the social problems mentioned.

After a few minutes, I checked the answers and asked the students to number the paragraphs. They had to find the paragraphs which contain information on each of the social problems.

Then I checked the answers and explained some difficult vocabulary.

Then I gave one handout which contained five paragraphs and another handout which contained five headlines. Students had to match them.
1- What are some aspects of teaching or learning that could usefully be investigated using a questionnaire?

2- How could the information from question 1 be used?
Some aspects of teaching and learning can be investigated through carrying out a survey or administering a questionnaire.
Surveys and questionnaires are useful ways of gathering information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences, and enable a teacher to collect a large amount of information relatively quickly.
Example

A teacher may wish to investigate students’ attitudes toward group work, how useful they find group work activities, what they think they learn from them, and for what content areas or skills they think group work is most appropriate.
What would be some suitable issues or topics for action research in a class you are observing or teaching?

What kind of information would you need to collect to investigate each issue in more detail?
Action research is used here to refer to teacher-initiated classroom investigation which seeks to increase the teacher’s understanding of classroom teaching and learning, and to bring about change in classroom practices.

(Gregory 1988; Kemmlis and McTaggart 1988)
According to van Lier (1988:27), some of the central topics to research about are the following:

a) The nature and development of the students’ interlanguage

b) The role of interaction between the teacher and the students, that is, the type of communication which takes place in the classroom

c) The use of learning strategies

d) Cognitive styles

e) Efficiency of evaluation techniques
Action research typically involves small-scale investigative projects in the teacher’s own classroom, and consists of a number of phases which often recur in cycles.
Stages in action research

There are four classic developmental phases of action research:

**Phase 1: Develop a *plan of action* to ...**

a) improve what is already happening or
b) identify and examine a "puzzle" or problem area in your teaching.

**Phase 2: *Act* to implement the plan.**

**Phase 3: *Observe* the effects of action in the context in which it occurs.**

**Phase 4: *Reflect* on these effects.**
Other authors establish the following eight stages (Cohen and Manion, 1985):

**Stage 1.** The identification, evaluation & formulation of the problem.

**Stage 2.** Preliminary discussion and negotiations amongst interested parties – teachers, advisers, researchers, sponsors.

**Stage 3.** Review of research literature and comparable studies.

**Stage 4.** Restatement of the problem, or formulation of a hypothesis; explicit discussion of the assumptions underlying the project.

**Stage 5.** Selection of research procedures, allocation of resources, choice of materials and methods, etc.

**Stage 6.** Choice of evaluation procedures - bearing in mind that evaluation will be continuous.

**Stage 7.** The implementation of the project itself, including data collection and analysis, monitoring and feedback.

**Stage 8.** The interpretation of the data; inferences to be drawn; overall project evaluation.
A lesson report

It is a structured inventory or list which enables teachers to describe their recollections of the main features of a lesson.

What is a lesson plan and a lesson report?
The purpose of a lesson report is to give the teacher a quick and simple procedure for what happened during a lesson, how much time was spent on different parts of a lesson, and how effective the lesson was. This useful record of the main features of the lesson helps monitor the teacher’s teaching.
Lesson report forms

Should be prepared by a teacher or group of teachers to match the goals and content of the particular course they are teaching and the different kinds of teaching activities, procedures, and resources that you expect to use in the course.
What kind of information do you think should be included in a lesson report?

What questions should be in your mind when writing a lesson report?

Which forms do you prefer; the checklist or responding to Yes/No and WH-questions? Why?
A group of teachers teaching a grammar class would first discuss their approach to the teaching of grammar, clarify their assumptions about the goals of the course, and identify the kinds of classroom activities, procedures, and resources they plan to use.

Use the lesson report form on a regular basis to record the activities, procedures, and resources used throughout the course.

Meet periodically to review and compare lesson reports with those of other teachers teaching the same course.

As you do so, you gather information that will be useful the next time you teach the same course.
An alternative approach to lesson reporting is simply for the teacher to spend a few minutes after a lesson writing answers to questions such as the following:

- What were the main goals of the lesson?
- What did the learners actually learn in the lesson?
- What teaching procedures did I use?
- What problems did I encounter and how did I deal with them?
- What were the most effective parts of the lesson?
- What were the least effective parts?
- Would I do anything differently if I taught the lesson again?
Task 7

Answers 7

- Questionnaire
- Teaching Journal
- Questionnaire
- Audio Recording
- Action Research
The approaches described so far are just some of the ways in which teachers can become involved in what has been referred to as "critically reflective teaching" or "exploratory teaching."

What distinguishes these approaches to classroom investigation from other investigative strategies is that they are intended to complement the kinds of things teachers normally do as they teach, rather than impose additional chores on teachers.

Furthermore, they let teachers themselves (rather than outsiders) decide which aspects of teaching they wish to explore and which procedures they prefer to use.