



THE ROLE OF PRINTED MATERIALS IN ENCOURAGING REFLECTION IN APSCHE-BRITISH COUNCIL ELT TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on encouraging reflective skills among novice teachers for their proficient growth in APSCHE-British Council ELT teacher education programmes. It is an attempt to analyse how activities in print materials in such APSCHE-British Council programmes can be designed effectively to stimulate reflection. As print materials are still the dominant medium of instruction in ELT programmes in India, the deliberations will hopefully have significant implications for the teaching-learning process in such contexts. There are many recent studies that consider reflection as a crucial tool for learning and suggest strategies to foster reflection among learners. But in the present education system, the measures to be adopted for promoting reflection need special consideration. Print materials need to be used optimally to help compensate for the physical gap between learners and teachers in such a context. The paper offers some suggestions on how teacher support can be built into, learning print materials, to encourage trainees to reflect, and highlights this as a special need of APSCHE-British Council teacher trainees. Some materials from an existing APSCHE-British Council ELT programme will be used to illustrate the case.

INTRODUCTION

APSCHE-British Council Training pedagogy is different from regular education pedagogy in many ways. In APSCHE-British Council Training, the basic feature is that teachers and learners are separated physically from each other for most of the time during a programme of study. This makes education possible/convenient for in-service professionals, married women with family responsibilities, and other persons who cannot attend classes in the face-to-face mode due to personal or professional commitments, problems or responsibilities. This feature of APSCHE-British Council Training, which also basically differentiates it from regular education, requires the adoption of instructional design suitable for such Training. Efforts are being made to build teacher support in the materials in such a programme. With the advent of

DR. J. RAVINDRA DAS

DR. R. DEVARAJULU REDDY 1Page



technology, course designers use both synchronous and asynchronous ways of course delivery to increase support to the learners. On the whole, course designers of APSCHE-British Council Training programme need to adopt an approach and pedagogical strategies significantly different from those in regular education.

What is reflection?

In simple terms reflection is a form of conscious response (some say a processing phase) to a situation or event, and the experiences within that situation or event. In our case this involves, but is not limited to, a learning and teaching situation/event, and can include all manner of formal and informal occasions that are often quite complex. For the teacher and student these responses will include what they think, feel, do and conclude both at the time and/or after the experience. In this respect reflection is an active and aware process that can occur anytime and anywhere. It functions to help us, or our students, to re-capture, re-live, make sense of, think about, contextualise, and evaluate an experience in order to make decisions and choices about what has been experienced, how it has been experienced, and what would or wouldn't be done next.

Reflection – a gap

Reflection is a buzzword nowadays especially in the field of teacher education. A lot of deliberations have taken place regarding strategies to promote reflection among teachers in a regular teacher education programme (where the teacher or trainer is present as a facilitator) or in general classroom situations. In the APSCHE-British Council Training context, teachers and trainees need to motivate themselves to continue their studies in the midst of distractions, and gain academic and practical professional insights from whatever materials (print and online) they receive on the programme. So the ability to reflect as an adult learner is very important for them to gain maximum professional competence through a programme of study. Accordingly, course designers need to adopt strategies specific to the APSCHE-British Council Training context to promote reflection among APSCHE-British Council teacher trainees.

Why print materials

Many APSCHE-British Council Training programmes all around the world have utilized technological advancements to deliver instructional materials to the learners. But in developing countries like India, print materials are still the dominant medium of instruction. In many other places too, where online materials are more dominant than print materials, print materials are used as an additional support to learners. Therefore, in order to start from the existing situation in developing countries, we need to exploit the print medium to its maximum. Regarding print materials in APSCHE-British Council Training, the most often talked-about issues are increasing accessibility by using access devices and making them self-learning enabled. Very little discussion focuses on promoting reflection through print



materials. This is why this paper is attempting to generate discussion on this less talked-about issue.

Reflection in APSCHE-British Council Training

Reflection is defined in different ways for different purposes. For the purpose of this discussion, by reflection through print materials, we mean presenting print materials in such a way that they provide stimuli for thinking, engage learners in activities, and help them use reflective skills. This is important for promoting learner autonomy as well, which is a key feature of APSCHE-British Council Training. If trainees are able to use their own reflective skills through print materials, it will enhance their learning experience and fill the gap.

What we can do

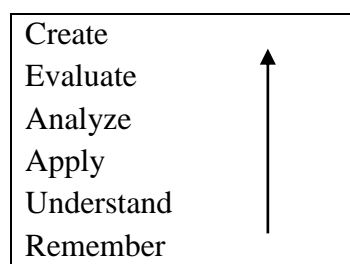
It is often observed that APSCHE-British Council print materials are meant for self-learning, self-directed, self-explanatory, and self-guided so that learners/trainees can easily use them on their own. But just presenting content in a simplified way will only spoon-feed the trainees rather than hone their skills. So it is essential to give them scope to think, contextualize knowledge and learn at a deeper level. That demands a balance between presentation of content and engaging trainees in activities that trigger reflection.

Instructional designers and academics should allow APSCHE-British Council learners to be more reflective, to give personal views on topics, to debate and argue their points of view, to question information given by the instructor and textbooks, based on personal observations and knowledge acquired elsewhere. (Tam 2000)

A demonstration

In the following sections, I will try to present a demonstration of how we might incorporate reflective activities in the text. For this purpose, I will use a model originally propounded by Benjamin Bloom, which was later revised, i.e. Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001).

Figure 1: Revised Bloom's taxonomy





As shown by the arrow, the model presents a continuum from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills. Though this is not a direct model for reflection, I think that the continuum in this model is appropriate for promoting reflection among APSCHE-British Council trainees. This will become clear as we go through the revised design of a text.

The original text (slightly modified)

The following text has been taken from the materials of a MA ELT programme in an Indian University. I have slightly modified the text (by adding/ removing a few words and by slightly changing the structure of a sentence) in order to protect the identity of the institution, because I feel that criticizing the type of activity design is more important than criticizing the institution concerned.

Inter-language Interference

There is an influence of the properties of the L1 on the course of L2 learning. The learners transfer sounds, structure and usage from one language to the other. Transfer is of two kinds – positive transfer and negative transfer. Positive transfer is the result of similarities between the L1 and L2, while negative transfer is the result of differences between the two. The latter is known as interference. Positive transfer makes it acceptable to use the L1 habits in the L2 settings. For example, the assumption that the subject goes before all other units in a positive sentence satisfactorily transfers from Telugu to English. On the other hand, in negative transfer L1 habits cause errors in L2. For example, Subject- Object-Verb order does not satisfactorily transfer from Telugu to English.

The redesigned text (by using Bloom's taxonomy)

In the following sections I will present the same content by following the different stages given in Bloom's taxonomy. I will use bullet points in the section for the first stage (*Remember and understand*) for the convenience of analysis in the next part of this paper.

Language Transfer/Interference (Stage: Remember and understand)

- a) English is not our mother tongue. In most cases in our daily life, we talk in our mother tongue, i.e. in Tamil, Telugu, Assamese, etc. So when we speak in the second language, i.e. English, it is often influenced by our mother tongue. This is called interference or language transfer.



- b) For example, Assamese people often find it difficult to pronounce /f/ or /ʃ/ because it not there in their mother tongues. So while speaking in English, they often pronounce ‘ship’ as /sip/ instead of /ʃip/ and /phan/ instead of /fæn/.
- c) Have you ever noticed such influences among the people in your region? If yes, make a list of them below. (If you are an in-service teacher, you might think of your students coming from different regions, and note if you observed any such influence among your students.)
.....
.....
- d) In the example given above regarding Assamese speakers, the speakers transfer sounds from their mother tongue to English. Sometimes the structure or other features might also be transferred. For example, Telugu speakers easily transfer the subject in the sentence-initial position to English, because it is there in Telugu too. For example, In Telugu, *Manamu andaramu Bharateeyulam*. In English, *We all are Indians*.
- e) From the above two examples (the first one in an Assamese context and the second one in a Telugu context), we can see that language transfer can be of different types. In the first case, transfer happened due to differences between the two languages (Assamese and English). This phenomenon is called negative transfer. In the second case, transfer was the result of similarities between the two languages (Telugu and English). This is called positive transfer.
(Stage: *Apply*)

Now think of some more examples of positive and negative transfers from your own mother tongue to the English language. Make some notes in the following space.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

(Stage: *Analyze*)

How do you think language transfer is relevant to language teaching? In the case of positive transfer, we do not need to worry at all. But negative transfer calls for specific strategies for language teaching. As a language teacher, which of the following things would you do with your students if you find negative transfer?

1. Ignore it.
2. Explain the concept of negative transfer.
3. Ask students not to be influenced.
4. Design activities focusing on areas of negative transfer to minimize it. If you are aware of negative transfer among your students, it will help you identify the areas to work on to help your students improve their English. For example, if you find that many of your students find it difficult to use the verbs ‘drink’ and ‘eat’ because there

is one single word to refer to both in their native language, you can design activities around this learning point. So we can see that Option 4 given above is correct.

Now look at the following case study.

(I am giving just an outline of the subsequent steps to save space as this will help us visualize the whole process.)

Subsequent steps:

Case study of a teacher designing an activity focusing on an area of negative transfer

(Stage: *Evaluate*)

Present a list of a number of activities. Trainees will choose one that is appropriate for a particular case of negative transfer.

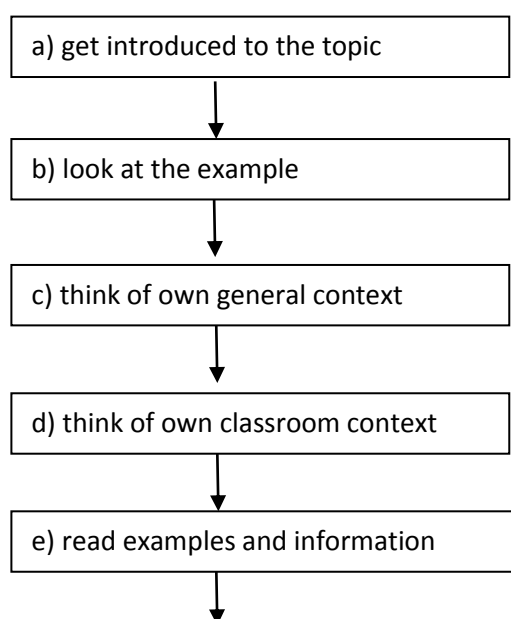
(Stage: *Create*)

Guide trainees to design an activity appropriate for addressing a particular case of language transfer.

Analysing the redesigned activity

If we analyse the above redesigned activity, we may notice the following. *Scaffolding for reflection*: Reflection is a complex process. As the learners/trainees in a APSCHE-British Council Training process study on their own, it would be wrong to expect them to be able to apply advanced reflective skills from the very beginning while confronting new content. The process used here facilitates reflection step by step. The first step (*Remember and understand*) is not really reflection-oriented, but it provides a firm foundation for reflection. If we notice carefully, we can find the following structure in this stage.

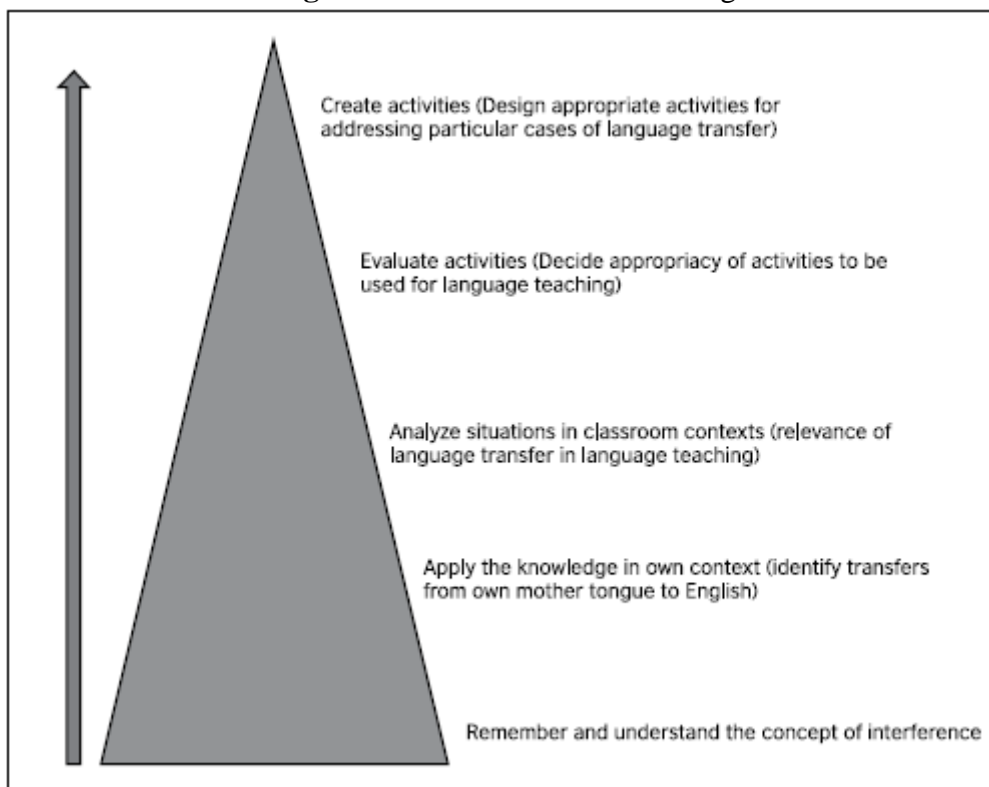
Figure 2: Scaffolding for reflection



f) receive more information

Though it seems to be a long process, it is important to prepare the trainees for further reflection on the issue, especially while presenting new content. The next few activities demand the application of the skills of applying, analysing, evaluating and creating respectively. Thus attempts have been made to make a gradual shift to advanced reflective skills. The whole process is a kind of scaffolding facilitating higher levels of reflection. We can show the structure of scaffolding in this particular presentation of content in the following way.

Figure 3: A structure of scaffolding



Input between steps:

In the APSICHE-British Council Training context, as the teacher is not always there physically to give instant feedback, the course writer needs to give some additional inputs between activities. For example, in the analysis stage, the question asking the trainees to decide on the appropriate option has been followed by a discussion of the solution. Moreover, case studies have been used at various places to help trainees obtain conceptual clarity.

Other features of SLM (Self-learning Materials):



Research in APSCHE-British Council Training has established the need for using various features in order to make materials self-learning for APSCHE-British Council learners. In the above redesigned text, various such features have been incorporated. They include use of personalization (personal pronouns like 'you', 'I', 'we', etc., slightly informal language, direct questions like 'Have you ever noticed such influences among the people in your region?') and simple language (short sentences, small paragraphs, etc.).

CONCLUSION

Teacher trainees – be they in the regular or the APSCHE-British Council mode of training – are learners with experience and the ability to use their reflective skills. Print materials, being a dominant medium of instruction in APSCHE-British Council training programmes in developing countries, should trigger their motivation to use reflective skills for pedagogic purposes. This paper has attempted to generate discussion on possible ways to facilitate such a process on the basis of a revised model developed by Bloom. However, I do not claim that this is the only way to promote reflection among APSCHE-British Council teacher trainees, or that one needs to follow the model rigorously to facilitate reflection. What I want to suggest is that incorporating elements of such a model might guide us in the promotion of reflection through print materials in APSCHE-British Council teacher training programmes.

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