



## Summary of Development as a Reflective Practitioner

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### Abstract

This paper is a summary which explores the effectiveness and evaluation of my development as a reflective practitioner. It focuses on development with two useful theories about learning and teaching. They are about deep learning & surface learning and levels of teaching. Actually, when I put these theories to practice reflectively, the result shows positive outcomes, it can improve students' motivation and raise students' interest in studying English and help me developing in my profession.

**Keywords:** Surface and deep learning, Active learning environment, Levels of teaching, Constructive theory, Critical incident, Effective practice, Reasonable reflection.

### Introduction

I understand that there have been many experiences and incidents required reflection and realization. I learned how to reflect from my experiences in expounding constructive theories. Gibbs' (1988) reflective series is the model that I can comprehend how students learn, and how my thoughts have been influenced by evaluation. After reflecting on my lectures and students' activities, I discuss with my colleagues and gain many useful advices to adjust my action which were dissatisfactory. Throughout five years, I have tried as a reflective teacher, and it really helped me to improve in my profession.

### 1. Reflective Practitioner

Sumsion (1997) observes that the object and purpose of reflection can be wider than just acquiring technical professional competencies and extend to a more holistic view of personal development. The concept of the "reflective practitioner" is popularized by Schön (1983, 1987) and Cowan (1998). It refers to evaluating elements of the self, the task and the environment concerning their effect on practice in the past, present and future. Kenny (2004) thinks that "A teaching clinic can function as a mirror that allows participants -both teacher and students - to reflect on their work and themselves." Schön (1987) describes the environment as a "hall of mirrors". On the basis of Kolb Cycle, the Cowan diagram enhances the theory of being a reflective teacher. A reflection-for-action generates "a more detailed definition of the diverse needs and goals which were to be relevant to individual students; reflection-in-action means reflecting on what one has been doing; reflection-on-action takes place in action completed." (Cowan, 2006, pp52-57)

Actually all these theories can be applied to teaching practice. Through experimentation I can understand theories much more easily and intensively. Thus I manage to be a reflective practitioner as Schön explains. The most satisfying results of taking the course I want to reflect on is the activities described below.

### 2. Two significant theories about learning and teaching

After reflecting on every session during the last year, there are many theories which have really influence on my learning and teaching, and made me improve my abilities of teaching greatly. Here, I mainly relate two significant theories. One is deep learning and surface learning, and the other is levels of teaching.

#### 2.1 Deep learning and surface learning

##### 2.1.1 The concept

Ramsden (2003, p57) states that "Deep approaches are almost universally associated with a sense of involvement, challenge and achievement, together with feelings of personal fulfillment and pleasure...Students who are taking a deep approach find the material more interesting and easier to understand, and are therefore more likely to spend 'time on task.'"

Biggs (2003, p14) says that "The surface approach arises from an intention to get the task out of the way with minimum trouble while appearing to meet course requirements... In using the surface approach, students focus on what Marton calls the 'signs' of learning; the words used, isolated facts, items treated independently of each other."

Biggs (2003) summarize these two approaches to study. He think the two approaches to learning describe the way

students relate to a teaching/learning environment; students have their own personalities to speak, and good teaching supports the deep approach and discourages the surface.

### 2.1.2 Encourage students from surface learning to deep learning

#### 2.1.2.1 Deep learning is preferable to surface learning

The evidence is as follows:

From Marton's and Säljö's (1976; 1997) ideas of 'surface' and 'deep' approaches to learning, these two approaches are not personality traits or fixed characteristics but are intentions. In order to help students change their learning approaches from surface to deep in the limited time, if teachers create an active learning environment, and let the students know they are required a deep approach, they maybe adopt deep learning; otherwise, they maybe use surface learning. As Ramsden (2003, p41) says "the way in which anyone goes about learning is a relation between the person and the material being learned...it is about how people experience and organise the subject matter... it is about 'what' and 'how' they learn, rather than 'how much' they remember", that means the approach can be thought of as a qualitative aspect of learning. It is proved that there are clear relationships between students' perceptions, approaches and outcomes. The most consistent finding suggests that perception of heavy workloads is associated with a surface or reproducing approach to study.

Different students take different approaches to learning. These approaches are not stable traits in individuals, although some students will tend towards taking a deep approach while others will tend towards taking a surface approach (Biggs, 1999). It is suggested that good teaching can influence students to take a deep approach while poor teaching in the widest sense can pressure students to take a surface approach. (Lublin). Teachers can make creative use of teaching methods and approaches to create opportunities for deep learning. Wakely says that there are many methods teacher can use, such as using learning lists and getting the students to read a variety of texts on the same subject so that they have a lot of opportunities to experience related items perhaps even in different contexts can help encourage deep approaches. Making extensive use of dictionaries and using word associations to develop a deep knowledge. In order to encourage deep learning approach by our students, we can use opportunities for revising and applying knowledge, teaching and learning activities intended to encourage deep learning, and it can take time to succeed.

#### 2.1.2.2 Activity 1

My students are non-English major minority students with low motivation, most of them are surface learners, and I am going to help them change their learning approaches. For the purpose of expanding their vocabulary when the fall semester began, I put my plan through as follows:

Firstly, from the result of Lublin's research, "If students see knowledge as a way of understanding the discipline and the world, they are more likely to adopt a deep approach." At the beginning of the session, I stated like that, "A strong vocabulary can be a valuable asset, both in college and later in career. To improve vocabulary, you must be willing to work at it, spending both time and effort noticing and learning new words and meanings. Keep in mind that intent to remember is one of the principles of learning."

Secondly, in order to make the students memorize new words and phrases easily and encourage them in deep approach of meaningful memorizing, I designed some tasks in each unit, include reading widely, looking for clear words to replace unclear words, and build word awareness through exercise and pair-work. For example, (1) I select an article named "Loads of fun stuff for English learners" after Unit 1, and most new words and phrases will be repeated in the article. (2) Let the students to replace the general and unclear word in the sentence "The movie was so good." Such words as "exciting", "moving", "thrilling" and "scary" can replace the word "good", and each of them gives more information than the word "good". (3) I try to use words that the students understand but seldom use both in formal classroom lectures and in more casual discussions and conversations. (4) I also encourage and tutor them to read and retell in my spare time.}

As Ramsden (2003, p47) says deep approach is to "relate previous knowledge to new knowledge", to "relate theoretical ideas to everyday experience", and from Biggs' (2003) 'Product' 3P Model, deep learning emphasizes how students learn but surface learning emphasizes what students learn. Almost four months past, all of them were engaged in study English before/in/after sessions. As a result, students looked not as bored as before but confident and active all along. From the students' feedback, most participants agree that they are satisfied with their learning outcome (51.8% strongly agree, 33.7% agree). Obviously, the different activities brought them into deep learning and kept them from boredom and ungodliness.

## 2.2 Levels of teaching

### 2.2.1 The concept

Biggs (2003, pp 20-25) compare three levels of thinking about teaching. Level 1 teachers focus on the student factors. Teachers seek to blame the students for their failure to learn, perhaps citing lower ability levels and /or poor motivation.

Level 2 teachers focus on the teacher factors. Teachers believe that teaching is all about what they do and that, if this is good enough, their students will learn. Level 3 teachers focus on what the student does in terms of processes and the final product and believes that the teacher's role is to make learning possible. Clearly, level 3 teachers is one of best.

### 2.2.2 Activity 2

Same students as activity 1, I choose to design and deliver PowerPoint for supporting my students' learning. Before Christmas, in order to Increase knowledge of western cultural for my students, I selected a topic "Festivals around the world" for PowerPoint based on prior experiences, such as "A Gift for Mother's Day". According to Ramsden(2003) describe that one of University teacher's theories of teaching is making students busy and using a set of efficient actions, I gave the students task-based instruction in session. (1) I give them learning outcomes for making my students learning possible; (2) I design some pair tasks, include opening questions, discussing, question and answer pairs. At the same time, I show two beautiful slides for enjoying the festive revelries day and night in western countries; (3) I create three slides for 3 minutes fast reading---"Festivals and celebrations", then let students answer 3 questions in order to make the students quite impressed with the text; (4) I design further questions and further activity for group work. After discussion, each group chose one classmate to give a short presentation. (5) Let students retell the text, and the student who do well will gain a small prize from me. Finally, I summarize the text and collected feedback sheet from all students.

The feedback from the students intended to help me get to know the students' reaction to activity 2. Each questionnaire consists of 5 statements, for which the students' should choose 1 out 5 ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The feedback from students shows that all of my students agree that the PowerPoint design is both interesting and beneficial to their learning (45.3% strongly agree, 54.7% agree), most of them agree that PowerPoint can motivate their confidence to deep learning (45.2% strongly agree, 33.3% agree, 21.5% uncertain). The feedback also shows that they consider retelling text is difficult for them. (51.7% strongly agree, 30.8% agree, 15% disagree, 2.5% strong disagree) Evidently, I guided students to take deep learning. On the other hand, I think I am a level 2 teacher at present based on Ramsden's theories of "Teachers at Level 2", because the focus is on what the teacher does. If I have chance to teach this topic again, I will let students who feel difficult retell the text by filling some blanks which include some key words of phrases.

### Reflection

I have got unbelievable development of skills, experience and knowledge in teaching this year. I started learning with less knowledge of teaching theories but now I moved into one who know more teaching theories and can apply these theories to my teaching practice. The most important point is that I learn reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action according to the Cowan diagram.

Now I apply these useful theories to teaching practice. So I am a reflective practitioner at present, and I am going to learn how to research curriculum in the future.

As Biggs (2003, p7) says that "reflecting on your teaching, and seeing what is wrong and how it may be improved, requires you to have an explicit theory of teaching." When I reflect on activity 1 and activity 2, I think they are two critical incidents for me.

For lack of reflection, consideration, relation of theories to practice and self-evaluation, I used to "transmitting information" (Biggs) in session, so the students took surface learning and I was a level 1 teacher. With my mentors' positive instruction and my self-efforts, I gradually have insights into theories and I am able to match them with practice. Now, I can guide my students to take deep learning, for example, I use several active methods to make students to deep learning in activity 1 and activity 2. Meanwhile, I become a level 2 teacher, for instant, I can do "good management" but usually focus on my presage factors in activity 2. I am looking forward to moving to a Level 3 teacher in the future.

### Conclusion

I have engaged in kinds of teaching activities including lecture, group work, feedback to students, supporting learning with technology and etc. which considerably arose student motivation and enthusiasm of learning during these years, and I have gained many advantages. I learn not only teaching theories but also practical skills of teaching. The most important is that I learn how to reflect and improve my teaching skill from critical incidents. My ability to guide the students to take deep approach has been developed greatly. For me, there is still much to learn and I'm firm to be a reflective practitioner who can react to every situation and reflect on my teaching practice, so I will continue to develop.

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