

Microteaching as an introduction to reflective observation

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SINOPSIS

Muchos cursos de entrenamiento para maestros incluyen un componente de micro-enseñanza y para la mayoría de los alumnos es una experiencia de gran nerviosismo cuyos resultados rara vez reflejan verdaderamente las habilidades en el salón de clase. Este artículo describe un intento en hacer toda esta experiencia menos atemorizante y en asegurarse que la evaluación cubra no solamente las habilidades de desempeño, sino, más importante aún, la habilidad de reflexionar sobre el propio desempeño y el de sus colegas.

Términos Clave: <programa de enseñanza> <formación de docentes> <docentes> < profesor de idiomas> <desarrollo de habilidades> <México>

ABSTRACT

Many teacher training courses include a micro-teaching component and for the majority of trainees this is a newwacking experience, with the results very rarely giving a true reflection of their classroom abilities. This article describes an attemp to make the whole experience less frightening and to ensure that assessment covers the trainees abilities not only to perform, but, more importantly, to reflect on their own performance and that of colleagues.

Key Terms: <instructional programmes> <teacher education> <teachers> <language teachers> <skill development> <Mexico>

INTRODUCTION

The following article describes an experiment carried out at the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY), Facultad de Educación, to use the Microteaching Modules on the Especialización en la Enseñanza del Inglés as an introduction to a reflective approach to classroom observation. The two modules of microteaching occur in Semesters 2 and 3 of the 3 semester program and precede periods when the teachers are back in the classroom, undertaking peer and self-observation tasks as part of their coursework.

BACKGROUND

During previous generations of the course microteaching had aroused feelings of fear and anxiety. This was mainly due to the way that microteaching was assessed; each module carried a mark (2 marks out of a total of 12 for the whole program) and that mark was based entirely on one 'performance' in the microteaching session.

The course trainers were therefore interested in finding ways to make microteaching a less threatening, more positive experience which would raise awareness and encourage greater reflection. An important additional aim was to ensure that this increased awareness and reflection could be further exploited in subsequent peer and self-observation tasks.

Previously the microteaching component had been based on the applied science model, related, at least initially, to the psychological theory of behaviourism, with an emphasis on immediate feedback, reinforcement, shaping and similar Skinnerian concepts. The theory was that the skills of good practice could be specified by the experts, conveyed to the trainees during briefings, and the trainees' behaviour would then be shaped until they reached criterion. (Wallace 1991:94)

THE 'NEW' APPROACH TO MICROTEACHING

The new approach adopted in the Diploma program was based on the reflective model (See Figure 1). Wallace (1991:14) sees professional education as comprising two kinds of knowledge:

- received knowledge which includes, among other things, the necessary and valuable element of scientific research and
- experiential knowledge which is the knowledge-in-action developed by practice of the teaching profession.

In combining received and experiential knowledge in the classroom, or putting them into practice, the teacher is constantly making judgements and decisions. It is possible to leave these processes unexplored but it is more productive to reflect on them, leading to the conscious development of insights into knowing-in-action. Professionals should reflect on their performance, asking themselves what went

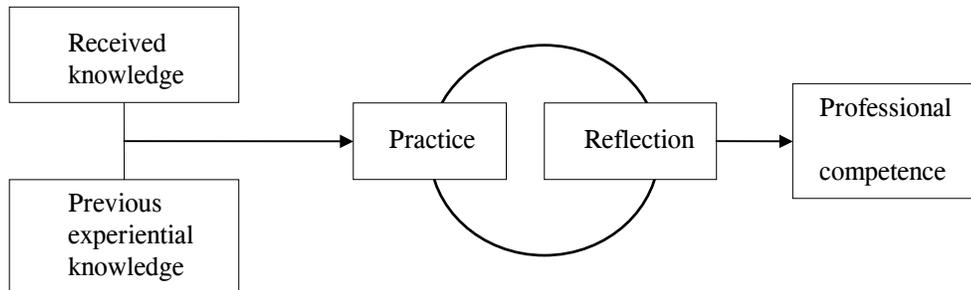


Figure 1. Reflective model (from Wallace 1991)

wrong or why it went so well, what to avoid and what to repeat, thus improving their professional competence. As Bartlett (1990) says:

...if we want to improve our teaching through reflective inquiry, we must accept that it does not involve some modification of behaviour by externally imposed directions or requirements, but that it requires deliberation and analysis of our ideas about teaching as a form of action based on our changed understandings. (p.203)

How could reflection be incorporated into the microteaching sessions with a view to increasing professional competence? The teaching team decided to adopt the following approach:

1. Provide background reading on the reflective approach to microteaching (handed out in advance of the sessions).
2. Discuss microteaching in general - its aims and procedures.
3. In groups, work out the approach and procedures to be adopted for microteaching on the Diploma in TEFL.
4. Make the microteaching sessions as trainee-centred as possible - with most of the decisions coming from trainees - so that they were in control of the procedure.

5. Find an alternative to basing assessment purely on performance.
6. Ensure that the actual microteaching would take place in a non-threatening, supportive atmosphere.
7. Have a feedback/discussion session at the end of the module to reflect on the approach taken.

PROCEDURE

Three 2-hour sessions were programmed for an introduction to micro-teaching as it was felt that time allocated to clarifying the issues and alleviating fears at this stage would be time well spent. We also included a final 2 hour session for the preparation of a file of materials for assessment and for a general feedback session.

Session 1.

The first session involved the discussion of microteaching in general. For this we used the handout 1 (see page # x) with trainees working on each section in groups followed by whole class feedback. Trainees were encouraged to incorporate ideas from the articles they had read in their discussions.

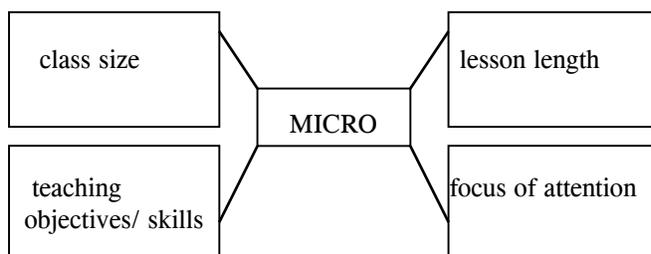
Handout 1:

MICRO-TEACHING

These activities are to start you thinking, talking and reading about MICROTEACHING.

A.

1. What is “micro” about microteaching ? Fill in the boxes.



2. Put the following steps into a possible order for a model of microteaching.

- A replanning B critique C planning
D modelling E recritique F teaching G reteaching

What are the **aims** of each of these stages?

Wich of these steps do you consider **essential** in microteaching?

3. What is the difference between microteaching in a preservice and an inservice training programme?

B. Microteaching students

Who will be the “students” in the microteaching lesson?

There are 2 possibilities :

1. real students
2. peers

In the case of peers:

- a) the “students” can be given a “level” and/or a “role” to play OR
- b) the lesson is aimed at the level of the “peers”

List the advantages and disadvantages of each of these 3 possibilities.

C. Preparation

The preparation of the microlesson can be done in different ways. What do you consider to be advantages and

disadvantages of the following:

- a) prepare and teach individually
- b) prepare and teach in pairs
- c) prepare in pairs and teach individually

D. Feedback: Analysis and Discussion

In your groups discuss the following questions:

1. When is feedback given?
 - immediately after you have taught
 - after you have had time to evaluate the lesson yourself
 - after you have seen the video playback (privately or as a group?)
2. Should feedback come from.....
 - self
 - supervisor/tutor
 - peers (observing)
 - 'learners' (peer or real)
 - recording of the lesson - replayed whole or in parts
 - checklists/observation schedules
3. In what order should feedback be given
 - the microteacher
 - the tutor
 - the peers
 - the 'learners'
4. What is the role of the tutor/supervisor?
 - to observe/lead/chair
 - to give oral/written feedback
 - to lead discussion directly/indirectly
 - to focus on the microlesson itself
 - to extend the discussion to more general issues
 - to emphasise present performance and/or future goals for the teacher
5. Should video be used? If so, how?
6. How should the oral feedback be conducted? Consider the following possibilities, taken from Gower and Walters (1983) and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each:
 - a) Supervisor tells the trainees about the lesson
 - b) Supervisor elicits comments from the trainees (Teacher and colleagues)
 - c) Supervisor chairs, invites teacher for comments on the lesson, then any other trainees to comment. Finally

supervisor sums up.

d) A trainee chairs the discussion.

e) A structured discussion - each trainee notes the strongest and weakest points in the lesson and, as a group, without intervention from supervisor, trainees come to some agreement.

Finally, what do you consider the aims of microteaching to be - for you as a teacher and as an observer?

Discussion on the above handout covered the following areas:

- the rationale behind microteaching
- the artificiality of the situation and the inherent problems
- the advantages and disadvantages of different preparation strategies
- the possible approaches to feedback and the appropriacy of each to the present situation
- the use of video-recordings in feedback
- an understanding of the purposes of microteaching on this particular course and the way it supports the approach adopted by the tutors in other areas of the syllabus. This provided all concerned with an overview of microteaching and an awareness of the problems and difficulties involved, which would be common to everyone. This

understanding was essential if people were to feel more at ease with their task.

Session 2

The next stage was to consider which particular micro-area of classroom interaction should be focussed on and the specific skills involved. The teaching team were keen to give trainees the opportunity to microteach using skills and techniques covered in the first semester when the focus had been on presenting and practising new language. It was also necessary to introduce the idea of reflection and analysis and to show where these skills would be required. This second session began, therefore, with the handout 2 (page # x)

MICROTEACHING

General Aims

The overall aims of this microteaching program are:

- a) to provide you with the opportunity to develop planning, presentation and practice skills in a cooperative environment
- b) to encourage you to analyse and reflect on what you do and see
- c) to familiarise you with the principles and procedures of microteaching to prepare you for your future role as teacher trainers.

Specific Aims

- a) to give you practice in basic techniques for presenting specific language points and for introducing and organising pair/group work for controlled and freer oral activities
- b) to provide an opportunity to experiment with teaching materials and techniques
- c) to develop your ability to observe, analyse and evaluate your own and others' teaching
- d) to develop your ability to give and receive feedback on teaching
- e) to provide you with an insight into the management of microteaching

Having isolated the presentation and practice of new language as topics for microteaching, the next step was to work on a checklist for observers and supervisor to use during the microteaching for feedback. (This was an important stage of the proceedings as the trainees had unanimously agreed on the implementation of a checklist, emphasising its use not only for feedback but also when planning their microteaching session.)

The trainees were first of all asked to take one of the following teaching areas and, in groups, to think of up to six skills that it would be useful for a trainee teacher to be able to demonstrate:

Area 1: Presenting new language (structure, function)

Area 2: Setting up a controlled/freer oral practice activity.

The next step was to give the trainees the opportunity to watch a video of a teacher presenting a new structure. As they watched, they were to bear in mind the skills they had selected in the previous activity and to consider anything important they might have omitted.

After watching the video, trainees then had the opportunity to go back to their checklists and revise them where necessary. The revised versions were then displayed on a large piece of paper for comparison and contrast and two final checklists decided on, by the trainees: one for presentation and one for practice.

Session 3

It was also felt that, before going any further, the tutors should clarify the logistics and procedure for the microteaching module. As was said before, no matter how much of an attempt is made to render it less threatening, microteaching is a stressful activity; we did not want to create more tension with the trainees worrying about the details of organisation etc. At the same time the training team wanted as much of the decision-making as possible to rest with

the trainees. The group was therefore asked to decide on factors concerning preparation, amount of time for the microteach, organisation of feedback, use of video and checklists, (decisions based on their work with Handout 1) and to make suggestions for assessment procedures.

The following guidelines resulted:

- prepare in pairs but teach individually, one person dealing with presentation, the other with practice
- teach for 10 minutes
- trainee may choose whether to be videotaped or not
- one trainee act as observer (non-participating) with checklist
- 5 minutes reflection time at end of microteach for relaxation and putting thoughts down on paper in preparation for feedback
- microteacher starts feedback, followed by peer comments, with observer's comments at the end
- supervisor helps guide discussion and writes summary of comments on checklist to hand to microteacher group to follow the Golden Rules (displayed on the walls of the classroom at all times)

BE PUNCTUAL
BE A GOOD 'STUDENT'
BE SUPPORTIVE
BE POSITIVE

ASSESSMENT

The trainees were unsure what form assessment should take. They knew that they did not want it to depend on performance and felt that of greater importance was their ability to reflect and comment on what they had seen or experienced. At this stage, therefore, the tutors exercised greater control and, in discussions with the trainees, decided that trainees would submit for assessment a record of the microteaching program to contain the following:

- micro-lesson plans together with copies of materials used formal checklists completed by observers/supervisor
- informal notes on materials and methods used by self and colleagues
- analysis of the experience of different roles: micro-teacher, observer, organiser, feedback tutor, camera-person, 'student' etc.
- comments on the reading-texts
- summary of the microteaching experience

At the end of each day's session trainees would write up their feelings and thoughts about what they had experienced. (This could take the form of a diary - a personal record to be seen by no one but the microteaching tutors.)

Finally, the following information was provided on a handout to clarify further points that had not been discussed in the sessions but needed to be made clear. See Handout 3, page # x.

Handout 3:

REMEMBER: You can either exploit or adapt existing published materials or produce your own. MT also offers you the chance to pilot materials and evaluate them with colleagues, before trying them out in a full class.

Planning Guidelines

- You have 10 minutes maximum for your presentation.
- Plan your microteaching carefully. Write an outline lesson plan into which your segments fit, and then prepare a detailed plan of your micro-lesson segment with details of aims and procedure/stages.
- Discuss your plan with your partner.
- Check exactly what sort of class you have in mind: level, age, previous learning experience, layout of the classroom etc. Make sure you give this information to the group before you start teaching.
- Check that you have all the equipment you need (pens, OHP, tape-recorder etc)

RESULTS (Session 4)

As with all innovations in teacher-training procedures the feedback from the trainees was of great importance.

Information concerning their views was obtained in the first instance from a summary sheet (handout 4) completed on the last day of MT. Handout 4:

SUMMARY OF MICRO-TEACHING

Answer the following questions and include your comments in your assessment file:

1. Which, of all the comments made on **your** presentation, do you remember most?

.....

2. Recall one good thing about your presentation, and one thing you need to work on, and write them down:

.....

3. Recall two good things that you observed in other presentations and write them down:
.....
.....
.....

4. After seeing all the presentations, what are the areas that most need working on?
.....
.....
.....

5. What impressed you most about the whole micro- teaching experience?
.....
.....
.....

The aim of this questionnaire was to help students focus their attentions on what they as individuals and the group as a whole had achieved during the microteaching sessions - to reflect on their successes and to consider those areas which needed more attention or a different approach.

Perhaps of greater interest to the teaching team were the assessment files. Here we found evidence of the amount of reflection that had gone on during the microteaching experience and the extent to which participants would be able to exploit this reflective ability in their peer observations during the semester. The following (unedited) extracts from two assessment folders are indicative:

Student 1 (native speaker)

"Here (the reflective approach) a teacher's behaviour is not seen as a demonstration of individual micro-skills, but as something that is related to powerful ideas. There is more freedom for the teacher to express his creativity and it is, as suggested, reflective. This approach holds the idea that microteaching is better seen as a technique for professional reflection rather than a technique for shaping behaviour. In teaching we are interested in

the conscious development of the teacher, which means that he reflect on what he is doing and find the most effective way of expressing his ideas and style so that the learner may learn.

It goes without saying that assessment must be based on the trainee's powers of self-evaluation. If we focus only on the `teach' for assessment, it stands the danger of becoming too prescriptive. We are not interested in what we can or cannot do **now** but what we could do in the future. The reflective model allows for this and, as such, can make microteaching an exciting, waking-up process. I feel microteaching based on the reflective model is a sensitive way of stimulating and accelerating the teacher's own natural intellectual and spiritual development.

(On the role of observer):

This for me was the hardest part of microteaching... One must be an educator. In fact, the art of observation educates oneself, first. This observation is really what allows us to become reflective teachers."

Student 2 (non-native speaker)

(On the role as student):

Although being a student was an unreal situation, in a way and at certain points I did feel as a real student: like when I didn't understand instructions clearly and this made me aware of how students feel.

(About the readings):

We definitely followed a reflective model which was very productive and open-ended. We had the opportunity to look at the different skills and strategies each teacher has. For me, the most important part was the critique stage, in which we were able to show our own powers of analysis and encouraged to reflect about our own as well as our peers' teaching.

In conclusion I think that MT has been a new and rewarding experience! It made me aware of my micro-mistakes and how to deal with them. Getting into the roles of teacher, student and observer also gave me the opportunity to look at things from different perspectives. I believe that MT will help

me not only in my role as a teacher but in the future as a possible trainer. When I started observing my colleagues I didn't know what to focus on but now I do and having the checklist was extremely helpful."

CONCLUSION

Our approach to microteaching was an experiment that was generally felt to have succeeded. There was a unanimous feeling that the MT period had been useful, productive and, to the relief of all concerned, considerably less stressful than had been envisaged. Many trainees commented that the initial stress felt by all decreased as they realised that the role of observer was taking precedence over the role of performer.

It was also generally agreed that reflection had played an important part and that the ability to evaluate the teaching of oneself and one's peers in a constructive way had been greatly enhanced. It is our aim in the TEFL Diploma program to provide the opportunities for this ability to continue growing.

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