

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT
OR ONGOING BENEFIT?

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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Reflective Practice:
Theoretical Construct or Ongoing Benefit?

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ABSTRACT

Reflective teaching is an approach toward teaching which requires teachers to think and gather data about their classroom actions, reflect on them, act on them, observe the results, and finally improve their teaching which will in turn assist them in developing themselves professionally. Teachers can become reflective practitioners through involving themselves in a variety of different activities such as keeping teaching journals and teaching portfolios, writing lesson reports, conducting classroom observations, forming reflective inquiry groups, undertaking research, and a number of other reflective activities that raise teachers' awareness of their own practice .

Reflection helps teachers to become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. That is one reason why in teacher education programs teachers are encouraged to reflect on their practice. However, whether or not reflection becomes a part of their practice once they leave these programs is a thought-provoking question that this study sought to answer. This study was as an attempt to investigate former AUS MATESOL program participants' perceptions of "Reflective Practice," and aimed to find out how these current teachers perceive "Reflective Practice," whether or not they consider themselves "Reflective Practitioners," what form of reflection

these teachers use in their practice, and what factors determine their engagement with “Reflection” and “Reflective Teaching.”

In order to gather data to answer my research questions I used semi-structured interviews with four teachers, three females and one male, who graduated from the AUS MATESOL program, and are now teaching at two different universities in the United Arab Emirates. The findings of my study indicate that these former students have generally developed an understanding of reflection and reflective practice to some extent, are aware of its values, and use different forms of reflection in order to reflect on their practice. As the findings of my study suggest, the most common modes of reflection among the participants of this study are contemplating over their practice, discussing with colleagues, and getting feedback from students. The results of my study also suggest that having enough time to reflect and document the reflections, holding receptive attitudes, being convinced of the usefulness of reflective teaching, and believing in change are factors that determine these teachers’ engagement with reflection and reflective practice.

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DEDICATION

I owe it all to my family: to my husband, for all his love, support, and assistance; to my mom and my dad, who have always believed in me and offered me their endless encouragement; and to my sister, who has always cheered me up with her kind words. I know how much you all wanted me to do this. This thesis is dedicated to you as a token of my true appreciation for what you have done for me.

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The concepts of reflection, reflective thinking, and reflective teaching are not new in the field of education. They have been around for more than 50 years (Qing, 2009). The importance of reflection is widely discussed in the literature, where reflection and reflective teaching have been considered crucial components of teachers' professional development. Bean and Stevens (2002) note that reflectivity is one of the characteristics of an effective teacher. Qing (2009) points out that by reflecting on their experience, teachers can have a better understanding of teaching as well as their own practice. Moreover, reflection raises teachers' awareness of themselves, their strengths, and their weaknesses, and consequently helps them to develop their own practice (Pollard, Anderson, Maddock, Swaffield, Warin, and Warwick, 2008). These are reasons why many teacher educators encourage student teachers in teacher training courses to reflect on their practice and examine it critically.

As an MATESOL student, I have been required to reflect on the success, failure, strengths, and weaknesses of the lesson plans, teaching activities, and teaching materials that I have prepared as course requirements all through the program. To me, this has been an interesting part of the courses, and I have found it very helpful. However, as reflection helps teachers to be aware of what they actually do in their classes and how things go inside the classroom (Alger, 2006), it should not be limited to student teachers. Regarding this point Alger (2006) points out, "For these students, [reflection] is part of the language and culture of teaching. However, without the structure, audience, and collaboration provided in their teacher education program,

how can student teachers progress when reflection becomes primarily a private endeavor?” (p. 299). Therefore, whether or not the students of TESOL programs such as AUS MATESOL continue to reflect on their practice once they leave the program was a thought-provoking question and ultimately formed the core of the current study.

There has been a lot of research in the context of pre-service teacher education programs on the significance of reflection. The results of these studies indicate that most of the participants of these courses have generally developed the skills of reflecting to some extent. However, there has been little research, if any, on whether the participants of these programs have developed the dispositions to be reflective practitioners and will continue to reflect on their teaching as a part of their practice once they leave these programs. Regarding this point, Alger (2006) points out that “without a university supervisor, cooperative teacher, professor or other teacher colleague to help probe the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson more deeply, once student teachers leave the teacher education program, dialogic and critical reflection may be scarce” (p. 299). Therefore, this study served as an attempt to investigate the engagement of some of the graduates of the AUS MATESOL program with reflection and reflective practice in the real world of their own classrooms.

As a student of this program, I have always been interested in finding out whether or not the valuable practice of reflective teaching is exercised outside the realms of teacher education programs and is considered a useful activity by practicing teachers. That was one reason why I chose this subject as the topic of my investigation. I believe that looking at reflection through the eyes of the participants of my study who are reflective practitioners in one way or another has added to my understanding of the notion of reflective teaching, teachers’ perceptions of it, and

their degree of engagement with it. This rewarding experience familiarized me with the real nature of the topic under investigation in the real world of teaching; something tangible beyond the theories discussed in the literature. Apart from this personal gain in insight and understanding, I also hope the results of this study provide teachers with useful insights into the true nature of reflective practice, familiarize them with the benefits as well as the problems of this approach, and encourage both novice and experienced teachers to be critical of their own practice and seek professional development. Moreover, hopefully this study provides teacher educators, mentors, and university professors teaching TESOL courses with an understanding of the benefits and problems of reflection as perceived by practicing teachers, which in turn might help them with their future educational decisions regarding the integration of reflective activities into the curriculum. Thus, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do the participating teachers perceive “Reflective Practice?”
2. Do they consider themselves “Reflective Practitioners?” Why or why not?
3. What form of reflection, if any, do they use in their practice?
4. What factors determine their engagement with “Reflection” and “Reflective Teaching?”

In order to undertake this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four university teachers, three females and one male, who graduated from the AUS MATESOL program, and are now teaching at two different universities in the United Arab Emirates. Data were collected during a period of one week in June 2010. The participants were interviewed for about 25 minutes each. The questions were designed in order to elicit information about the participants’ experience with reflection and

reflective teaching as students, their current degree of engagement with reflection, the modes through which they reflect on their practice, and the benefits and problems of reflective practice as perceived by them. All the interviews were transcribed and read carefully, and the participants were contacted via phone calls and emails for further clarification on unclear issues or issues that emerged after the interviews were transcribed. Different themes were derived from the data and organized into categories, which are presented and discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Overview of the Chapters and the Appendices

Chapter one presents the introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, methods that were used in order to collect data, and finally an overview of the chapters included in the paper. Chapter two includes a review of the literature on the history and definitions of reflection and reflective practice. It also reviews different forms, levels, and modes of reflection as discussed in the literature as well as the advantages and limitations of reflection and reflective practice. Chapter three discusses the design of the study, the methods, procedures, and techniques that were used in order to collect data. It also gives a detailed description of the instrument that was used for data collection, piloting of the instrument, participants of the study, role of the researcher, ethical issues, and issues related to reliability and validity of the data. Chapter four presents the data analysis and findings and includes a discussion of the findings. Chapter five contains a summary of the findings of the study, conclusions, implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research. There are three appendices included in this paper. Appendix A is the interview guide that contains the questions asked during the

interviews. Appendix B is the consent form which was signed by all the participants of the study. Finally, Appendix C is Maha's interview transcript.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Teaching is a very demanding job. Teachers have to face a wide range of dilemmas in their professional lives. They have to prepare their material, deal with different classroom issues, organize and control the class, motivate students, and at the same time keep their families satisfied (Pollard, et al., 2008). Dealing with all these challenges requires teachers to develop themselves professionally and improve their practice. As Bartlett (1990) notes, in the field of teaching a variety of approaches to teacher development have been recommended, such as the teacher-as-researcher, action research, clinical supervision, and the critical pedagogy perspective. Bartlett further adds that “another form of inquiry intended to help teachers improve their practice is reflective teaching” (p. 202). Reflection and reflective teaching have been considered essential components of teachers’ professional development. Day (1993) argues that “few discussions on professional development occur without some reference to the central role that reflection plays in the learning life of a teacher. It is the *sine qua non* of the ‘teacher-researcher’, ‘action research’, and ‘reflective practitioner’ movement” (p. 83).

History of Reflection and Reflective Thought

Reflection and its usage in education can be traced back to Dewey’s educational theories about “traditional” and “progressive” education and the relationship between experience and education (Dewey, 1944, 1997a, 1997b). Dewey (1997a) highlights the significance of reflection in progressive education and argues

that traditional education which considers learners to be mere receivers of information, “imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods” (p. 18) upon learners. However, as Dewey states, the young have such a wide range of abilities that this imposition impedes their active participation in their own learning process. According to Dewey, the traditional view of learning treats knowledge as a static entity which is “taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future” (p. 19). On the contrary, as Dewey puts forward, a progressive view of education emphasizes individuality, freedom of intelligence, learning through experience, learning skills as means rather than ends, and getting familiar with the world as it is changing. He points out that reflection and reflective thought have a significant role in this view of education.

Dewey (1944) highlights the importance of “good habits of thinking” (p. 152) in education and states that educators should focus on promoting these habits in students by providing them with the essentials. According to him, “thinking is the method of an educative experience; [therefore], the essentials of methods are ... identical with the essentials of reflection” (p. 163). Regarding the essentials, Dewey states that there should be an activity in which the learner is interested and a genuine issue to trigger thought. Also, the learner should have the information to deal with the issue, come up with solutions, apply them, and test their validity. According to Dewey, thinking happens when individuals need to deal with uncertain issues, since “only what is finished, completed, is wholly assured, [and] where there is reflection, there is suspense” (p. 148). As he further adds, reflection and reflective thinking help individuals to “reach a conclusion [and] project a possible termination on the basis of

what is already given” (p. 148). Thus, to Dewey, reflective thought pertains to “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the future conclusion to which it tends” (1997b, p. 6).

History of Reflective Practice

The concepts of reflection and reflective practice are not new in the field of education. They have been around for about half a century (Qing, 2009). Clarke (1995) argues that the idea of reflective practice came into existence as a response to the notion of “teacher as technician,” which assumed that problems related to teaching can be generalized across different contexts and thus, they “did not require on-site interpretation or adjustment” (p. 244). The problem of a technical approach to teaching is that “an over-reliance on technical problem solving often leads to frustration and disappointment” (p. 257), because it is not able to respond to each classroom’s unique problems. Clarke points out that in this view, the knowledge of teaching is seen as received knowledge rather than knowledge-in-action, and classroom problems are considered to be routine problems which can be predicted and regulated. But Schön (1987, 1991) claimed that teachers’ jobs are beyond problem solving; teachers try to come to an understanding of their own contexts through the process of problem setting.

Definition of Reflection and Reflective Practice

Researchers have different perceptions of the concept of reflection and reflective practice. Gunn (2010) notes, “There is no one set definition of reflection or reflective teaching that everyone agrees on” (p. 2). Furthermore, Bartlett (1990) states

that reflection “is more than ‘thinking’ and focuses on the day-to-day classroom teaching of the individual teacher as well as the institutional structures in which teacher and students work” (p. 204). Moreover, Larrivee (2008) argues that reflection deals with acknowledging, articulating, and challenging one’s own beliefs. Qing (2009) defines reflective teaching as “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 experience” (p. 36). As Qing further notes,

Reflective teaching asks EFL teachers to stop, to slow down in order to notice, analyze, and inquire on what they are doing. It tells them to relate theory and practice, to evaluate both old and new teaching experience, and to make interpretations on the situations encountered. (p. 36)

Thus, as Bartlett (1990) states, becoming a reflective teacher requires teachers to “move away from the ‘how to’ questions, which have a utilitarian value, to the ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions, which regard instructional and managerial techniques not as ends in themselves but as a part of broader educational purposes” (p. 205).

Forms and Levels of Reflection

The literature defines different forms of reflection. Schön (1991), based on his earlier work in 1987, puts forward a discussion of two forms of reflection, “Reflection-in-action” and “Reflection-on-action,” and notes, “Both ordinary people and professional practitioners often think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it. Stimulated by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action” (p. 50). Schön (1991) argues that reflection-in-action “is bounded by the ‘action-present’, the zone of time in which action can still

make a difference to the situation” (p. 63), and emerges under particular circumstances. Schön argues that when our actions end in expected results, we do not think about them. On the contrary, when the results turn out to be surprising, “we may respond by reflecting-in-action,” which focuses “on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action” (p. 56). Schön (1987) also argues that reflection-on-action takes place when our reflection is not directly linked to present actions; it takes place when we think back on our past actions in order to examine them and make sense of them.

Researchers use different terms when they discuss various levels of reflection. Van Manen (1977) describes three levels of reflection and explains that the first level of reflection is the technical level where means are more important than ends. On this level, there are some principles defined, which need to be followed in order to achieve a predetermined end. On the second level, reflection refers to examining “individual and cultural experiences, meaning, perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, and pre-suppositions, for the purpose of orienting practical actions” (p. 226). Finally, on the highest level of reflection which is the critical reflection, not only ends but also means matter, and reflection at this level seeks “worthwhile educational ends in self-determination, community, and on the basis of justice, equality, and freedom” (p. 227).

On the same issue, Boody (2008) states that there are four accounts of reflection. The first one is reflection as retrospection where “the teacher reexamines and ponders over prior experience to make sense of it, to learn from it, and presumably to become a better teacher in the future” (p. 500). The second form of reflection is Dewey’s reflection as problem solving, which is an on-going process,

where the teacher becomes aware of a classroom problem, thinks about the problem and analyzes it, proposes some solutions, tests them, and finally experiences a feeling of satisfaction as a result of solving the problem. The third form of reflection is Van Manen's critical reflection, which involves not only coming to an understanding of the situation, but also "exploring what is most educationally worthwhile and creating the conditions that would allow all people to equally join in the dialogue on what is of most worth" (p. 501). Finally, Boody refers to Schön's reflection-in-action as the fourth form of reflection.

Reflection has different levels and there is a hierarchy in the classification of reflection, ranging from the simplest form of reflection which involves describing the actions undertaken in classrooms, to the richest form of reflection which pertains to critical reflection. Researchers and experts in the field of education use different terminology to distinguish different levels of reflection (Alger, 2006; Larrivee, 2008). Alger (2006) explains that there are three types of reflection: descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection. Descriptive reflection involves a descriptive explanation of what takes place within a classroom with no reference to the underlying reasons for undertaking those actions. Dialogic reflection is a level of reflection where teachers question their thoughts and actions. This is where they begin to raise doubts about what they usually take for granted. Critical reflection, which is the most rewarding of all, goes beyond the actions and "honors multiple perspectives and expresses awareness that events and actions may be influenced by sociocultural and political realities" (Alger, 2006, p. 294).

Regarding the same issue, Larrivee (2008) defines four levels of reflection: pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection.

Larrivee explains that in pre-reflection “teachers react to students and classroom situations automatically, without conscious consideration of alternative responses” (p. 342). In surface reflection, which is the same as technical reflection or descriptive reflection, teachers are mainly concerned with “what works rather than with any consideration of the value of goals as ends in themselves” (p. 342). In pedagogical reflection, as Larrivee notes, “teachers reflect on educational goals, the theories underlying approaches, and the connections between theoretical principles and practices” (p. 343). Finally, in critical reflection teachers focus on both their practice and the social context in which the practice is situated.

The Importance of Teachers’ Views

Reflection requires teachers to uncover the underlying views, understandings, and beliefs behind their actions in their classrooms, which subsequently raises their awareness of what they actually do in their classes, and what actions they take in dealing with different classroom issues (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Many researchers call attention to the significance of teachers’ views about teaching as well as the importance of eliciting these beliefs and assumptions since “these understandings and beliefs function as interpretive lenses through which beginning teachers make sense of their experience” (Alger, 2006, p. 288). Regarding the importance of teachers’ educational beliefs and their effects on teachers’ practice, Bartlett (1990) notes that teachers’ actions are influenced by “the beliefs and chains of reasoning that are held before and after the occurrence of the action” (p. 203). Donaghue (2003) states, “Teachers’ beliefs influence the acceptance and uptake of new approaches, techniques, and activities, and therefore, play an important part in teacher development” (p. 344). In fact, what highlights the importance of teachers’

beliefs about teaching is the fact that there is a great difference between input, uptake, and output in teacher development, which indicates that not all the input teachers are provided with in teacher training courses will be transferred into practice. Some of these ideas are filtered due to several reasons, one of which is the discrepancy between the input and teachers' own personal beliefs (Donaghue, 2003).

Amobi (2003) states that teachers' beliefs and assumptions about education play an important role in shaping their approach toward teaching,

There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between philosophy and practice in education. One's system of educational beliefs informs practice, and practice in turn helps develop and clarify educational beliefs. This ongoing process depicts the cyclical nature of the relationship between educational belief and practice. (p. 345)

Richards and Lockhart (1994) point out that teaching is a personal profession which allows teachers to bring their different personal assumptions about teaching with them to the field. These personal and diverse views and values about teaching "serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision making and action, and hence constitute what has been termed the culture of teaching" (p. 30). The diversity of teachers' views and values is because they are driven from a number of different sources. According to Richards and Lockhart, one of the sources of teachers' views is teachers' own experience as language learners that might affect their beliefs about teaching. Vazir (2006) explains that novice teachers bring their own individual experiences with them to the classroom and "use their interpretations of those experiences as models for reasoning about the nature of teaching and what teachers do" (p. 447). Moreover, Richards and Lockhart note that teachers' experience of what

works best might be their primary source of beliefs about teaching. In addition, teachers might be required to follow certain styles and practices within different institutions, which can affect their beliefs about teaching. Apart from that, teachers' personal preferences and their personality factors can determine their beliefs about teaching. Finally, different existing theories, methods, and approaches that teachers want to apply to their own practice can affect their beliefs about teaching.

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of eliciting teachers' views and assumptions about teaching and education, and used different instruments in order to encourage teachers to verbalize the underlying assumptions and rationales behind their beliefs and educational decisions. Donaghue (2003) used the "Repertory Grid Technique," which is an awareness raising activity, in order to elicit the beliefs of a group of English language teachers from various European countries who came to England in order to participate in a two-week methodology course. The results of the activity indicated that the participants enjoyed the activity very much since it "helped [them] a lot to think about [their attitudes] and about [their] main approaches to teaching" (p. 348). Moreover, the trainers who implemented the activity believed that the activity "introduced and encouraged the notion of reflective thinking which underpinned the course" (p. 350).

Amobi (2003) investigated the attitudes of 47 first semester pre-service teachers using the "Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs" which is designed to assess educators' tendencies toward either the teacher-centered or student-centered educational belief system. The survey also consisted of a qualitative section where a narrative analysis of the survey results was included. In the analysis, the participants' educational belief system and the perspectives espoused by that system were

explained. The participants were first asked to complete the online survey, and then acknowledge—by agreeing and disagreeing with the survey classifications and analyses—whether the classifications and analyses were actually representing their educational beliefs or not. The results of the study indicated that there was “a high level of consistency with both the respondents’ observations of survey-classified belief systems and the educational purpose focus of each belief system” (p. 359). But, as Amobi (2003) points out, the results of these kinds of instruments which are designed to elicit teachers’ beliefs and assumptions about teaching, are “just the tip of the iceberg,” and are only to empower beginner teachers, and provide teachers with a chance of “having ownership of their own educational beliefs” (p. 359). Larrivee (2000) notes that it is imperative for teachers to not only examine their personal beliefs and assumptions about teaching, but also tie those beliefs to the pedagogical decisions they make in their classrooms. Larrivee notes, “If teachers latch onto techniques without examination of what kind of teaching practices would be congruent with their beliefs, aligned with their designated teaching structure, and harmonious with their personal styles, they will have just a bag of tricks” (p. 293).

The Advantages of Reflection

Reflection is considered to be an initial step toward professionalism. According to Bean and Stevens (2002), “the ability to reflect is one of the hallmarks of an effective educator” (p. 205). Reflection provides teachers with an opportunity to have a better understanding of their practice, be critical of it, judge it in terms of what went well and what did not go very well, and consequently improve it (Alger, 2006). Regarding the advantages of reflection Amobi (2003) notes, “The judgment that is formed as a result of reflecting on an observation of a new experience in light of past

knowledge and experience, produces a heightened understanding of the consequences that will result from the present situation” (p. 346). On this issue, Vazir (2006) argues that reflection involves reconstruction, and “reconstruction...is rebuilding old concepts and experiences in order to deal with the demands of present teaching situations” (p. 447).

Many researchers consider reflection to be a very beneficial and constructive self-awareness raising activity for teachers. Pollard, et al. (2008) state that a very important aspect of reflective teaching is knowing one’s self. They point out that teachers have weaknesses and strengths and “classroom life tends to reveal these fairly quickly” (p. 104). They add that reflective teaching is about “facing such features of ourselves in a constructive and objective manner and in a way which incorporates a continuous capacity to change and develop” (p. 104). Regarding this issue, Larrivee (2008) points out that understanding one’s self, which involves a deep examination of one’s beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and values, is an essential element of critical reflection.

Reflection can also help teachers to overcome classroom routine, which can sometimes be a threatening issue. Qing (2009) notes that gaining experience in teaching helps teachers form their teaching strategies for dealing with classroom routines. But, “while a teacher’s teaching style provides a means of coping with many of the routine demands of teaching, there is also a danger that it can hinder a teacher’s professional growth” (p. 35). As Qing explains, “if teachers remain at a stage where practice is mechanical, without learning from their experiences in class and relating them to theory, their practice will never be considered professional” (p. 39). Regarding this point, Gunn (2010) states that pursuing a reflective practice can

prevent teachers from “falling into an attitude of routine, repetitive ‘one size fits all’ teaching” (p. 208).

Adopting a Reflective Practice

According to Larrivee (2000), “the path to developing as a critically reflective teacher cannot be prescribed with an intervention formula. The route cannot be preplanned—it must be lived” (p. 306). Reflective practice requires teachers to think critically about their practice and reflect on it. There are a number of issues that potential reflective practitioners should take into consideration. Pedro (2005) states, “Questioning and problem-solving are two ways that individuals can become reflective about their actions in the classroom” (p. 57). In addition, in order to become critical reflective teachers, teachers need to exercise control over their actions, and see them “in relation to the historical, social, and cultural context in which [their] teaching is actively embedded” (Bartlett, 1990, p. 205). According to Bartlett, “becoming a critically reflective teacher is intended to allow [teachers] to develop [themselves] individually and collectively; to deal with contemporary events and structures...and not to take these structures for granted” (p. 205). Bartlett further explains,

Becoming a critically reflective teacher...involves the realisation that as second language teachers, we are both the producers and creators of our own history. In practical terms this means we shall engage in systematic and social forms of inquiry that examine the origin and consequences of everyday teaching so that we come to see the factors that impede change and thus improvement. (p. 206)

Becoming a reflective practitioner requires teachers to develop certain characteristics within themselves. Pollard, et al. (2008) state that teachers need to demonstrate three very important attitudes if they want to become reflective teachers: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. They explain that “open mindedness is an essential attribute for rigorous reflection; because any sort of enquiry that is consciously based on partial evidence, only weakens itself” (p. 20). As they further note, reflective teachers need to be “willing to reflect upon [themselves] and to challenge [their] own assumptions, prejudices and ideologies, as well as those of others” (p. 20). Regarding the other expected attitudes of a reflective practitioner, Pollard, et al. explain that while responsibility pertains to considering the consequences that follow each educational decision, wholeheartedness “refers essentially to the way in which such consideration takes place” (p. 20). Moreover, Stanley (1998) states that it might be difficult for teachers to sustain their commitment to reflection since reflection might uncover some unpleasant things about one’s practice. Stanley explains, “In going deeper into reflection on one’s teaching, it is not unusual to begin to find issues of prejudice or favoritism toward certain students, learning styles, or theories of teaching and learning” (p. 587). Therefore, as Stanley points out, “it takes a healthy degree of ego development to put oneself and one’s work under the microscope” (p. 586).

Cycle of Reflective Teaching

Teachers interested in reflective practice are required to engage themselves in a cycle which is not linear. In other words, as Bartlett (1990) notes, in reflecting on their practice teachers might need to go through some parts of the cycle several times or skip others. According to Bartlett, this cycle includes the elements of “mapping,”

“informing,” “contesting,” “appraising,” and “acting.” While mapping pertains to the process of data collection through different methods such as journal keeping and audio and video recording, informing refers to searching for underlying principles of teaching. As Bartlett further explains, for teachers “[informing] begins the first steps toward identifying [their] uncertainty about [their] taken-for-granted and most preciously held ideas about [their] teaching and its broader purposes” (p. 211). Contesting refers to questioning the assumptions about teaching, and involves “a search for inconsistencies and contradictions in what [teachers] do and how [they] think” (p. 212). According to Bartlett, appraisal refers to the search for new ways of teaching which are “consistent with [teachers’] new understanding” (p. 213), and finally acting, refers to putting into action the new understanding of teaching.

Different Ways of Reflection

There are a number of different activities that can help teachers have a better understanding of their own practice, and engage in reflective teaching: keeping teaching journals and teaching portfolios, writing lesson reports, conducting action research, undertaking case studies, audio and video recording lessons, classroom observations, and forming reflective inquiry groups. Many researchers in the field of education and teacher training argue in favor of using journal writing as a way to promote reflection among the participants. Porter, Goldstein, Leatherman, and Conard (1990), for example, explain that the use of journals in teacher education is motivated by three ideas. First, writing can serve as a “discovery process—a way to explore ideas, generate and connect ideas, change preconceived notions, and connect abstract ideas and experiences” (p. 227). Second, journals help beginner teachers to engage themselves in a social activity, and have a sense of belonging to a community. Third,

it helps them to be actively involved in their own process of learning, and “make their teaching more ‘process’ than ‘product’ oriented” (p. 228).

Porter, et al. (1990) attribute seven different advantages to the use of journals in teacher preparation courses. First, students can write about the problematic aspects of the course in their journals and receive feedback from the instructor. More importantly, if a problem is mentioned by a number of students, then the instructor can clarify the issue for the whole class once they meet. Second, journaling promotes autonomous learning, since students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Third, the process of journal writing and receiving feedback from the teacher affects the relationship between the two of them, and helps students verbalize their thoughts and become confident. Fourth, the activity can save a lot of time, and consequently class time can be used in a more productive way. Fifth, journal writing helps students to relate the course content to their own practice. Sixth, journal writing increases student-student and teacher-student interaction. Finally, “journals make the class more process oriented” (p. 237).

Journal writing is widely used in teacher education programs for a variety of different reasons. According to Bailey (1990), keeping a journal is very beneficial for beginner teachers, since “the novice teacher must feel free to reflect, experiment, criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions in the journal. Otherwise its main benefits in teacher development—personal development and insights about teaching—will be neglected” (p. 218). Bailey states that she used diary writing as an option for her students’ research projects in the Practicum, because “while these journals were necessarily always gems of ethnographic investigation, they were often extremely useful exercises for the teachers-in-preparation, both in generating

behavioral changes and in developing self-confidence” (p. 217). Although novice teachers can discover their unnoticed strengths and weaknesses through keeping journals, Bailey suggests that diary writing be used as an option for teachers or pre-service teachers, since “some people are simply not comfortable with self-examination and introspection, and the issues that emerge can be painfully revealing” (p. 225).

Numrich (1996) argues that journals and diary studies have been widely used in teacher education programs in order to reveal idiosyncratic variables in students’ learning processes. Numerich examined the diary entries of 26 novice teachers taking Practicum and found some common experiences shared by these new teachers. Numrich notes that examining these entries can help teacher educators become aware of novice teachers’ needs. However, experienced teachers can also benefit from journal writing. Bailey (1990) states that diary keeping has an awareness-raising function for teachers. However, as she argues, simply keeping journals does not benefit teachers. Rather, the diarist should reread the entries and look for patterns in the entries. This will help the diarist to learn from the entries. Bailey points out that “in reworking, rethinking, and interpreting the diary entries, teachers can gain powerful insights into their own classroom behavior and motivation” (p. 225). Bailey, in a study where she engaged herself in journal writing, found out that she was falling into the “vocabulary explanation trap.” She states that by writing in a teaching journal she understood that she was over-explaining some vocabulary items and keeping a journal helped her notice the problem. She explains, “When I realized what I was doing by writing in my journal, I made a conscientious effort not to explain vocabulary items unasked” (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 1998, p. 549). In addition,

journals written by students provide very valuable information for the instructor or the supervisor who reads the journal. Vazir (2005), a Pakistani teacher who keeps a journal herself and encourages her students to keep a written record of their experience, believes that reflection helped her “construct and reconstruct new ways of learning and teaching” (p. 449). She also notes that reading her students’ journals promoted her understanding of their learning processes.

Not only writing reflections but also sharing them with each other can help student teachers to learn collaboratively through scaffolding. Using electronic modes of dialogue has provided teacher trainers with an opportunity to help student teachers share their thoughts with each other. Creating online journals is one way to do this. Bean and Stevens (2002) used online journals with both pre-service and in-service teachers in a university in the United States where the participants were required to contribute to weekly online bulletin boards during the course. Bean and Stevens found “scaffolded reflection” very beneficial, because it provided the participants with a chance to “formulate and articulate their personal belief system” (p. 205).

Although keeping a teaching journal has a number of advantages for both novice and experienced teachers, there are problems with it. Regarding this point, Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) argue that the fact that the intended audience of the journal is the author, allows him or her to “write candidly and extensively without premature culling or editing of the data” (p. 61). Also, if teachers choose not to share the insights they gain from this activity with their colleagues, they would still experience a feeling of isolation, which is a common problem among teachers, as well as preventing themselves and others from being introduced to new ideas. Finally, some teachers consider journal writing to be a time-consuming activity. Regarding

this point, Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan suggest that teachers manage the time they want to spend on writing journals by assigning specific times for journal writing and deciding about the frequency of writing their entries. They even suggest that teachers record their journals on a tape by talking their entries into a tape recorder.

Keeping lesson reports is another way of reflecting. A lesson report, as Richards and Farrell point out, is a written record of what happened in the class during the lesson. As Richards and Farrell (2005) suggest, teachers should try to answer these three questions while writing a lesson report (p. 39),

- What aspects of the lesson worked well?
- What aspects of the lesson did not work particularly well? Why?
- What aspects of the lesson should be done differently next time?

In order to answer these questions, teachers need to think very carefully about their actions and pedagogical decisions, and speculate on the success or failure of their actions and decisions. This helps them to think critically about their practice and improve it.

Keeping teaching portfolios is another way of developing one's practice. Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (1998) state that "a portfolio is a collection of artifacts through which teachers present their own professional persona" (p. 550). They explain that a teaching portfolio usually consists of examples of lesson plans, tests, teaching materials, a list of the teacher's duties, a statement of teaching philosophy, a list of one's strengths, test scores, students' evaluations, records of peer observations, and reasons why each of them are included. As they note, keeping such a file "confront[s] the compiler with the reality of his or her teaching persona from the perspective of significant professional others" (p. 551). Moreover, a portfolio can be

beneficial for teachers in three different ways. First of all, a portfolio is “evidence of the standard of the teacher’s performance” (p. 98). Second, keeping a portfolio and viewing it helps teachers with their future decisions and facilitates future improvements. Finally, teaching portfolios can promote collaboration among colleagues, since they can share and discuss the contents with each other (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Despite all the advantages of keeping a teaching portfolio, teachers might find it difficult and therefore be reluctant to keep one. As Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) point out, completing a teaching portfolio takes time. Also, as it is not possible to include each and every detail about the activities used in the classroom, teachers need to decide what to include and what not to include in the portfolio which is a problem per se. Moreover, some teachers consider portfolios to be means of being judged by others, and think that “they have not had enough opportunities to shape the evaluative process of which their portfolios are an essential part.” Consequently, “they might ... feel understandable resistance, and even resentment, at the way they view the process as being done to them rather than done with them” (p. 230). They suggest that teachers be provided with appropriate input about this issue; so that these negative responses can be avoided.

Another activity that can help teachers become reflective of their own practice is undertaking action research. Action research can assist teachers “bridge the gap between research and their teaching” (McDonough, 2006, p. 34). As Richards and Farrell (2005) note, the word “action research” has two dimensions: while the word research “refers to a systematic approach to carrying out investigations and collecting information that is designed to illuminate an issue or problem and to improve

classroom practice,” the word action pertains to “taking practical action to resolve classroom problems” (p. 171). Therefore, action research, as Allwright and Bailey (1991) point out, requires an intervention and “involves taking an action and systematically observing what follows” (p. 42). According to them, action research is focused on the classroom and “simply tries to investigate what actually happens inside the classroom. At its most narrow, it is in fact research which treats classroom interaction as virtually the only object worthy of investigation” (p. 2). Action research can also be conducted in collaboration with a group of people. Qing (2009) notes that “collaborative involvement in action research strengthens the decisions that teachers will make on professional practice through critical thinking, identification of classroom situations, planning, observation, reflection, and intervention” (p. 38).

“Teachers who have carried out action research often report significant changes to their understanding of teaching” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 171). That is one reason why in teacher education programs, teachers are encouraged to conduct action research in their classes. Sowa (2009) notes that conducting action research helps teachers become reflective and confident, and develop their practice. Sowa examined how conducting action research helped teachers develop reflective practice and become familiar with the teaching of English language. The study took place in an ESL Methods course at a university in the United States. The participants of the study were six graduate students who were licensed to teach in the United States, but were not certified to teach ELLs (English Language Learners). During the course, the participants were taught what action research was and what processes it involved. Then, they were required to undertake an action research project with ELLs and reflect on the process of conducting the research in their logs throughout the semester.

In addition, at the end of the semester, the participants were surveyed. The results indicated that the participants found the project very useful, since it helped them have a better understanding of their students' needs, and made them "more aware of how and what they were teaching whether they were currently teaching ELLs or not" (p. 1030). Furthermore, the participants noted that conducting action research helped them develop a reflective practice on the one hand and affected their dispositions on the other. As Sowa notes, the participants stated that "they realized that they needed to be more open, more patient, more flexible, and more prepared to listen" (p. 1030).

Regarding the effect and the importance of conducting action research, McDonough (2006) investigated whether carrying out action research as part of an elective graduate seminar affected the professional development of the participants of the seminar. The participants were graduate teaching assistants teaching in foreign and second language departments. McDonough analyzed the participants' journals, reflective essays, action research reports, and oral and written feedback, and found out that the participants "gained a broader understanding of research, developed an appreciation for peer collaboration, and adopted new L2 teaching practices" (p. 33) as a result of participating in the seminar. In addition, McDonough contacted the participants by email 13 months later in order to see whether the process of conducting action research had any lasting effects on them, and found out that the participants believed that the seminar had positive effects on their professional development, although they had not conducted any new projects since the end of that course. However, McDonough believes that the reported positive effect might be due to the fact that the participants were responding to her directly and not anonymously.

According to Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001), while undertaking action research has a number of advantages such as “the potential professional development of the teachers involved” (p. 141), it also brings about a number of problems. First of all, the whole process of conducting action research takes time. Teachers need to hypothesize the project, collect data, analyze the data, think about an appropriate intervention, implement it, and observe the results. It also takes a lot of effort which might not necessarily be valued by the administrations. Moreover, as Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan note, “the agenda [of the action research] can be hijacked by the administration” (p. 141). They explain that since action research projects are usually together with innovations within the institution’s curriculum, the results of the projects might be used in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the innovations. Also, some teachers consider conducting action research to be an extra burden, or even “an exercise in self-aggrandizement” (p. 142) since teachers are not paid to conduct action research projects in their classes. In addition, some teachers find it difficult to master the technical skills needed for conducting research projects. Finally, there is a danger that the process of conducting action research interferes with the main duty of a teacher, which is material preparation and teaching. Despite all these pitfalls, Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan believe that undertaking action research is “an avenue for professional development” (p. 143).

Conducting case studies is another way that can help teachers reflect on their practice. Richards and Farrell (2005) state that “case analysis in teacher education involves collecting information over time about a teaching situation and using that information to help better understand the situation and to derive principles from it” (p. 126). Alger (2006) conducted a study to understand the role and development of

reflection in novice teachers. She explored the effectiveness of a case writing assignment that was designed to promote reflection in a Methods course. The nine participants of her study were asked to choose a dilemma in their own practice, address it, and try to solve the problem. Finally, they were asked to speculate on the success or failure of their actions and present their cases to the whole class. At the end of the course, the students were interviewed to track the development of reflection over time. The results indicated that the activity promoted the notion of reflection among the participants and helped them have a better understanding of classroom problems.

Videotaping one's lesson is another technique that is used in order to promote reflection. Teachers can videotape themselves while they are teaching and watch the video later on. Amobi (2005) notes that videotaping lessons is widely used in microteaching activities in teacher education programs, and explains that the videotaped lessons taught by pre-service teachers can be later viewed by them, analyzed, and reflected upon. According to Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (1998), an important advantage of video-taping is that it provides teachers with a very objective view of their teaching. Regarding this issue, Qing (2009) notes that "the information portrayed in these recordings will answer those doubts that usually arise when we have finished a class" (p. 38).

Although watching videotaped lessons of themselves or others can be a very rewarding experience for teachers, there are some negative aspects involved in video recording lessons while they are in progress. Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) argue that the presence of a camera may affect the events that are happening in the class. Moreover, cameras can only record what is directly in front of them, which means

that it is not easy to capture everything that is happening in the class all at once. According to them, the solution to this problem is having someone operate the camera. But as they further state, “The video camera itself can be enough of an intrusion even without the extra person” (p. 127). Also, the sound of a videotaped lesson is not usually very clear which requires teachers to use special microphones while video-taping the lesson.

Conducting peer observations is another way of enhancing one’s reflective abilities. Richards and Farrell (2005) explain, “Peer observation refers to a teacher or other observer closely watching and monitoring a language lesson or part of a lesson in order to gain an understanding of some aspects of classroom interaction” (p. 85). They further add that peer observation can help teachers raise their awareness of classroom issues and the way these issues can be solved. In addition, peer observation helps “narrow the gap between one’s imagined view of teaching and what actually occurs in the classroom” (p. 94). Qing (2009) argues that peer observation is beneficial in two ways. First, teachers will be exposed to different teaching styles by observing other teachers, and second, they will be provided with a chance to reflect on their own practice. Qing even suggests that teachers conduct peer observations in pairs and discuss their findings with each other. However, as Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) put forward, having an observer in the class might be a threatening issue to some teachers. This might be why some teachers are not interested in having an observer in their classes.

Forming reflective inquiry groups is another way of initiating reflection in teaching. In this method of reflection, teachers form groups and then discuss with each other issues encountered in their classes. Then based on their discussions, actions

are taken in order to deal with the issues. This method of reflection “builds trust among staff, improves teachers’ practice, and engages staff in serious commitment on [the] field [of teaching English], and it tells learners that they are important in the process, and that there is a profound interest in facilitating the acquisition of English” (Qing, 2009, p. 38). Regarding this point, Ermeling (2010) conducted a study with four experienced high school Science teachers from a school in Southern California, where the participants formed a collaborative teacher inquiry group to discuss their classroom problems. The study was motivated to find out whether participation in the inquiry group affected the participants’ classroom practice. The results indicated that participating in inquiry groups led to “detectable changes in teachers’ practice” (p. 387) and improvement in their performances.

Thus, keeping teaching journals, lesson reports, teaching portfolios, conducting classroom observations, audio and video recording of lessons, forming reflective inquiry groups, and undertaking action research and case studies can help teachers enhance their understanding of classroom life and consequently improve their own practice. Richards and Farrell (2005) point out that these activities serve as strategies for teachers and course coordinators to come to an understanding of teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. They state that the information which is obtained from these activities can help teachers in three different ways. First of all, the results of these activities help teachers become confident and have a positive view of themselves. Second, these activities can help teachers discover a problem in their practice which they were not aware of. Finally, these activities can be very helpful in identifying the areas of one’s practice that need development.

These different ways of promoting reflection can be used either alone or in combination with each other for both student teachers and experienced teachers. Clarke and Otaky (2006) conducted a study with Bachelor of Education students at a university in the United Arab Emirates where they used face-to-face and online discussions as well as journals. In the participants' oral and written comments, the researchers found evidence that indicated that the participants engaged in reflection. Furthermore, Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (1998) report on a study where the three of them collaboratively engaged themselves in three reflective activities: journal writing, keeping teaching portfolios, and videotaping their lessons. They believe that "[they] benefitted not only from [their] initial use of these three practices but also from [their] communal discussion about them" (554). They concluded, "The self-selected use of any of the three procedures described above can lead to powerful professional development, especially when the data are shared with trusted peers" (p. 554).

Teachers might have special preferences toward some of the different modes of reflecting which were mentioned earlier. Farrell (2001) suggests that teachers try a variety of different modes of reflection and see which ones work best for them. Farrell undertook a case study where he investigated how different modes of reflection could promote professional development in an experienced Korean EFL teacher. The methods of reflection used in this study were classroom observation, individual discussions with the researcher, group discussions with a group of four other EFL teachers including the researcher, and journal writing. The results indicated that the participant felt more comfortable with reflecting through group discussions. She did not like to keep journals; nor was she interested in having someone observe her class. Therefore, Farrell suggests that teachers tailor reflection and its different forms to

their individual needs and choose to reflect through their own preferred mode of reflection.

Resisting Reflection

As Stanley (1998) points out, becoming a reflective practitioner requires teachers to engage themselves in a series of phases. According to her, these phases are engaging with reflection, thinking reflectively, using reflection, sustaining reflection, and finally practicing it. As she further notes, reflection requires time, energy, and commitment. She states that “personal, professional, and contextual factors may limit and even inhibit a teacher’s ability to engage with reflection” (p. 586). She also adds that “personal issues of self-esteem may trigger responses of guilt, pain, and self-doubt when teachers examine their teaching” (p. 586). That is why the experience of reflection is not pleasant for some teachers. Regarding this point, Stanley believes that “if the experience of reflection is too painful, a teacher may consciously or unconsciously resist learning to reflect” (p. 586).

In the literature on reflective practice, indications of resisting reflection have been spotted among participants of teacher education courses. Amobi (2005), for instance, undertook a study with 31 students of a General Methods course for secondary education teachers in the southeastern United States. All the students of the course participated in two microteaching activities, and at the end of the second one were asked to reflect on their experience based on the feedback they got from their peers, their own perceptions, and the videotapes of themselves while they were teaching. Their reflections were examined in order to identify the patterns of reflection. The findings of the study indicated that the microteaching activity was considered a very beneficial activity by the participants. In addition, reflecting on

their experience helped the participants correct their own mistakes, which as Amobi notes, is a very rewarding outcome since learning from mistakes through reflection helps novice teachers improve their capabilities. However, the finding of this study also suggested that although the participants were provided with a pressure-free environment in order to feel comfortable with reflecting on their lessons, evidence of resistance to reflection was noticed in some of the participants who found it hard to scrutinize their teaching actions.

Knowing How to Reflect

Although it is very important to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect upon their practice, it is imperative that teacher trainers make sure that students know what reflection is and how and on what students are supposed to reflect. Shkedi (2000) notes that “the key to educating reflective teachers lies in the quality of the pedagogical guidance provided” (p. 108). As he further adds, failing to provide such guidance “limits the professional growth of critical-reflective teachers and restricts their ability to deal effectively with culturally valued subjects” (p. 109). Shkedi argues that there are three approaches to training reflective teachers: “technical-reflective approach,” “simulative-reflective approach,” and “internship-reflective approach.”

Shkedi explains that in the technical-reflective approach, teaching is considered to be knowledge which can be acquired. In other words, according to this approach, there are certain strategies, methods, and skills that characterize good teaching, and a good teacher is someone who acquires and implements them in her teaching. As Shkedi notes, according to the simulative-reflective approach, reflective teaching is considered to be good teaching. This approach argues that “teachers

cannot make use of defined and anticipated systems,” rather they should deal with “the unexpected and the unconventional” (p. 99). Therefore, teachers are required to research their own teaching contexts continually and try to come to new understandings of their unique teaching contexts. Finally, the internship-reflective approach, like the simulative-reflective approach, highlights the importance of critical reflection. However, the internship-reflective approach deals with teaching in actual contexts and under real circumstances, not practicum activities.

It is essential, therefore, that instructors make sure that students know what reflection is and how they can reflect on their practice. Rarieya (2005) states, “Tutors need to demonstrate to students how they can think about what they read, hear, or view” (p. 292). Rarieya argues that although reflective practice is not something that can be taught, tutors can help students become reflective practitioners. Rarieya conducted a study to explore the uptake of reflective practice by the participants of a teacher education course at Aga Khan University, Pakistan. She explains that although reflection was part of the courses that were offered to participants, some students had difficulty with reflecting, and their reflection was more like a description of the situation. In this study, the participants were asked to keep reflective journals and engage in reflective discussions with other participants of the course. Rarieya notes that the participants did not seem to know how to reflect and they asked for guidelines. Moreover, they were not willing to share their reflections with each other. But as reflection became a part of their routine, they found it easier to reflect. One of the findings of this study was that the participants’ most popular form of reflection was the journal dialogue between them and tutors. Rarieya attributed this finding to the fact that some of the participants were not very skilled at writing.

Regarding the same issue, Gunn (2010) conducted an Exploratory Practice investigation of a situation where her MATESOL students in a practicum course in the United Arab Emirates were showing resistance toward keeping a journal of their beliefs about teaching. She explains that her students found it hard to talk about their beliefs about teaching and learning, and link them to the activities included in their lesson plans. The results of this study indicated that although the students of this course seemed to understand the value of reflection, they chose not to do that in their assignments mainly because “they [did] not want to have a written record of something that showed they had made a mistake or done something ineffective in the class” (p. 215). By listening to her students’ comments, Gunn concluded that the problem was “a lack of understanding of what reflection is” (p. 216). When the students were told what reflection meant and what was good about it, they changed their attitudes toward reflecting on their classroom actions, and started developing their teaching identities. This highlights how essential it is for instructors and teacher educators to make sure that their students know what reflection is.

Limitations of Reflection

Although reflection is encouraged by a number of experts in the field of education and teacher development, there are limitations to it. Webb (2001) states that reflection is not a rational and objective approach to teaching, and argues that if teachers do not take into account the differences among various ethnic and racial groups of students while reflecting on their practice, it is very likely that their practice will turn into a racist one. Webb reasons that reflections is not an objective act; nor are teachers isolated individuals. Therefore, “when reflection is conceived as a process of looking back alone, it may not improve pedagogy,” because “it is not clear

how teachers identify their cultural and racial attitudes toward other groups” (p. 249). Regarding this point, Webb explains that “reflection and reflective teaching do not specifically address the cultural component involved in teaching and teachers may not be able to address issues of gender and race in their pedagogy by themselves” (p. 250). Thus, Webb suggests that teacher educators help pre-service teachers “identify their ethnic and racial attitudes” (p. 251) by discussing them, since a dialogic reflective approach can help novice teachers reveal their underlying cultural beliefs and assumptions.

Furthermore, Halbach (2002) points out that an approach developed within a context that had worked well in that context might not work very well within another context without proper adaptations, and a reflective approach to teacher training is no exception. Halbach undertook a study at a university in Spain with a group of undergraduate students of English studying Methodology in order to find out whether being taught through a reflective methodology affected students’ way of thinking about teaching and learning. The results of the analysis of students’ diaries and their final term papers indicated that “most students [were] not prepared to enter into a cycle of reflection” (p. 246). Halbach attributed this finding to two different reasons. First of all, since the students who had a good command of English showed higher levels of reflection in their diaries, it was concluded that their level of English proficiency affected their abilities to reflect. Also, the results of students’ educational background survey indicated that most of the students who demonstrated reflective characteristics were from non-Spanish educational backgrounds. This suggested that there was little space for critical thinking in the Spanish educational system and learning environment. Based on her findings, Halbach argues that methodologies

which have been developed in certain contexts should not be applied to other contexts unless they are tailored to meet “local characteristics” (p. 248).

Moreover, cultural aspects can highly affect the absence or presence of reflection among teachers and student teachers. Regarding this point, Richardson (2004) reports on her own experience with her female Arab students at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates and states that encouraging these students to take control of their own learning was contrary to their cultural values. She observes, “Arab students prefer prescriptive learning environments where they are told exactly what to do and directed along a single path” (p. 432) due to their past experience of learning as passive learners. Thus, she concludes that the success of reflective practice highly depends on cultural values of the context where the practice is taking place. She suggests that teacher educators first start with lower levels of reflection—technical reflection—in order to familiarize their students with the notion of reflection. In addition, teacher educators should become aware of their students’ cultural values in order to design a culturally grounded curriculum, appropriate for targeted students.

Conclusion

Thus, as the literature on reflection and reflective practice suggests, reflection is an essential component of teachers’ development. There are a variety of different activities that can help teachers reflect on their practice such as journaling, keeping lesson reports and teaching portfolios, conducting classroom observations, undertaking action research and case studies, and forming reflective inquiry groups. Engaging in any of these reflective activities can help pre-service, novice, or even experienced teachers become reflective and improve their practice. Many researchers

conducted studies among pre-service and in-service teachers in teacher training programs in order to explore the participants' perceptions of reflection. Pedro (2005), for example, explored what reflective practice meant to five pre-service teachers and how this understanding informed their practice. The participants were students of a graduate teacher preparation program who were purposefully selected by the researcher in order to have diversity of perspectives in the research. The study was aimed at having a better understanding of reflective practice in teacher preparation. The results suggested that although the participants of this study had varying perceptions of reflective practice, they had a general understanding of reflection, learned how to reflect through courses, and engaged themselves in reflective practice. The results of the studies which investigated the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward reflection and reflective practice (e.g., Alger, 2006; Gunn, 2010; Pedro, 2005), mainly suggest that these teachers have a general understanding of the concepts of reflection and reflective practice, and are aware of the benefits of this approach to teaching. However, there has been little research, if any, conducted in order to follow up and find out whether student teachers who were continually encouraged to reflect during teacher training courses have chosen to continue to reflect on their practice once they leave the program and start teaching in their own classes. This gap in the research formed the core of the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to have an understanding of four former AUS MATESOL students' attitudes toward reflection and reflective practice. The research was specifically aiming at finding out about these current teachers' perceptions of reflection and reflective practice, whether or not they consider themselves reflective practitioners and why, forms of reflection they use in their practice, and factors that determine their engagement with reflection and reflective practice. So, the study was an attempt to come to an understanding of what reflection and reflective teaching means to these practicing teachers, and highlight the benefits, problems, and challenges of reflection as seen by them. The study was qualitative in nature, and relied on interviewing as the only strategy of data collection. I chose to conduct a qualitative inquiry because as Richards (2003) points out, first of all, quantitative approaches "are not designed to explore the complexities and conundrums of the immensely complicated social world that we inhabit" (p. 8). Second, qualitative research is "a person-centered enterprise" (p. 9) which is more appropriate to the field of language teaching. Third, a qualitative inquiry can bring about "transformative potential for the researcher" (p. 9).

By choosing to conduct a qualitative inquiry I did not intend to generalize my findings, which is usually the aim of quantitative research, rather I wanted to "represent the particular" (Richards, 2003, p. 10) which here pertains to the experience of former MATESOL Program students and their current engagement with

reflective practice. In other words, the focus of my study was on individuals and their lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I did not use any other methods of data collection for the purpose of triangulation since the aim of my study was to uncover the participants' subjective views. Regarding this point, Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that studies that are aimed at making "more objective assumptions would triangulate interview data with data gathered through other methods" (p. 102). That is why I relied solely on interviewing as my strategy for collecting data to undertake this study.

Using interviews is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (Litchman, 2006). I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with the participants of my study because in this kind of interview, a number of general topics and issues can be addressed by the researcher and at the same time participants are given the freedom to structure their responses. In fact, this method of data collection has its roots in the assumption that "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective)" (Marshall & Rossman, p. 101). Thus, the interviews I conducted with the participants of my study were more like "a search and discovery mission," where I aimed at "detecting what [was] already there inside variably cooperative respondents" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 144).

Sampling, Procedures, and Settings

I chose to conduct this study with current university teachers for two main reasons. First, most of the graduates of the AUS MATESOL program are now teaching at different universities. Second, university teachers are less pressured by time constraints than school teachers, which would make it more likely for them to be

willing to participate in this study and be interviewed. That is why I decided to choose my participants from the graduates of the program who are teaching at universities. Out of 21 alumni, 11 were working in universities. Therefore, I sent emails to these 11 AUS MATESOL graduates working at different universities in the United Arab Emirates. I was planning to choose four participants randomly from those who would show interest in participating in this study. However, out of these 11 people, only four people replied and expressed their willingness in being interviewed. Only one of the people to whom I sent an invitation, replied and explained that she could not participate in this study. The rest (six people) did not reply to my email. Thus, the four who replied became the participants of my study.

I sent emails to those four people where I explained more about my study and asked them when they preferred to be interviewed. All four of them stated that they preferred to be interviewed by the end of June 2010 before they left for their summer vacation. Therefore, I conducted all the interviews within a week in mid June. The interviews themselves took about 25 to 30 minutes each, excluding the time I spent on building rapport with the participants at the beginning of the interview and the time I spent on talking to them and thanking them before I left. The interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred location. While two of the participants preferred to be interviewed in their offices, one of them chose to be interviewed at the library of the American University of Sharjah. As the fourth participant lives in a city in another Emirate of the UAE, which is about 100 kilometers far from Sharjah, I had to take a trip to that city and meet him at his preferred location, which was a business club at a hotel.

Interviews

The interviews that I conducted with the participants of the study consisted of three parts (see Appendix A). The first part aimed at getting background information about the participants such as their ages, their nationalities, years of teaching experience, and when they graduated from the MATESOL Program. The second part of the interview consisted of questions about the participants' definitions of the concept of reflection and reflective practice. It was interesting for me to know how the participants would define the concept because "definitions are the basis on which individuals explain their understanding of a particular concept" (Pedro, 2005, p. 56). Analysis of this part of the interviews helped me answer my first research question, which was "How do these current teachers perceive 'Reflection' and 'Reflective Practice'?" In this part of the interview, I also asked questions about the participants' experience with reflection as students, because as Richards and Lockhart (1994) note, one of the sources of teachers' educational decisions is their own experience as students.

In the third part of the interview, I asked the participants' about their engagement with reflection and reflective teaching as current teachers, whether or not they consider themselves reflective teachers and why, forms of reflection they use in their classes, and the benefits and problems of reflection and reflective teaching as perceived by them. Analysis of this part of the interviews familiarized me with the participants' perceptions of reflection and reflective practice—which helped me answer my first research question. Moreover, it helped me answer my second, third, and fourth research questions which were aimed at finding out whether or not the participants consider themselves "Reflective Practitioners" and why; forms of

reflection they use in their practice; and factors that determine their engagement with “Reflection” and “Reflective Practice.”

Pilot Study

I piloted the interviews with two students currently enrolled in Masters programs at AUS for three main reasons. First of all, to practice interviewing and gain confidence; second, to check the appropriateness of the questions and the way I was planning to pose the questions; and third, to make sure that the interviews would not last longer than I had expected. After conducting the pilot interviews, I asked the participants to comment on the questions that I used and the way I communicated with them (Wallace, 1998). In addition, I transcribed one of the interviews, showed the transcript to an experienced researcher, and asked her to comment on the transcript, the way I structured my questions, and how I probed the participant’s responses. I incorporated the comments I received from these three people in the actual interviews that I conducted with the four participants of my study.

Participants

The participants of this study were four teachers, three females and one male, teaching at two different universities in the United Arab Emirates. Ayesha¹ is 41 years old. She is from Jordan and she has 20 years experience in teaching English at high school and university level. She graduated from the program in 2006 and since that time, she has been teaching at a university in the UAE. Maha is 38 years old. She is from Egypt and she has 10 years experience in teaching English at high school grades 10 and 11 as well as university level. She graduated from the AUS MATESOL

¹ In order to protect the participants anonymity pseudonyms are used for them.

program in 2006 and since then she has been teaching English at a university in the UAE. She is also studying for her second Masters. Catherine is 57 and from the United States of America. She had no teaching experience before joining the program. She graduated from the program in 2009 (five months prior to the time of the interview), and after graduating from the program, she got a job at a university in the UAE, where she taught IELTS for one semester. Finally, Kareem is 53 years old from Tunisia. He has been teaching English at secondary and tertiary level for 24 years. He graduated from the program in 2006 and since that time, he has been teaching at a university in the UAE. He is now working on his PhD Dissertation. Although three of the participants graduated from the program in 2006, only two of them were cohorts. The participants' background information is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Background Information about the Participants

Teacher	Age	Nationality	Experience in Teaching English	Levels Taught	Graduated from the AUS MATESOL Program
Ayesha	41	Jordanian	20 Years	High School and University	2006
Maha	38	Egyptian	10 Years	High School and University	2006
Catherine	57	American	4 Months	University	2009
Kareem	53	Tunisian	24 Years	High School and University	2006

Role of the Researcher

Richards notes that “a good interviewer is a good listener” (2003, p. 53). On this issue, Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out that a qualitative study can be a successful one only if the researcher is able to demonstrate good interpersonal skills, be a good listener, be capable of conversing with people easily, and finally be

respectful of other people's views. In the course of the interviews, I tried to be very attentive to the participants. I taped the interviews because I did not want to take notes while the interviews were in progress. I wanted to give my full attention to the participants and probe any further interesting issues that might emerge from their comments. I also wanted the participants to feel that I was interested in listening to what they had to say about the topic. As I intended to have a chat with the participants rather than a formal interview, I tried to "drop the academic armor" in order to have "richer, more intimate acceptance into the ongoing lives and sentiments of participants" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 78).

I had previously met only one of the participants of this study. When I joined the program, she had only a few more courses to pass in order to graduate. I had never met the rest of the participants and we only exchanged emails, phone calls, and text messages in order to negotiate the time and the place of the interviews. As it is very important for the interviewer to develop rapport with the participants of the study, I spent some time at the beginning of each interview to establish rapport with the participants and gain their trust. (Litchman, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In order to build a rapport with the participants, gain their trust, and tell them why they were being interviewed, I started the interview with talking about the purpose of the data collecting activity, how the information would be used, and how the participants could be involved in the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

I used a variety of eliciting techniques suggested by Richards (2003) such as prompting, checking, and probing. To check the participants' answers and make sure that I understood what they meant to say, I either repeated what they said or rephrased their words (Litchman, 2006) where necessary. Also, I tried to formulate my

questions in a way to make the participants feel comfortable and at ease, and engage them in the interview (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). In addition, I tried to remain low and unobtrusive in the course of the interviews, and phrase the questions in a general manner avoiding including my personal opinions and thoughts in the questions (Litchman, 2006). Although I did not compensate the participants of my study monetarily for their time and help, I invited two of them who were not busy after the interview to have a cup of coffee with me. Also, I gave all the participants of the study a “thank you” card, where I thanked them for participating in my study.

Ethical Consideration

Participating in this study was completely voluntarily. Only the people who replied to my email and showed interest in participating in this project were contacted in order to negotiate the time and place of the interview. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) note, “When people adjust their priorities and routines to help the researcher, or even just tolerate the researcher’s presence, they are giving of themselves. The researcher is indebted and should be sensitive to this” (p. 81); therefore, every care was taken to accommodate the participants’ preferred time and place of the interviews. In addition to that, ethical considerations in this research were observed by protecting the participants’ anonymity through using pseudonyms, granting permission of recording the interview before conducting the interviews, and using informed consent forms (see Appendix B), where I explained to the participants that the transcripts of the interview could be made available to them, if they wished so. By making the transcripts available to the participants, I wanted to assure them that the transcripts were accurate, they matched their comments, and I did not add anything to or remove anything from their comments. I specifically told them that they could

comment on anything in the transcript and change anything that they thought they did not mean to say. I also wanted to show them the transcript to ask for any further clarification regarding the issues discussed during the interview where necessary. Only two of the participants wished to see the transcripts. The other two said that they did not want to see the transcripts of the interview. The transcripts were sent to those two people within two days of the interview day. None of the participants made any comments or asked for any changes in the transcripts.

Issues of Reliability and Validity

Peräkylä (2004) notes that one of the advantages of working with audio and video recordings and transcripts is their accuracy; because unlike ethnographic research that deals with problems such as “unspecified accuracy of field notes” (p. 285), data obtained through examining recordings and transcripts represent the social interaction that took place between the interviewer and the interviewee. Peräkylä further points out that regarding maintaining the reliability of the data, two very important issues should be taken into consideration: technical quality of the recordings and the adequacy of the transcripts. In this research in order to avoid losing any portions of the data, I used two recording devices with high levels of quality: a digital sound recorder together with a digital video camera—which I used only to record the sound. I also transcribed all the interviews word for word together with all the pauses, emphases, interruptions, laughter, and hesitations using a very simple transcription strategy, one that made sense to me. After transcribing each of the interviews, I checked them against the recording three times in order to make sure that they were accurate.

Regarding validity of the data, Richards (2003) points out that one of the ways through which a researcher can assure validity of the data is to ask the participants to comment on accuracy of data. This is what I did in my study. I asked the participants whether I could meet them once more to show them the transcripts and discuss any unclear issues with them. Two of the participants stated that they were leaving the country for summer vacation but they agreed to reply to my further questions through emails. The other two participants said that they preferred to answer my further questions through emails or phone calls. Thus, although it was not possible for me to conduct a second interview with any of the participants, I contacted three of them through emails or phone calls and I asked them for further explanations on the issues we discussed during the interviews. The fourth participant left the country exactly one day after the interview and did not reply to my email where I attached a copy of the transcript of the interview. Apart from asking the participants to comment on the transcripts, I constantly went back to the original data, read them, and compared the emerged themes with each other in order to find new relations in the data while I was analyzing the data (Richards, 2003).

Data Analysis Methods

As Richards (2003) explains, the first step toward interview analysis is transcription; so that it can serve as the foundation of the analysis. I transcribed the interviews within one day of the interview day and started analyzing them right after that, in order to reduce the effect of “data dominance factor” where “the researcher becomes overwhelmed by the sheer weight of accumulated data, with the result that analysis may be reduced to a necessary and uninspiring technical process rather than an illuminating exploration” (Richards, 2003, p. 91). In order to analyze the data, I

read through the transcripts several times and thought about the different ways I could derive themes from the data. After reading the interviews several time, I made notes in the margins of the text where I summarized the participants' perspectives on the issue being discussed. This familiarized me with the participants' views and later helped me with presenting the data. Then I read each interview again one at a time, and I coded the data. The codes emerged from three sets of sources: the data the participants provided me with, the questions I asked, and the literature. For example when I asked the participants how they define the concept of reflection and reflective practice, I created a code for the participants' answer named "Definition of Reflective Practice," and when in reply to this question, the participants talked about thinking about their past actions and ways to improve them, I created another code named "Retrospection," adopted from Boody (2008).

After coding all the transcripts, I reviewed the codes and removed the ones that were redundant or repetitive, and renamed some of them. Then I read them once more and this time I organized the codes into hierarchical categories including larger categories and subcategories (Litchman, 2006). For example, when one participant was telling me how reflection helped her become more confident, I coded it as "Confidence." When I was reading the codes once more in order to organize them, I put it under "Benefits of Reflection," which was a code that originated from one of the interview questions. When all the categories and subcategories were created, I reviewed them once more and then I drew diagrams where I put the larger categories in the center and put the subcategories around them. This was done for each of the participants and it helped me with comparing and finding the commonalities within the data (see Figures 1 to 4, pages 52, 58, 62, and 66). Then I compared the categories

and subcategories created for all the participants with each other in order to answer my research questions. All in all, using all the above mentioned methods and strategies helped me address my research questions on the one hand and provided me with insight into the nature, benefits, challenges, and problems of the concept of reflective teaching as perceived by these four practicing teachers in the real world of teaching on the other.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the data, reports on the findings of this study, and then discusses the findings. In the first part of the chapter, I explain how I derived the categories from the data. In the next part of the chapter, I report on the results of the interviews for each of the participants. The results are presented for each participant under six different categories and are supported with examples from the participants' comments. This is followed by a section where I compare the findings from each of the interviews with each other in order to identify the commonalities as well as some other findings that were present in the data. In this section, I also discuss the results and relate them to theory. Finally, I conclude the chapter by answering the posited research questions.

Data Analysis and Findings

An initial analysis of the data revealed that there were six major categories that were discussed during the interviews. The sources of these categories were the interview questions. The categories are Participant's Experience with Reflection as a Student, Participant's Definition of Reflective Practice, Participant's Self-perception as a Reflective Practitioner, Participant's Forms of Reflection, Benefits of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by the Participant, and Problems of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by the Participant. In the following section, I report on the perspectives of each of these teachers regarding each of the categories described above.

Ayesha's Experience with Reflection as a Student

To Ayesha, a 41-year-old teacher of English with 20 years experience in teaching English, reflection on her practice as a student was an “interesting challenge”² which added a lot to her experience. Although it was a lot of work for her, it was not “a burden” or “a waste of time.” Ayesha referred to her experience with reflection as a student as something “really useful” that helped her develop her “critical thinking” skills.

Ayesha's Definition of Reflective Practice

Ayesha defined reflection and reflective teaching in two different ways: reflection as retrospection and reflection as self talk. According to Ayesha, Reflective teaching is looking at her performance and trying to see what worked well in her class, what did not work well, why something worked well while another one did not, and finally trying to improve her performance. Apart from that, she referred to reflection and reflective teaching as “some sort of self talk,” where she talks to herself and discusses things with herself when she finishes teaching a lesson.

Ayesha's Self-perception as a Reflective Practitioner

When I asked Ayesha whether she considers herself a reflective teacher, she replied that she constantly thinks about her teaching, the success, and the failure of the techniques she uses in her classes. When I asked her why she does that, she said that she is reflective because she learned to be reflective when she was a student and she believes in the usefulness of this approach. That is why reflective teaching is now “a part of [her] teaching practice.”

² The participants' words have not been edited.

Ayesha's Forms of Reflection

In response to the question of “What forms of reflection do you use as a teacher?” Ayesha referred to thinking, journaling, students’ feedback, research, and discussion with colleagues as the ways through which she reflects on her performance. When I asked Ayesha about the content of her journal, she explained that she “keeps notes of the good practices,” and added, “If you can call these notes as journals, so yeah, I keep them.” She then explained that in her journal she keeps notes of the successful and unsuccessful techniques that she uses in her class. When I asked her why she keeps notes, she replied, “It is better to keep something written, you know, rather than, you know, forgetting it, forgetting them or losing them.” Furthermore, Ayesha referred to getting feedback from her students as another way of reflection. She stated that she sometimes asks her students how some techniques or materials worked for them, what did not work for them, and why it did or did not work. She also said that after midterm exams she usually gives her students a feedback form and asks them to comment on the exam, how they did in the exam, and what they would do in the future to improve their performance in the exam.

Moreover, in a follow-up phone conversation with Ayesha, she said that she once undertook an action research project. When I asked her about the details, she said she was interested in identifying Arab students’ writing errors resulting from their L1. Therefore, she asked the administration to provide her with access to students’ writing exam papers. Then she analyzed the errors, categorized them, found the origins of them, reported them in a paper, and presented the results at a TESOL conference. She said that she is also trying to take those errors into consideration when she is teaching writing to her students. In addition to that, Ayesha said that she

usually discusses and shares teaching materials and techniques with her colleagues especially when they are teaching the same thing.

Benefits of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Ayesha

When I asked Ayesha about the advantages of reflective teaching, she identified two main benefits of being a reflective teacher: professional development and knowing one's self. On this issue, Ayesha explained,

[Reflection] is something very important to do in order to improve. Because if you keep doing the same thing believing that it's really effective and it's really, you know, excellent, without, you know, examining this if you like, I don't think you will, there is a chance that you can improve or you can, you know, learn from your experience.

She also explained that reflection helps teachers to become aware of their weaknesses and strengths, and consequently improve them.

Problems of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Ayesha

In reply to the question of "What are the disadvantages of reflective teaching?" Ayesha stated that reflective teaching has no disadvantages. However, when I asked her whether she has ever found herself resisting reflection she said that she does not have time to do it on a daily basis and after each lesson, although she does that "quite a lot." She said that not having enough time is the only reason that she sometimes cannot reflect.

To sum up, the main findings of my interview with Ayesha indicate that she enjoyed her experience with reflection as a student, and referred to it as a challenge that helped her develop her skills. In addition, she defined reflective teaching as

retrospection as well as self talk. Moreover, she considers herself a reflective teacher because she thinks about how things usually go in her class, she believes in the usefulness of this approach, and it is now part of her practice. Ayesha continually thinks about her performance, asks for her students' feedback, shares and discusses techniques and teaching materials with her colleagues, and keeps note of her successful and unsuccessful practices—which she called her journals. Furthermore, Ayesha once conducted a research project in order to have a better understanding of Arab students' writing errors. Ayesha referred to professional development and the idea of knowing one's self as benefits of being a reflective teacher. Finally, she said that the only reason sometimes she cannot reflect is that she does not have time to do it each and every day. The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates Ayesha's perspectives about the topic under investigation.

Figure 1: Ayesha's Diagram of Reflection and Reflective Teaching



Maha's Experience with Reflection as a Student

To Maha, a 38-year-old teacher with ten years experience in teaching English, who is now studying for her second Masters, reflection as a student did not mean much and it was not very important. She considered the reflective activities as assignments that had to be done. Maha explained,

When I was a student, I wasn't really interested in the point of reflective teaching, because from my previous experience at schools, it didn't mean that

much. So what? What do you mean by reflective teaching? So it did not engage me when I was an MA student.

When I further probed the issue, I found out that Maha believes that her lack of engagement and interest in this approach as a student was mainly because she was not teaching at that time.

Maha's Definition of Reflective Practice

Maha defined reflection and reflective practice as retrospection. According to her, reflection and reflective teaching is looking back at one's teaching, taking into account the context, the material, and the individual differences among students in order to make changes in one's performance.

Maha's Self-perception as a Reflective Practitioner

In reply to the question of whether or not she considers herself a reflective practitioner, Maha said, "We have to! Or else you would end your career. You have to!" Regarding this issue, at the beginning of the interview Maha told me the story of her engagement with reflection as a teacher who had just graduated from the MATESOL Program and got a job as a university teacher, and how reflection changed her teaching philosophy. Maha stated that she used to be a very serious teacher with certain set standards. She said that she was not flexible with her students' lateness, attendance, absence, and the use of mobile phones in class. She was trying to treat all these problems because they were against her standards. She spent a lot of time arguing with her students about these issues and as a result of being very strict and inflexible during the first semester of teaching at university, she got a very poor evaluation from her students and she was about to lose her job.

Maha explained that in order to keep her job, she started working on the problems. In order to do that, Maha went to one of her experienced colleagues and asked for help. After discussing the issue with her colleague, Maha started observing her colleague's classes and her colleague observed her classes. Then together, they thought about the different ways Maha could establish rapport with her students and overcome those problems. She said that based on her colleague's suggestions, she started giving informal feedback forms to her students and asked them to comment on her teaching. This was how she recognized that there were problems regarding the way she was teaching. For instance, her students wrote that she explains the lesson very quickly or she speaks very fast. When she became aware of these problems, she tried to overcome them with the help of her colleague. She said that since that time she has been trying to work out all the problems her students refer to in the feedback forms. She added that she is now working on her smile and her rapport with her students. When she saw my surprised look, she said that she is not a "smiley person." However, she received this feedback from her students that she is always frowning and this scares them. Thus, now she is trying to smile more. Maha considers herself a reflective teacher because she is trying to change her teaching and develop it based on the comments she gets from her students.

Maha's Forms of Reflection

When I asked Maha about the forms of reflection that she uses as a teacher, she said that she uses her students' feedback in order to reflect on her teaching. She brought me a student feedback form which contained three statements: "Three things that Ms. Maha does to help me learn are;" "Three things that Ms. Maha could do to help me learn better;" and "Three things that I do to help myself learn better;" and

explained that this is how she reflects on her performance. She said that preparing this form was a suggestion from her colleague who does the same thing with her students. When I asked her what other forms of reflection she uses, she brought me another feedback form titled “Informal Feedback Form on Ms. Maha’s Academic Class,” designed to be given to students during the third week of the semester. This form was just a little more complicated than the first one because it was designed for advanced students studying IELTS and TOEFL. In the form, she explained to students that although she cannot change the syllabus, she can control the way she teaches. Then she asked students to write down three things that they enjoyed about the class as well as anything else that they would like her to do.

I asked Maha whether she keeps journals or teaching portfolios in order to document her reflections. She said that she does not do that and explained,

Portfolio is part of the course work; they are not for reflective teaching. So, I’m not using it. Unless because when I used to teach at the IEP, they have to prepare reading portfolios, writing portfolios, listening portfolios; but it is not for reflection or reflective teaching. It is a combination of the course material.

Maha also explained that she usually shares the feedback she gets from her students with her experienced colleague and asks for her suggestions. Furthermore, she pointed out that when she shares her teaching materials with her colleagues, especially her officemate, she usually discusses with them how the materials worked for them.

Benefits of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Maha

According to Maha, reflection has a number of benefits. First, reflection brings about professional development. Regarding this point, Maha said, “It comes by nature if you are seeking professional development, if you are seeking personal

development, it goes without saying that you have to reflective on anything that you do in class.” Moreover, according to Maha, reflection results in knowing one’s self and becoming more confident. On this issue Maha stated, “[Now] I’m much more confident than the first [semester]. I know my potentials.” In addition, reflection on her own teaching and observing other teachers’ classes resulted in a change in Maha’s teaching philosophy. She realized that focusing on the delivery of the lesson, establishing rapport, and being flexible with students are very important things. She later explained,

When I observed the other teachers, and I found out those who get very very high evaluation just play on these things, the way you communicate with them, how down to earth, humble and sometimes which is against your ethics, but they let it go to make up for other things.

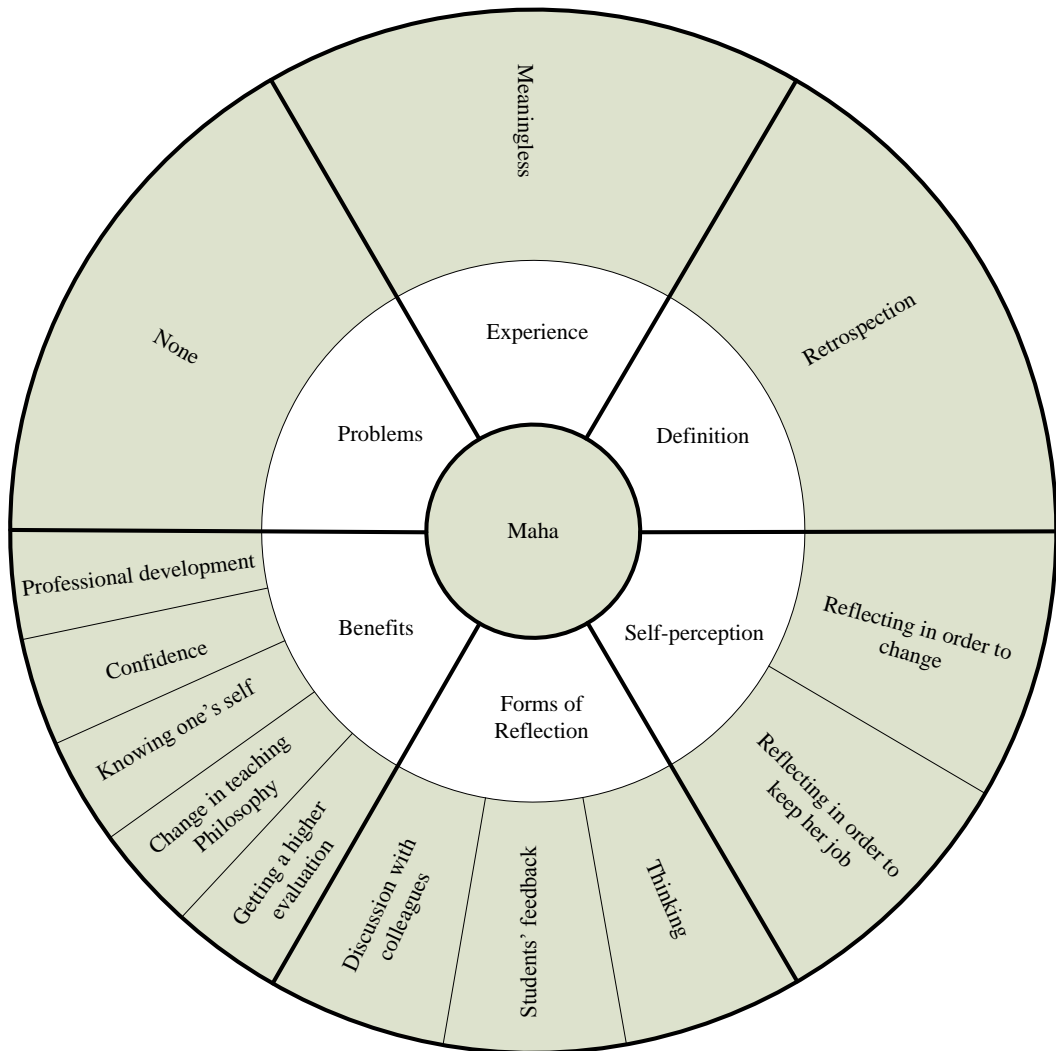
Finally, she said that taking into consideration all these points helped her get higher evaluations from her students at the end of the semester.

Problems of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Maha

In response to the questions where I asked Maha about the problems of reflection and reflective teaching and whether or not she has ever found herself resisting reflection, Maha replied that there is nothing wrong with reflection and reflective teaching; nor has she ever found herself resisting reflection. She added, “[Reflection] happens by nature. I can say I can’t stop it, because it’s part of your career. Like doctors! Can they stop developing themselves?” That was why she said she could not think of any problems that can be attributed to reflection and reflective teaching.

To sum up, reflection did not mean much to Maha when she was in the MATESOL program probably because she was not teaching at that time. Maha defined reflection and reflective teaching as retrospection on past actions and trying to improve those actions. Moreover, Maha considers herself a reflective teacher because she has to be reflective on her teaching if she wants to keep her job as a teacher. Maha is continually trying to change her teaching based on her students' comments. In addition, thinking, getting feedback from students, and discussion with colleagues are the ways through which Maha reflects on her teaching. Furthermore, Maha referred to professional development, knowing one's self, gaining more confidence, changing her teaching philosophy, and consequently getting higher evaluations from her students at the end of the semester as the benefits of being a reflective teacher. The diagram in Figure 2 presents Maha's beliefs about the topic under investigation.

Figure 2: Maha's Diagram of Reflection and Reflective Teaching



Catherine's Experience with Reflection as a Student

To Catherine, a 57-year-old teacher who has just started teaching English, reflection did not mean much when she was an MATESOL student. She explained that as a student, she could not understand the impact of the reflective activities she was required to undertake. When I asked for the reason, she noted,

You don't even know, you don't even have the sense of what teaching is going to be for you, you know. You don't understand in what ways you are going to,

you know, it's an outward activity but you don't understand in what ways you're gonna be internalizing your experience.

She further clarified this point by giving an example, "If somebody tells you what chocolate is, you don't know what chocolate is, until you eat it. Then it is a very different experience." However, Catherine stated that although reflection did not mean much to her when she was a student, it helped her "sharpen [her] skills."

Catherine's Definition of Reflective Practice

Catherine defined reflection as retrospection and explained that reflection to her is thinking back about her teaching, her interaction with the students, the things that happened during the class, the things that worked well, the things that did not work as they were expected, and thinking about "how you would utilize what happened, next time."

Catherine's Self-perception as a Reflective Practitioner

When I asked Catherine whether she considers herself a reflective teacher, she replied, "to some degree," because she was not sure what makes a teacher reflective.

Regarding this point she said,

Certainly I mean, there is, you know, is it thinking about what you've done in your classroom? Does that make you reflective? Or are you reflective when you commit those things to paper or to? I don't know. You know, you would have to, you know, make the distinction, you know. How do we define that reflection, that process?

In reply to Catherine's question, I said that there are a number of different things a teacher could do in order to reflect on her teaching, such as thinking about a

classroom problem and trying to solve it, journaling, classroom observations, etc. Then Catherine said that she does not keep a teaching journal; nor has she ever been observed by anyone. However, she continually thinks about her teaching, her teaching materials, her interaction with her students, and reflects on them in the form of “a lot of thought, maybe not always committed to paper.” When I asked her why she has chosen to be a reflective teacher, she replied that it is because she wants to be responsive to her students.

Catherine’s Forms of Reflection

When I asked Catherine about the forms of reflection she uses as a teacher, she said that she uses four modes of reflection: thinking, teaching portfolio, discussion with colleagues, and students’ feedback. She explained that she keeps a teaching portfolio and every now and then, she goes back to her portfolio, reviews the materials she had prepared in order to see whether she can use them in the future, and comments on them. Moreover, Catherine pointed out that as she lives on campus she always has many people around to chat with about students and their learning habits. Furthermore, Catherine constantly gets feedback from her students by asking them,

How do you feel you’re doing? How am I doing? What would you like to be doing? What do you think would work? What can I do to help you more? Can you think of anything because I want to do that for you?

She explained to me that she thinks getting feedback from students is very important because this would make students feel that the teacher is interested in their feelings, and when they feel so, they would do their best.

Benefits of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Catherine

I asked Catherine about the benefits of being a reflective teacher. In reply, she referred to professional development as the benefit of being reflective and said that reflection helps her to “be a better teacher.”

Problems of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Catherine

When I asked Catherine whether reflection and reflective teaching has any disadvantages, she referred to the importance of having a receptive attitude and pointed out,

Yes³, you have to be sensitive, you have to be sensitive. So if you tell your student hmm you know, in my, in my, how can I help you, you know, you have to be ready for them to say, I mean, they don't, I have to say they don't have to be polite and say oh you're a really good teacher; oh I really like to do this activity; oh this is very helpful to me.

Also, when I asked Catherine whether she has ever found herself resisting reflection she replied that “reflecting on something painful” is hard for her and sometimes she wants to “turn it off.” When I further probed the issue and asked her what she meant by “something painful,” she said it is difficult for her to reflect on something unsuccessful on which she has been working with her students.

To sum up, reflection for Catherine did not mean much when she was a student of the program because she did not know what teaching in real classrooms would be like. However, she said that reflection helped her to develop her skills. Catherine defined reflection as retrospection where she thinks back on her teaching, her teaching materials, her interaction with students, and tries to improve them.

³ The underlined words indicate the participant's emphasis on the words.

Catherine said that she considers herself a reflective practitioner to some extent because although she thinks a lot about her teaching in order to be responsive to her students, she is not sure what makes a teacher reflective. Moreover, Catherine said that she uses four modes of reflection: thinking, keeping a teaching portfolio, discussions with colleagues, and students' feedback. According to Catherine, professional development is the benefit, and reflecting on something painful as well as having a receptive attitude are the problems of being a reflective teacher. The diagram in Figure 3 illustrates Catherine's beliefs about the topic under investigation.

Figure 3: Catherine's Diagram of Reflection and Reflective Teaching



Kareem's Experience with Reflection as a Student

Kareem, a 53-year-old teacher with 24 years experience in teaching English, who is now working on his PhD dissertation, pointed out that one's experience and engagement with reflection either as a student or as a teacher has a lot to do with his personality as an individual. In other words, reflecting is a personal matter. When I asked him for more clarification, he said that he personally prefers a learner-based approach to a teacher-based one; that is why he enjoyed his experience with reflection as a student of the program. He referred to this experience as a challenge with "paradoxical characteristics," where "on the one hand there are parameters that they are guiding parameters; and on the other, there is freedom. You can go beyond these parameters." Kareem then added that although he enjoyed this challenge, it was not easy for him. He referred to his own teaching and reflection as "two different habits" and said that it was not easy for him to "overcome an old habit which is no longer appropriate, and substitute it with another one, which is reflective teaching."

Kareem's Definition of Reflective Teaching

To Kareem, reflection equates with the non-stop process of retrospection, where the teacher collects data about his classroom actions, reflects on the data, analyzes it, and then applies the results in order to make changes in his practice.

Kareem's Self-perception as a Reflective Practitioner

When I asked Kareem whether he considers himself a reflective teacher, he said that he cannot answer this question himself because "we only see our images through other people as told to us." He said that he cannot evaluate himself and he should leave the evaluation to others. But he also mentioned that as he has always

been worried about being updated and being aware of the new teaching approaches, he is interested in learning, and he thinks about his performance as a teacher. When I asked him why he chose to be like that, he replied that he has never chosen to be reflective. It is part of his personality because he believes in change.

Kareem's Forms of Reflection

When I asked Kareem about the forms of reflection he uses as a teacher, he referred to thinking, journaling, discussion with colleagues, the literature, and students' feedback as his modes of reflection. Kareem said that he does keep a journal, although he does not have time to make daily entries; however, he thinks about his practice and reflects on it daily. In addition to that, he mentioned that sometimes he discusses issues with his colleagues, but it is not done regularly, because as he pointed out, some teachers do not want to discuss things with each other. Therefore, he discusses issues with his colleagues "every now and then, when it's convenient." Furthermore, Kareem said that he evaluates his own teaching through reading the literature, and compares his practice with the theories in the literature. Finally, he referred to students' formal feedback as another way of reflection.

Benefits of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Kareem

When I asked Kareem about the benefits of being a reflective teacher, he replied, "Hmm, again I told you, hmm, it is part of the personality." But when I told him that for sure there must have been something particularly useful about it, which is why he reflects on his teaching, he referred to knowing one's self as the benefit of being a reflective teacher, and explained, "You can find yourself in it."

Problems of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by Kareem

When I asked Kareem about the problems of being a reflective teacher, he noted that reflective teaching requires a teacher to make changes in his practice, and this is not an easy task. When I asked him why he thinks so, he explained,

Because it's not, it's not a teacher-centered hmm. You forget about your personality. This is the paradox. And the focus is on other factors related to the learners. So, how can you split? The split from one's personality is the problem.

Kareem also said that to him reflective teaching is “innovation,” and being innovative is not easy. Moreover, in reply to the question of whether he has ever found himself resisting reflection, he said that he has never resisted reflection but he has always been worried about it. He added that reflection to him is keeping updated, and he has always been worried about keeping himself updated on the latest methods and approaches.

To sum up, Kareem said that teachers' engagement or lack of engagement with reflective teaching is a personal issue. He noted that his experience with reflection as a student of the program was a challenge because he had to forget his old habit of teaching and acquire a new one. Kareem defined reflection and reflective teaching as retrospection on one's teaching through collecting data, analyzing it, and using it in order to make changes in one's teaching. Although Kareem did not provide me with a straight answer to the question of whether he considers himself a reflective teacher, he mentioned more than once that being a reflective teacher is part of his personality because he believes in change. Kareem's modes of reflection are thinking, journaling, discussion with colleagues, reading the literature, and students' feedback,

although journaling and discussion with colleagues are not done very often. Kareem referred to knowing one's self as the benefit of reflective teaching. Finally, Kareem said that changing one's way of teaching, being innovative, and keeping updated are not easy tasks, and are the problems of being reflective. The diagram in Figure 4 illustrates Kareem's ideas about the topic under investigation.

Figure 4: Kareem's Diagram of Reflection and Reflective Teaching



Discussion of Findings

In this section, the findings from each of the interviews with the participants are compared to each other, discussed under the six main themes that were explained

in the earlier sections, and related to theory. In addition, other findings that were identified within the transcripts are examined.

Participants' Experience with Reflection as Students

Analysis of the participants' answers to the question that asked them about their experience with reflection as students of the program revealed that they had different experiences with reflection as students. On the one hand, while Ayesha referred to her experience with reflection as "an interesting challenge," Kareem referred to it as a challenge with "paradoxical characteristics," where he had to forget his old habit of teaching and acquire a new one. On the other hand, while Maha said that reflection did not mean much to her when she was a student of the program, Catherine described her experience with reflection by giving the example of experiencing the taste of chocolate, and the difference between reflective activities as explained to her, and reflective teaching as experienced by her in the real world of teaching. In other words, while Ayesha and Kareem described their experience with reflection as MATESOL students as a challenge, Maha and Catherine referred to it as something that did not mean much to them at that time. But now that they are teaching they are able to understand how helpful it is to reflect on their teaching.

The difference between the participants' experience with reflection can be attributed to their teaching experience when they were MATESOL students. When Ayesha and Kareem were students of the program, they were teaching at schools at the same time. This could be why reflection meant more to them. Thus, according to the participants' comments about their experience with reflection, it seems that those who were teaching in real classrooms when they were students of the program had more meaningful approaches toward reflection; while those who were students and

were not teaching had difficulty with understanding the meaning of reflective activities. In fact this finding is evident in Maha's remarks, where she explained about her lack of engagement with reflection as a student and said, "We used to write reflective essays and in our, at that time, because I was not in a working experience, so it didn't mean that much to me. I don't pay, I didn't pay that much importance to it." The participants' engagement with reflection as students of the MATESOL program, or lack thereof, can also be attributed to their years experience in teaching. While Ayesha and Kareem had respectively about 14 and 18 years experience in teaching English when they joined the program, Catherine and Maha had 0 and 4 years experience in teaching. This could be why Catherine and Maha found it difficult to understand the meaning of reflection and reflective activities as students.

Another interesting finding that the analysis of the participants' comments about their experience with reflection as students revealed is Kareem's misconception about the concepts of reflection and reflective teaching as being very new. Kareem referred to reflective teaching as "the vogue." However, according to the literature on the history of reflection and reflective teaching, the concepts of reflection and reflective teaching are not new in the field of education, and they have been around for more than 50 years (Qing, 2009). This misconception is probably because these concepts are new to Kareem, who was already an experienced teacher of English when he joined the program. In other words, this misconception might have originated from the fact that reflection and reflective teaching were introduced to him for the first time when he was an MATESOL student. In fact, the point that reflection was introduced to them for the first time in the MATESOL program was confirmed by all the four participants of the study.

Participants' Definitions of Reflective Practice

According to the participants' definitions of reflection and reflective practice, it seems that reflection to them entails retrospection and equates with thinking back on their practice, contemplating what went well and what did not go as they expected, and consequently trying to improve their practice. This definition of reflection and reflective teaching is in line with Schön's (1987, 1991) definition of reflection-on-action which pertains to "thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (p. 26). It also matches Boody's (2008) explanation of reflection as retrospection, where the teacher carefully considers his or her prior experience and thinks about it in order to learn from it and to improve his or her performance. This is how all the participants defined reflection and reflective teaching. Apart from that, Ayesha stated that reflection to her is "some sort of self talk," where she talks to herself and discusses the alternative ways of doing things in her classes. This finding is in line with Prawat's (1991) description of "conversation with self" which is an internal reflection within an individual, motivated to discover and sort out "the most valid or productive" (p. 740) ways and choices.

Although all the participants defined reflection and reflective teaching as retrospection, the findings show that Maha and Catherine use reflection for other purposes as well. Maha's story of engagement with reflective teaching indicated that she uses reflection and particularly her students' feedback for problem solving. As she explained, she faced many difficulties during the first semester of teaching at a university and she was about to lose her job. So, she started giving informal feedback forms to her students. The comments that she received from her students revealed a

number of problems regarding her teaching. She started working on the problems mentioned by her students, discussed her problems with one of her colleagues and asked for her help, thought about different ways of overcoming those problems, implemented some changes in her teaching, and observed the results. When the results were not satisfactory, she thought about other solutions. Maha's use of reflection matches the description of reflection as problem solving exemplified by Dewey (1944). As Dewey notes, reflection entails "the sense of a problem, the observation of the conditions, the formation and rationale elaboration of a suggested conclusion, and the active experimental testing" (p. 151).

Moreover, in the description of her teaching practice, Catherine stated that she usually goes into the class with a lot of teaching materials which she had previously prepared, and while she is teaching, she quickly senses which one of them she is going to use and which one of them she is not going to utilize. Catherine's use of reflection in this sense matches Schön's (1987) definition of reflection-in-action which is a kind of "on-the-spot experiment" that occurs when "we think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understanding of phenomena, or ways of framing problems" (p. 28). Thus, although the participants' definitions of reflection and reflective practice matches Schön's (1987, 1991) reflection-on-action, Boody's (2008) explanation of reflection as retrospection, and Prawat's (1991) reflection as self talk, the participants' remarks indicate that some of them use reflection as problem solving (Dewey, 1944) and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1987).

Participants' Self-perception as Reflective Practitioners

All the participants of this study said either implicitly or explicitly that they consider themselves reflective practitioners, although they gave different reasons to the questions of why they consider themselves reflective teachers, and why they chose to be reflective. While Ayesha said that she believes in the usefulness of reflective teaching, she continually thinks about how things go in her class, and that is why reflection is now part of her practice, Catherine reasoned that reflective teaching helps her to be responsive to her students. That is why she has chosen to be a reflective teacher. However, Catherine said that she considers herself a reflective teacher “to some degree” because she is not sure what makes a teacher a reflective one. She said that she continually thinks about her classroom actions but she is not sure whether this makes her reflective, or whether she is reflective only if she documents her reflections in the form of journaling, for instance. To answer her doubts, the literature on reflective teaching suggests that questioning what teachers usually take for granted regarding their teaching is the beginning of adopting a reflective approach (Bartlett, 1990; Pedro, 2005). Thus, Catherine’s uncertainty about what makes a teacher reflective might be due to the point that she is not aware of different forms, types, and levels of reflection.

Regarding the participants’ self-perception as reflective teachers, Maha said that she has to be reflective, or else she will lose her job. She said that she feels that she needs to change the way she teaches; that is why she is reflecting on her performance. An in-depth analysis of Maha’s description of her teaching practice revealed that the most important reason why she has become reflective is “to get a better evaluation.” Regarding this issue, she explained, “You have at the back of your

mind you only think of the evaluation and how (pause) the administration will look at you. So, I just can't use the same thing." That is probably why getting feedback from her students is very important to her. Although getting feedback from students is encouraged in the literature (Gunn, 2005; Reid, 2002), it seems that Maha gives so much importance to her students' feedback that she is actually trying everything she can in order to satisfy them, and consequently get higher evaluations from them. This finding might be due to this point that it was her students' feedback and implementing their suggestions that helped her to keep her job as a university teacher.

Kareem took a very different approach to answer this question and said that being a reflective teacher is not his choice. Rather, it is something personal. He added that being reflective is part of his personality, which is actually in line with the literature that suggests that "the degree to which any one teacher will actually engage in reflection depends on their individual propensities and abilities" (Richardson, 2004, p. 431). Nevertheless, Kareem responded to most of the questions I asked during the interview by saying, "It is personal." Only when I probed his responses and asked him for more clarification did he reply to my questions. Kareem had a wide range of knowledge about different forms and aspects of reflective teaching. Therefore, the way he replied to my questions cannot be attributed to his lack of knowledge about the issue. This interesting finding could be due to the point that although Kareem had a good understanding of the concepts of reflection, reflective teaching, and different modes of reflection, he wanted to be modest. That is why he was reluctant to give a straight answer to my questions when they were asked for the first time, and I had to ask him for more explanation in order to get a response from him.

Kareem also pointed out that for him reflection is innovation. This remark is in line with how Özdeniz (1996) discusses the relationship between reflection and innovation and notes that reflection can be used by teachers in order to bring innovation into their current performance. Regarding the advantages of such an approach toward reflection, Özdeniz points out,

Practitioners capable of investigating their own classrooms and of monitoring the effects that different approaches, methodologies, and techniques have on their teaching are no longer at the mercy of policy changes or paradigm shifts, for they are capable of assessing innovations and of coming to informed decisions, supported by evidence, about the innovation in relation to their work. (p. 123)

Moreover, Kareem pointed out that reflection for him is a response to his worries about being updated. This finding is very much in keeping with the literature on the progressive view of education with its emphasis on “knowledge” and “world” as dynamic entities (Dewey, 1997a).

To sum up, the participants of the study all consider themselves reflective teachers in one way or another, although they gave different reasons. While Ayesha said that she continually thinks about her teaching, believes in the usefulness of reflective teaching, and reflection is now part of her practice, Maha said that she has to be reflective because she feels the need to make changes in her teaching in order to keep her job. Furthermore, while Catherine said that she is somewhat reflective in order to be responsive to her students, Kareem said that he is reflective because it is part of his personality, he believes in change, and he wants to be innovative and updated.

Forms of Reflection Used by the Participants

Analysis of the participants' answers to the question of "What forms of reflection do you use as a teacher?" revealed that thinking about their practice, students' feedback, and discussion with colleagues are the most common forms of reflection among the participants. All the participants mentioned that they continually think about their actions and their classroom problems through unstructured reflections without documenting their thoughts, mostly because they are busy and they do not have time. Although thinking about their performances in classrooms makes teachers aware of their practice, it does not necessarily result in solving any problems. In fact, it can sometimes "lead to an intensification of unpleasant emotions without suggesting any way forward" (Wallace, 1998, p. 14). Wallace suggests that teachers use more structured forms of reflection such as conducting research.

Moreover, as the findings of this study suggest, getting feedback from students is a very popular form of reflection among the participants of the study. In fact, the formal and informal feedback that these teachers get from their students helps them to involve students in decision-makings and engage them in their own learning process. Regarding this point, Gunn (2005) considers students' feedback valuable for both language teachers and learners as a way to "help both the teacher and the students work towards greater understanding of classroom life" (p. 97) and "improve the quality of life in the classroom" (p. 101). On the same issue, Reid (2002) points out that asking students for their feedback on classroom issues provides them with an opportunity to become part of the teaching process. Moreover, the findings of the study suggest that discussion with colleagues is one of the participants' preferred forms of reflection. Although some of the participants stated that these discussions are

not systematic, they do not happen very often in their working places, and they usually happen when teachers share teaching materials with each other or they are teaching the same thing, their descriptions of their discussions somehow match Qing's (2009) definition of reflective inquiry group, where teachers discuss with each other classroom-based problems, brain storm different interpretations, and plan appropriate actions.

Apart from these three modes of reflection—thinking, discussion with colleagues, and students' feedback—which were common among all the four participants of the study, there were other modes of reflection named by some of the participants. Kareem referred to reflection through reading the literature as one of the ways he reflects on his performance. This form of inquiry which is discussed in the literature as “literature search,” is when the interested individual “tap[s] into other people's ideas in a much more directed and purposeful fashion” (Wallace, 1998, p. 214). Kareem also stated that he keeps a teaching journal although he does not make regular entries in his journal. Furthermore, Catherine said that she keeps a teaching portfolio where she keeps her teaching materials and comments on them for her future use. Moreover, Ayesha said that she conducted research to come to a better understanding of an issue related to language teaching. In addition, her explanation of the way she documents her teaching techniques indicated that she keeps lesson reports. Thus, the participants' replies to the question that asked them about different forms of reflection they use in their classes revealed that they use a variety of different modes of reflection discussed in the literature.

An in-depth analysis of the participants' remarks about the different forms of reflection that they use in their practice revealed a number of misconceptions. First of

all, Ayesha said that she keeps a “journal” where she usually takes notes of the successful and unsuccessful techniques that she uses in her classes in order not to forget them. However, note taking and journal writing are two different things. Regarding this point, Porter, et al. (1990) note that “the journal is a place to go beyond notes by exploring, reacting, making connections, and so on” (p. 229). In fact, Ayesha’s description of the notes she takes matches Richards and Farrell’s (2005) definition of a lesson report where the teacher takes notes of the aspects of the lesson which worked well; the aspects which did not work well; and the aspects of the lesson that need to be reconsidered or developed next time the teacher wants to teach the same lesson. In other words, although Ayesha keeps a written document of her classroom actions in order to reflect on it later, her term “journal” does not match with the definition of journal found in the literature.

In addition to that, Ayesha told me that once she undertook action research in order to identify the most common errors in Arab students’ writing originating from their L1. She said that she asked the administration to give her access to students’ midterm exam papers. Then she identified the errors, categorized them, reported them in a paper, and presented the paper at a TESOL conference. She said that she is now using the findings of her study when she teaches writing to her students. However, Ayesha’s description of what she undertook fits Burns’s (2002) description of basic research where the purpose of the research is “to establish relationships among phenomena, test theory, and generate new knowledge” which will subsequently result in “development of theory.” While the purpose of action research is “to develop solutions to problems identified within one’s own social environment” which will subsequently result in “development of action to effect change and improvement, and

deeper understanding in one's own social situation" (p. 291). In other words, Ayesha's research was not aimed at solving a problem, which is usually the aim of action research; nor did it involve the cycle of action research, which is identifying a problem, giving a treatment, and observing the results. Therefore, although Ayesha took a step further and undertook research, her use of the term "action research" does not match with the definition of action research discussed in the literature.

Analysis of Maha's remarks revealed another misconception regarding different modes of reflection. In reply to my question where I asked Maha about the forms of reflection she uses, she mentioned students' feedback, and when I asked her what other forms of reflection she uses, she showed me another feedback form. It seems that she recognizes students' feedback as the only mode of reflection. This finding, once more, highlights the importance that students' feedback plays for Maha, which is probably due to the difficulties that she experienced during her first semester of teaching at university. Moreover, when I asked Maha whether she keeps a teaching portfolio she asserted that a portfolio is a combination of course material and it does not have anything to do with reflective teaching. However, a portfolio is not only limited to a combination of teaching materials. In fact, lesson plans and teaching materials form only a part of a portfolio. Teachers can include other things such as a statement of their teaching philosophy, a list of their strengths, and even rationales behind including any of these documents in a portfolio (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). This finding suggests that Maha is not completely aware of different modes through which a teacher can reflect on her teaching.

Although Maha only referred to the feedback she gets from her students as her form of reflection, she said that she regularly talks to one of her colleagues, asks for

her suggestions, and discusses her classroom problems with her. She also pointed out that she observes classes to see what other teachers do and compares her practice with theirs. All these activities are very valuable modes of reflection that are widely discussed in the literature (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). Nevertheless, Maha does not count them as modes of reflection that she uses as a teacher. This is probably because she is unaware that undertaking these activities also makes a teacher reflective. This finding is evident in Catherine's comments as well, where she expressed her uncertainty about what makes a teacher reflective. She specifically asked me whether thinking about one's practice makes one reflective, or whether committing those thoughts to paper and documenting them makes a teacher a reflective one. These findings suggest that these two participants have some uncertainties and misconceptions about different modes of reflection.

In summary, based on the analysis of the participants' answers to the question which asked them about the forms of reflection that they use in their practice, it can be concluded that thinking without documenting, students' feedback, and discussions with colleagues are the most common forms of reflection among the participants. In addition to these three modes of reflection common among all the participants, keeping a teaching portfolio, writing lesson reports, journaling, conducting research, observing classes, and reading the literature are other modes of reflection mentioned by some of the participants. Nevertheless, the analysis of this part revealed that some of the participants have some misconceptions about the different modes of reflection that can be used by teachers, and feel uncertain about what makes a teacher reflective. However, despite some misconceptions and uncertainties, all four participants of this

study asserted that they reflect on their teaching through different modes of reflection discussed in the literature on reflective teaching.

Benefits of Being Reflective Practitioners as Perceived by the Participants

All four participants of the study stated that their engagement with reflection and reflective teaching results in their professional development and helps them become better teachers. This finding is very much in keeping with the literature, where reflection and reflective teaching is considered to be a step toward professionalism (Alger, 2006; Amobi, 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Pollard et al., 2008). Moreover, three participants, Maha, Kareem, and Ayesha, pointed out that being reflective teachers helps them to know themselves, their weaknesses, and their strengths. This finding is also in keeping with the literature that suggests that reflection helps teachers to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and helps them to develop themselves (Pollard et al., 2008).

Regarding the benefits of being a reflective teacher, Maha stated that as a result of being reflective she is now more confident. Richards and Farrell (2005) also note that increased confidence can be an outcome of reflective teaching. Maha also pointed out that reflection helped her change her teaching philosophy. On this issue, Maha said that reflection, discussions with colleagues, and observing other teachers' classes made her realize that the delivery of the lesson and communication with students matter more than the content, and she needs to focus more on these aspects. This finding might be due to the significance that students' feedback plays for her since this was how she managed to keep her new career as a university teacher. In fact, she referred to getting higher evaluations from her students as the eventual benefit of reflecting on her teaching.

To sum up, all four participants of the study stated that they consider professional development to be the main benefit of being a reflective teacher. In addition to that, three of them referred to knowing one's self as the benefit of being a reflective teacher. Moreover, one of the participants stated that reflection helped her become more confident, change her teaching philosophy, and get higher evaluations from her students.

Problems of Being a Reflective Practitioner as Perceived by the Participants

The participants all stated that they feel very comfortable with reflecting on their teaching. However, three of the participants said that they sometimes find it difficult to reflect on their teaching. On this issue, Catherine said that being reflective requires a teacher to have receptive attitudes and be responsive to students. This finding is very much in keeping with the literature that suggests that reflective teachers need to be willing to examine their practice, change it, and be open to suggestions (Qing, 2009). Catherine also stated that it is difficult for her to reflect on something painful. Qing discusses this issue and suggests that becoming a reflective teacher "calls for an appraisal of our own teaching, a willingness to change, an open mind to accept suggestions, and a serious attention to reflective practice" (2009, p. 39) because reflecting on one's practice might result in uncovering issues which are not pleasant (Stanley, 1998). Moreover, Ayesha said that she does not have time to document her reflections on a daily basis. On the same issue, Kareem said that although he keeps a teaching journal, he is busy and he does not have time to make daily entries in his journal. This finding is in line with Qing's argument, where he states that the process of becoming a reflective teacher "[takes] time, patience, responsibility, endurance, commitment, [and] encouragement" (2009, p. 39). Bailey,

Curtis, and Nunan (2001) suggest that teachers try to manage the time they want to spend on documenting their reflections.

In addition, although Kareem said that he has never found himself resisting reflection, he referred to the difficulty of change as the problem of reflection and reflective teaching. On this issue, Kareem said that pursuing a reflective practice requires a teacher to take a learner-centered approach, which is not easy, because the teacher needs to focus on the learners. Kareem's remarks on the view of knowledge as dynamic rather than static, is in line with Dewey's (1997a) discussion on the progressive view of education as opposed to the traditional one. In the progressive view of education, learners are not seen as mere receivers of knowledge. Rather, they have a role in their own learning process. Furthermore, Kareem said that being reflective requires a teacher to be innovative, and being innovative is difficult. Moreover, he said that reflection to him means being updated, and keeping himself updated is what he has always been worried about.

In summary, the participants of this study did not believe that reflection and reflective teaching have any disadvantages or problems. Therefore, they have never had any problems with reflecting on their performance. However, the participants referred to the time, the open-mindedness, and the receptive attitudes that being a reflective teacher requires as the difficulties of being reflective. In addition, to Kareem, being reflective means being innovative and updated. It also equates with taking a student-centered approach toward teaching. According to him, none of these three things is easy to do.

Overall Conclusion

To answer my first research question, “How do these current teachers perceive ‘Reflective Practice?’”, the results of the study indicate that the participants have a general understanding of and appreciation for reflection and reflective teaching, and are aware of the benefits that a reflective approach can bring about. Although they used different words in order to define reflective teaching, reflective teaching to them is thinking back on their practice and examining it in terms of what went well and what did not go as they had expected, in order to improve their performance, become aware of their weaknesses and strengths, and subsequently become better teachers. To answer the second research question, “Do they consider themselves ‘Reflective Practitioners’? Why or why not?”, the participants of this study said that they consider themselves to be reflective practitioners for different reasons. While Ayesha said that she considers herself a reflective teacher because she continually thinks about how things go in her classes, Maha said that she has to be reflective if she wants to keep her job and be a teacher. In addition, Catherine said that she considers herself a reflective teacher to some extent because she is not sure what makes a teacher reflective. Nevertheless, she continually thinks about her practice in order to be responsive to her students. Finally, Kareem implied that he is a reflective teacher, but did not say that explicitly. He said that being reflective is part of his personality, because he believes in change.

To answer my third research question, “What forms of reflection, if any, do they use in their practice?”, thinking without documenting their thoughts, getting feedback from students, and discussion with colleagues are the most common ways through which these four teachers reflect on their practice. In addition to that, keeping

teaching journals and teaching portfolios, writing lesson reports, conducting classroom observation, undertaking research, and reading the literature, which are discussed and encouraged in the literature (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005), are other ways of reflection mentioned by some of them. To answer my last research question, “What factors determine their engagement with ‘Reflection’ and ‘Reflective Teaching’?”, having enough time to reflect on their teaching and documenting those reflections is a determining factor in their engagement with reflective teaching. In addition to that, the ability to think about their performance objectively and open-mindedly and having a receptive attitude are other factors that determine their engagement with reflection and reflective teaching. Moreover, believing in change as well as the usefulness of reflective teaching are essential factors in their involvement in reflection and reflective teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I summarize the major findings of the study discussed in the previous chapter. This is followed by a section where I discuss the implications of this study for teacher educators and instructors teaching reflective courses, teachers, and university administrations. In addition to that, I point out the limitations of the study, and present some suggestions for further research.

Summary of Findings

According to the findings of this study, the participants have generally developed an understanding of and an appreciation for reflective teaching, are familiar with its values and drawbacks to some extent, and practice it in their own classes through different ways. Although these teachers do not necessarily commit their reflections to paper, they continually think about their classroom actions and try to improve them in order to become better teachers. In addition, they discuss different issues related to teaching and learning with their colleagues and try to come up with well-informed decisions. More importantly, by involving their students in decision-makings and asking for their feedback, these teachers promote reflective learning among their students. However, a very important finding of this study also indicates that some of the participants of the study have some misconceptions about reflective teaching and different ways through which teachers can reflect on their classroom actions, or are uncertain of what makes a teacher reflective. These misconceptions or uncertainties might be indications of the participants' inaccurate or insufficient

information about reflective teaching and its different aspects, which in turn highlights the necessity of providing student teachers, novice teachers, and participants of teacher training courses with necessary and sufficient input on reflection and reflective teaching in teacher education programs.

Implications of the Study

This section discusses the practical implications of this study for teacher educators and instructors teaching reflective courses at universities, teachers themselves, and university administrations.

Implications for Teacher Educators and University Instructors

According to the findings of this study, encouraging the participants of teacher training courses to reflect on their performance is a worthwhile attempt, which definitely pays back and helps these teachers become familiar with reflective teaching. However, as the findings of the study suggest, not all the participants had meaningful engagements with reflection and reflective teaching when they were students of the MATESOL program, especially those who were not teaching when they were students. Therefore, it is suggested that instructors engage pre-service teachers and students of TESOL programs in more meaningful activities so that even those who are not teaching or who have never taught before can be engaged in the activities, feel the activities' practical value, and as a result, feel more comfortable with reflecting on their teaching once they start teaching real students in real classrooms. Regarding this issue, Ellis (1990) points out that there are two kinds of activities that can be used in order to prepare teachers for their future career: experimental activities, which include peer-teaching and practicum activities, and

awareness raising activities, which “are intended to develop the student teacher’s conscious understanding of the principles underlying second language teaching and/or the practical techniques that teachers can use in different kinds of lessons” (p. 27).

As Ellis further notes, there are different ways through which the participants of these courses can be provided with data to reflect upon, and there are different kinds of reflective tasks they can be asked to undertake. To mention a few, student teachers can be provided with video and audio recordings of actual lessons, transcripts of different lessons, readings from second language teaching texts, both appropriate and inappropriate teaching materials, lesson plans, case studies, and samples of students’ written work, and then be asked to compare the lesson plans, evaluate the videos and the techniques used by the teachers in those videos, or even adapt the exercises to teach other things. Other kinds of activities that can be used with student teachers are consciousness raising activities, where students think about what makes a good teacher and what leads to good language learning, and then discuss the results with their colleagues (Donaghue, 2003; Özdeniz, 1996). These activities help novice teachers to reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning, and become aware of them. Asking student teachers to engage in these activities, which have practical implications, would give them a sense of what teaching in real classrooms would be like on the one hand, and teach them how they can think about their teaching in a constructive way on the other. It would also be useful to even have a specific course devoted to this.

There are other things that university teachers and teacher educators can do to make reflection a more meaningful activity for student teachers. Instructors teaching practicum courses can provide students with different opportunities to reflect on their

teaching. For example, they can ask their students to choose a dilemma regarding their teaching, try to solve it, and then examine the effectiveness of the solution (Alger, 2006). Furthermore, students can be encouraged to keep a journal of their teaching during the course, reread their journals, and look for patterns in their writings (Bailey, 1990). Students can also discuss the problems they face in their classes with each other and plan appropriate actions together. In this way, teaching makes more sense to students who have no or little teaching experience and are, therefore, unaware of teaching and its related issues. More importantly, engaging in these activities helps students have a meaningful and productive experience with reflection in the Practicum, learn how they can use reflection in a constructive way, and subsequently utilize this knowledge in the future once they start their own career as teachers. Thus, it is suggested that teacher educators and university instructors design activities in a way that they simulate real teaching conditions so that students feel what life inside real classrooms with real students would be like.

Another activity that can be very useful to novice teachers is observing other teachers' classes. Systematic observations help student teachers to understand the teaching process, become aware of the components of effective teaching, be able to understand the difference between effective and ineffective teaching, and pick techniques that they can apply to their own teaching (Day, 1990). This can specifically help novice teachers in dealing with classroom issues such as classroom management. Day points out that classroom management is an issue that often creates anxiety for student teachers and notes, "I find that having [student teachers] observe experienced teachers and code aspects of classroom management is very helpful" (p. 53). An important point that should be taken into consideration is that although

students of TESOL programs taking Practicum are required to observe classes and report their observations, observation should not be limited to this course. Students taking other courses can also be required to observe other teachers' classes, and become familiar with life inside real classrooms.

Another implication of this study which is for teacher educators and instructors who teach reflective courses at universities is that although teachers should tailor different forms of reflection to their individual needs and feel free to reflect through their preferred mode of reflection, it is very important to provide them with necessary input about what different forms of reflection are and how it is possible to reflect through each of them. This input should be made available to student teachers during teacher education programs. Otherwise, teachers enter their classrooms with inadequate and sometimes incorrect knowledge about different forms of reflection. When student teachers are provided with enough input about different modes of reflection, then they can be expected to choose the ones with which they feel comfortable and reflect on their teaching through their preferred mode. Therefore, it is suggested that instructors explain different forms of reflection to student teachers, and student teachers be asked to try different forms of reflection such as journaling, keeping portfolios, writing lesson reports, undertaking action research, conducting classroom observations, etc. This will help them to become familiar with different forms of reflection and choose the ones that best fit their needs and interests.

Not only is it necessary for teacher educators and instructors to familiarize students with different forms of reflection, it is also crucial for them to teach students how to manage their time in order to reflect on their practice. For instance, although journaling appears to be a very time-consuming reflective activity, as Bailey, Curtis,

and Nunan (2001) suggest, teachers can manage their time and assign a specific time for making entries into their journals. Student teachers should be familiarized with these different techniques when they are students. Otherwise, they leave the program, find themselves busy with all the things teachers are supposed to do, and consequently consider journaling to be a very time-consuming activity without even trying it.

In addition, it is important that teacher educators and university teachers familiarize students with structured ways of reflection, such as research. Reading about classroom research is one way of doing that, which can help teachers become familiar with different aspects of classroom research and develop their own skills. Therefore, I agree with McKay (2009) that teacher educators and university instructors should “provide novice teachers with readable accounts of classroom research that illustrates how research can be used to answer real classroom problems” (p. 286). Not only reading about classroom research, but also conducting classroom research can familiarize student teachers with classroom life and different issues related to it. Regarding this point, McKay notes, “L2 educators need to emphasize throughout the teacher-education program that the cornerstone of effective teaching is carefully designed research projects that seek to answer some of the many questions that need to be addressed in L2 teaching and learning” (p. 286). Therefore, I recommend that teacher educators and university instructors teaching TESOL courses require students to undertake classroom research and particularly action research to familiarize them with classroom problems and the realities of teaching, in order to prepare them for their future careers as teachers. When these students undertake research under the supervision of their instructors, they would master the skills of

conducting classroom research and consequently find it much easier to research their own teaching context once they leave the program.

Finally, although it is very important that teacher educators and university instructors provide students of teacher education programs with adequate input about reflection and different ways of doing it, it is also important for them to familiarize students with the culture of reflection and reflective practice. In other words, teachers should be taught how they can reflect on their practice objectively and open-mindedly. Moreover, they should be informed that asking for help and observing other teachers' classes do not necessarily mean that teachers who ask for help, teachers who want to observe their colleagues' classes, and teachers who want to be observed by their experienced colleagues are incapable of managing their own teaching. Rather, it means that these teachers want to know about the best ways of doing things, they care about their professional development, and they want to be better teachers.

Implications for Teachers

There is no doubt that continuous thinking about their practice is a very important activity that teachers can do in order to reflect on their own teaching and improve it. However, thinking about classroom problems does not always help to solve those problems. In fact, Wallace (1998) points out that unstructured thoughts can sometimes worsen the situation and suggests the use of structured reflection such as action research. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers structure their contemplation and research their own contexts by conducting classroom research or case studies. This would help them have a better sense of how life goes in their

classes, deal with their classroom problems, improve their teaching, and become familiar with the processes involved in conducting classroom research.

In addition to that, as one of the findings of this study suggest, discussing classroom issues and problems is a very helpful strategy for teachers. It would be even more helpful if teachers hold systematic and regular discussions with each other. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers form support groups where “two or more teachers [collaborate] to achieve either their individual or shared goals or both on the assumption that working with a group is usually more effective than working on one’s own” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 51). In support groups, teachers teaching the same courses can share and discuss their methods, approaches, and teaching materials with each other and evaluate them. They can even conduct peer observations within the safe and friendly environment of their groups, discuss their problems with each other, think about different actions, and consequently improve their practice. Finally, it is recommended that teachers try to use different forms of reflection discussed in the literature on reflective teaching and choose the one with which they feel comfortable. When teachers try different forms of reflection and experience them, they can definitely make a well-informed decision about choosing their own preferred mode of reflection.

Implications for University Administrations

The findings of the study highlight the importance of having mentors at university level. Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) note that not only novice teachers, but also experienced teachers may find it helpful to work with a mentor. In fact, they state that teachers who are teaching a new level or a new type of students need an experienced teacher to help them become familiar with the new environment.

Therefore, it is suggested that university teachers, especially the ones who have just started their career, be assigned mentors so that they can discuss their problems with an experienced colleague who can provide them with support and advice where necessary.

Limitations of the Study

I believe that conducting this study has helped me to have a better understanding of the notion of reflection and reflective teaching as perceived by practicing teachers. I think that looking at this approach through the eyes of different teachers with different perceptions and different levels of engagement with reflective teaching has provided me with insight about the issue. Apart from this personal gain in insight, the findings of this study can be very helpful to teachers, teacher educators, university teachers teaching reflective courses, and university administrations. However, there are some limitations to this study. One of the limitations of the study is about sampling the participants of the study. In my study I had three female participants and only one male participant. Moreover, three of the participants of the study work at the same university but at two different branches. I did not have a chance to interview participants working at different universities in the United Arab Emirates. Therefore, administrative policies in the university where three of the participants of my study work, might have affected the results of my study. However, these two limitations, having only one male participant and having participants from the same working environment, still could have happened even if I had had a chance to select my participants randomly.

There is another limitation to this study as well. I was planning to ask the participants to have a second meeting with me where I could show them the

transcripts of the interviews and ask them for further clarification on the interviews where necessary. But, as I collected the data for my study in the middle of summer, most of the participants were leaving for summer vacation and they were too busy for follow-up interviews. They said that they preferred to answer my further questions through emails and phone calls. Although I contacted three of the participants and asked them for clarification on the issues that emerged while I was analyzing the data, having a chance to conduct a second interview with the participants once I had already built personal relationships with them could have helped me to obtain richer data regarding the issue under investigation.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The results of this study indicated that the graduates of the MATESOL program have developed a general appreciation of reflective practice, are reflective teachers in one way or another, and reflect through their preferred mode. Thus, it would be illuminating to use other possible research methods—besides interviews—in order to get more insight into this issue. Moreover, conducting this study led me to two more research questions which can guide future studies. First, how do graduates of the AUS MATESOL program who are working as school teachers perceive reflection and reflective teaching? Second, how do former participants of other teacher education programs perceive reflection and reflective teaching?

Final Thought

To conclude this paper, I would like to answer the question I posed in the title of my research which is “Reflective Practice: Theoretical Construct or Ongoing Benefit?” The results of the study that I undertook revealed that engaging themselves

in reflective activities has been a rewarding experience for the four participants of the study. Their comments indicated that they can feel the blessings that reflection has brought about for them. Therefore, here is the answer: Definitely ongoing benefit!

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Part 1

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. What is your mother tongue?
4. How long have you been teaching? Where? What levels?
5. When did you graduate from the MA TESOL program?

Part 2

1. What does “Reflection” mean to you?
2. What does “Reflective Teaching” mean to you?
3. When you were a graduate student, were you encouraged to reflect on your practice? Tell me about your experience with reflection during the program.
4. What did you like about reflecting as an MA TESOL student?
5. What didn't you like about reflecting as an MA TESOL student?

Part 3

1. Now that you are teaching in your own class, do you consider yourself a reflective practitioner?
2. Why did/didn't you choose to continue reflecting on your practice?
3. What forms of reflection do you use? Why?
4. Have you ever shared your reflections with anyone? Why or why not?
5. What are the advantages of being a reflective teacher?
6. What are the disadvantages of being a reflective teacher?
7. Have you ever found yourself resisting reflection? Tell me about it.

Is there anything you would like to add? Thank you.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Dear participants,

Thank you very much for accepting to participate in this study. Please be informed that the information you will provide the researcher with will be used only for the purpose of this research. The sole purpose of the research is coming to an understanding of your sincere feelings and perspectives about the topic. This information will not be used to judge you or your practice. In addition, you will remain anonymous in the research paper since you will be given a pseudonym. Finally, if you wish to see it, the transcript of the interview will be made available to you prior to being used in this research.

Please sign the form if you agree to participate in this research.

Thank you.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

I would like to view the transcript: Yes No

Appendix C: Maha's Interview Transcript

The participant's demographic info:

Name: Maha Age: 38 Nationality: Egyptian

Experience in teaching: 10 years

Type of experience: High school and University

Graduated from the MATESOL program in: 2006

Length of the interview: 31 minutes and 32 seconds

She asked me if she could see the interview questions.

She spent a few seconds reading them, and she said that she needed to show me something.

She went to her office and came back a minute later carrying two pieces of paper.

Then she started talking:

Maha: Just to start off with, when I was a student, I wasn't really interested in the point of reflective teaching, because from my previous experience at schools, it didn't mean that much. So what? What do you mean by reflecting teaching? So, it did not just engage me when I was an MA student. Yet, when I came here, hmm, especially the first semester, I had a lot of problems with the students, hmm, with...

communication. So, and it was really a bad semester. So, at this point, I talked to one of my experienced old colleagues and we decided to have peer observation visits. She came to my class, she pointed out things that were really (pause) important (pause).

Shahla: Like what?

Maha: To deliver the lesson. First of all, these are the things, yeah, so, what she suggested at that time, this is what the majority of us in this area here usually do.

Hmm to build a rapport especially with these students here is more important than the actual delivery of the lesson. So, once the rapport is established and you have very very good communication with the students, no matter the way you teach, no matter how heavy or dense the material is, it won't make a difference.

Shahla: Wow! That's really really (interrupted by the interviewee)

Maha: That's it! So, hmm, mine, they had a problem because I came from a background where the teacher is always or has to be serious and the, there has to be great.

Shahla: Yeah. Where are you from?

Maha: Egypt.

Shahla: Ok.

Maha: Difference between the teacher, the students, great distance. So, I tried to keep the distance. So, this is one thing. So, this is why I'm saying, I was very very serious in terms that I have this, I had to hear this that I am a serious teacher, which wasn't fine at all at that time. The way I was used to dress, I always wore my suits, and this (interrupted by the interviewer)

Shahla: Like a real teacher. Yeah, I know!

Maha: Yeah, like the ones we see on TV.

Shahla: Like a real teacher!

Maha: Yeah, I don't wear casual clothes, no smart casual; I was always dressed very very formally. And this fired back on me. They they just reached, especially the first time, so this happened the first time, they reached the point that, that's it. There's no way to communicate and we don't want to communicate with her. This is the second thing. Hmm, in terms of attendance, absence, and lateness, (pause) because I was

new, I came from a background, and because of my standards, and said, because all the teachers at the (inaudible word), we have to set the standards. You have to point out your policy right from day one. This is what I did. So accompanied with my standards, and my experienced as called back in Egypt, so I brought all this back over here. And, well! It cause a lot of problems. I wasn't flexible with lateness; I wasn't flexible with attendance. These things that the way is more important than the content. So instead of spending time dealing with them: listen, they spend time negotiating whether they were absent 5 minutes or 10 minutes. And definitely you were late for 10 minutes. Oh oh, Miss. Look at my watch! It is 5 minutes. And all of this went back to the admin and I had very sincere yet strange advice. They told me set your watch on their timing.

Shahla: Oh my god!

Maha: Yes! I was a little bit intimidated and humiliated at the beginning but then I found out that this is the norm. So, I should, not the first time, later on, I started working on it. Ok! 5 minutes, 10 minutes won't make that big difference. So let it go. I shouldn't stop on these trivial issues if I want to keep my job. The third thing was my smile. (laughing)

Shahla: (laughing)

Maha: Because I always get, the first two semesters, because we have an evaluation. They have to fill it up, and a comment page. So they have to write their comments. Now, for the eval (unfinished), for the comments, what I got was that she is scary. She scares us. She is always frowning.

Shahla: Oh, god!

Maha: I talked to my, I called my mentor, I talked to my mentor. She said ok, let, she's Greek. So she has this oriental thing. I am Egyptian, but I am not as open as her!
(laughing)

Shahla: (laughing) I know what you mean.

Maha: So, I visited her classes, she visited mine. And I started working on my smile, and my sense of humor, in class. Definitely it did me very well. It paid back, it paid back.

Shahla: Great!

Maha: But it took longer time because I'm not a smiley person. (laughing)

Shahla: (laughing) I know! I know what you mean! I am not a smiley person either!

Maha: But it it makes a lot of difference. It makes a lot of difference. And when I observed the other teachers, and I found out those who get very very high evaluation just play on these things. The way you communicate with them, how daunt, earth and humble and sometimes which is against your ethics but they would let it go to make up for other things. But still it was a learning experience for me. So what Anna (pseudonym) my mentor and I decided to do is, we prepared these three questions (she showed a piece of paper to me which she had brought from her office at the beginning of our conversation. The paper consisted of three questions: Three things that Ms. Maha does to help me learn are; Three thing that Ms. Maha could do to help me learn better are; Three things that I do to help myself learn better are) and I would give it to them after the first month.

Shahla: Aha?

Maha: Ok! So, what do you think? What were the things that you liked? What are the things that you don't like? And what would you like to see (The conversation was

interrupted by one of Maha's colleague who entered the room and started talking to her for about 22 second.)

Maha: So, I gave them this. Well, I started giving this out when I had a little bit confidence in the way I communicate with students and you usually have the perception what will they write. The class that I really felt comfortable with, that I succeeded in establishing a good rapport with them gave good things on the, wrote nice, not nice, and pointed things about what do I do to help them, now (referring to the paper) things that could do to help me learn better, what do you suggest, and the majority because I'm teaching here in the IEP, so it's mainly TOEFL and IELTS for the students who came from government schools. So they have a little knowledge of English and they are bored to death; because they have to stay here for 25 hours a week and see me every day. So, the majority, gave that they want to have more fun, in terms of more games, hmm, chat more with them, and watch films. Now I didn't do this before that semester because I said ok how would watching films help in TOEFL or IELTS if they are going to sit for these two exams? But later on, after talking to my colleagues, yes why not? Let it be fun! It won't harm. So once in a while, I would just ask them to, I would just, we would go to a room where we can watch a video, a film, and it is usually just a comic one which is cultural sensitive, just for the sake of it and that I would usually do that on Thursdays, just to break it. This is one of the things that I have learned. Ok, if then, fine. Give me suggestions. Some of them would volunteer and bring their, we could, we watched Ratatouille, just cartoons.

Shahla: Yes, to have fun.

Maha: Just to have fun. They would just go to the cafeteria, bring their nachos and their pop corn, and we would sit there on Thursdays, every other week.

Shahla: Wow! What a great change! I mean (interrupted by the interviewee)

Maha: It is! It is! This is one thing and the other thing is that the first semester, I usually compare the first semester with all other semesters (laughing), because in the first semester I messed it up (laughing).

Shahla: Yeah. It was a problematic semester for you.

Maha: Hmmm so we didn't go to the computer lab on the first semester, because I didn't know what to do there. Ok. They need the teacher to help them deal with the TOEFL and IELTS. Ok, how? And they don't have the basics. So, how can I send them to the lab unless they are well equipped? But this has turned later on, ok! There must be a room where independent study. Ok. So what would I do? The first thing, the first time, I would just wrote a couple of websites on the board, go to these websites, do the questions and that's it. I found it really boring, and it is not beneficial at all, and we would go to the lab every other week on Wednesdays or Tuesdays. I said ok, and I would do this for my all classes. And said ok, now I'm not happy with what's going on in the lab. (A deep breath) So instead of them, giving them two websites or sometimes a list of websites, and I would write them on the board, I would prepare just slips with the websites as the first task, and the second task I would prepare something myself and ask them to answer the questions. This took more time to engage them more in the lab; so in the lab, yes, they were doing a great job. When the task was interesting and (inaudible word) they begin I like it in the lab, so you have to work on your own, that's it. Now in the lab they have to sit in pairs or teams, not on their own by all means. So, this helps me with my teaching, but so now what I'm really working on right now is my... (looking at me)

Shahla: Smile!

Maha: Smile and my communication. The other thing that I got from them was that I don't, I speak too fast. I explain the lesson very very quickly and I don't give them much time to think and answer if I pose a question, I don't give them time to answer the question. Well, after talking to Anna, after visiting her, I decided ok, just come down, cool, give them some time to answer; just I would repeat the lesson. What I found really really beneficial is that yes we have the course book and this is what we have to follow whether it's TOEFL or IELTS, the grammar section where we teach grammar. Ok, the book is not enough, because they have the book with them and they have the blackboard. So, what I decided to do, it was Anna's suggestion and it came out to be one of the best solutions, whenever I go to class, I have to have two things with me, a handout, a summary of the lesson handout and a worksheet, different from the book. So what we do is, we just explain the lesson, give them the handout, read through it together and in the hand out there would be a couple of questions to just ask them to focus more on what we are talking about. So once we are done with the handout, here comes the worksheet. They would do the worksheet in class in groups, whatever, it doesn't make a difference. So, this has helped in engaging the students more in the lesson, and it helped me get better evaluation.

Shahla: Just one question, these forms (referring to that paper) were suggested by your mentor or (interrupted)

Maha: She is a colleague of mine, but she does this with her class.

Shahla: So, it was just a suggestion?

Maha: Just informal suggestion and...

Shahla: But you liked it and you used it.

Maha: I, we use it a lot right now. Sometimes if, I don't have to give this, just one of the classes especially at the beginning ask them, ok, Miss, they usually say: Miss we are not in the mood today, we don't feel like doing anything today. Ok, suggest! What do you want to do? So, we would talk together and... I turn it away, ok, what do you think of the course; what would you like to do? It doesn't have to be formal and they have to write it. Because sometimes some of them feel that ok she will know our handwriting; so some of them might not write anything. So, just, ok, what do you think? I am not taking marks, what are your suggestions? And I liked the suggestions.

Shahla: I really like this idea! This is such a nice idea! Can I have a copy of this one (the paper she gives her students to give her feedback)

Maha: Definitely! Definitely! And these are some of their comments. Actually I'll give you their words, I don't know where are they. (Showing me some of the comments written by her students, and reading from the paper) Ok, what is that he don't like about me: She gets nervous. She is so so, she gets nervous when a lot (pause)

Shahla: (Reading from the paper) When we're late.

Maha: (Reading from the paper) When we are late or asleep, whatever, but it is ok because it's the rules. Ok, now what really intimidating me that semester, having their mobile phones in their hands all the times.

Shahla: I know!

Maha: I haven't had this experience before just because I know, you are in the class, you are not supposed to use the phone. But it took me more than two semesters to realize, ok, accept it, a fact of life, deal with it.

Shahla: Yeah, that was my main problem when I was teaching in Iran, using phones, such a painful thing.

Maha: (Laughing) Ok, so I decided ok I would just go with a box, and just say, hand in your mobile phones. Miss Miss Miss Miss. Ok, some of them wrote mainly, she is treating us, after this box thing, she is treating us like children. We don't like that.

Shahla: Aw!

Maha: Ok, just, so I stopped the box. And I would just taught the lesson with a smile, (smiling) do you mind if I put it away, (smiling) I'll take it, I like your mobile. What is it? Is it Blackberry? Oh, I don't like it, but I'll take it. So it draws their attentions not all the time but just they have to let it go for some time. The other thing is it rings. Miss, my mom is calling me and it's urgent. No, you shouldn't answer. Your mother knows that you are in class and you are not expected to answer. And then it fired back. Ok, go ahead, answer the phone. So flexibility affect a lot the teaching and communication.

Shahla: But it is difficult.

Maha: It is! Oooo (laughing)

Shahla: (laughing)

Maha: (Reading from another paper) Here, things that they do not like, when I ask a question, when I pose a question to one girl, another girl jumps up to answer and they don't like it. So, this happens especially when it is very very active and a nice group; and you have two or three students who are not in the group, who are totally isolated; so they feel that they are left out and abandoned. So, just, ok, guys, come down, ok, let's stick to the rules. Each one has to answer. Don't jump on each other. The other

thing is that I used to just play games and the game is just cut out pieces of paper, stick them here and there and that's it.

Shahla: Great! At the beginning when you started talking you said that you don't have a good experience with reflection as a student.

Maha: Aha.

Shahla: Why is that? Because you were not familiar with the concept, or you didn't like it?

Maha: No, because we used to write reflective essays and in our, at that time, because I was not in a working experience, so it didn't mean that much to me. I don't pay, I didn't pay that much importance to it. But right now, if I'm teaching three lessons and three different classes, definitely my performance in the third class is much better than the second, and definitely is way better than the first class.

Shahla: And when you were a student, for example you were asked to prepare your material, and then try to connect your objectives with the material, did you have a hard time doing that?

Maha: No, it was ok. No problem with that.

Shahla: And how long have you been teaching in general?

Maha: Six and four, 10.

Shahla: 10 years? Wow! And what levels?

Maha: Six years, school, grade 11 and 10, and here four years.

Shahla: And when did you graduate from the MATESOL program?

Maha: 2006

Shahla: Ok. Great! And when you were a student what didn't you like about reflecting?

Maha: No, it was ok!

Shahla: Even the time? I mean people usually say that it takes a lot of time.

Maha: No, it was fine. I was ok.

Shahla: Ok. Great! That's really great!

Maha: The first batch didn't, especially the first batch, we did not complain about anything! We were just admiring the fact that we were given the opportunity to sit for our Masters and they were very very much appreciative to the professors. So we did not ever ever ever complain about the assignments.

Shahla: You were such good students!

Maha: Yes!

Shahla: Because we are always doing that! We are always complaining about everything! (laughing)

Maha: (laughing) No, because that batch was totally different.

Shahla: And, this is (referring to the papers) one form of reflection that you are using. You give, you ask for your students comments, and is there anything else that you use? Journals? Portfolios?

Maha: Portfolio is a part of the course work; they are not for reflecting teaching. So, I'm not using it. Unless because when I used to teach at the IEP they have to prepare reading portfolios, writing portfolios, listening portfolios; but it is not for reflection or reflecting teaching. It is a combination of the course material.

Shahla: Ok, so this is the only thing that you are now at the moment using for reflection.

Maha: I tried to look for the evaluation, but I'm not sure where I have put it. Just let me ask Sarah (pseudonym, her office mate) if she has it. (She leaves to bring the

evaluation form, and is back within half a minute. She shows the evaluation form to me which is titled “Informal Feedback on Ms. Maha’s Academic Class)

Maha: Ok. This, this one, this feedback form (referring to the form) I used it when I teach at the IEP. This semester I taught at DEL, English Department, so I used it because they have already passed the TOEFL, some of them, and IELTS, and they are ready to enroll in their majors. So, the focus is totally different. So this is the feedback I got from the students. Have a look at it.

Shahla: (Looking at the evaluation form. The form consists of two statements:

“Things that you enjoyed about the classes,” and “Anything else that you would like me to do.”) Aha, so this is another way of asking (interrupted)

Maha: Would you like me... Yes, but as you can see here simple (referring to the first form) two simple questions.

Shahla: Because they’re more advanced!

Maha: I’ll make a copy for you. (She uses the photocopy machine which is right beside us to copy the paper, and then gives it to me).

Shahla: Thank you. So now, after all this, do you consider yourself a reflective practitioner?

Maha: We have to! Or else you would end your career. You have to, because (pause)

Shahla: So, you think you have to?

Maha: We have to.

Shahla: Do you want to? Or it’s a matter of must or it’s a matter of (interrupted by the interviewee)

Maha: It comes by nature if you are seeking professional development, if you’re seeking personal development. It goes without saying that you have to reflect on

anything that you do in class. I have my material that I have since I started working. Now, each time I teach the same course, I would have a look at the same material but I don't choose it as is. I have to change. Students change, the atmosphere change, the whole set up changes. So, it would give me a good idea, this, yes, I have material, it would give me a good idea what to do, but the way I deliver them to the students are always different. That's why it makes a lot, it's (pause), it's an added load for the teacher.

Shahla: Yes, definitely.

Maha: So, I can't use the same thing always. So it goes without saying. If you decide to be a teacher (deep breath)

Shahla: You have to be...

Maha: Yeah. This is one thing. Another thing is that you have at the back of your mind you only think of the evaluation and how (pause) the administration will look at you. So I just can't use the same thing; just definitely it (inaudible word) sometimes it's up, sometimes it's down. But this is a part of the whole teaching thing. I would do the same thing with two classes; one class would just enjoy it and the other class would just (pause) that...

Shahla: Hate it! Yeah!

Maha: They would just say what is she doing. So it depends on the students as well.

Shahla: If you want to define reflection how do you define it? If you want to put it in words.

Maha: Ok, I know. (long pause) When you just look back at what you had done, taking into consideration the context, the students, the material, the timing, all of this make you... reflect on your teaching and whether you would like to do the same

thing again because timing is important. Eight o'clock class is different from one o'clock class, is different from (laughing) three o'clock class. Top students, male students or female students, self-motivated students or lay back students, all these have to be taken into consideration.

Shahla: So, that is how you define reflection and reflective teaching.

Maha: As far as I think, yeah.

Shahla: That's great. That's really great. Have you ever shared your reflections with any of your colleagues?

Maha: Yeah, I told you. I always just ask Anna. Well! I picked her because she is an easy (pause) going person. It's easy to talk to her. She suggested that I would visit her and this is not appreciated. Many teachers feel intimidated if you are going to visit your classes. So we arrange visits all through the semesters, just for the sake of mutual benefit. And definitely I benefitted more than her; because she is a very good and experienced teacher. But I always share, I showed her these feedback feedback. I always give her, share with her my evaluation at the end of the semester. Whenever there is a problem in class, I just go to her and talk to her and she would just bring out things that happen in her class and share them with me. In this regard, I share a lot with her. Definitely I share with my office mate, but I share with Anna more.

Shahla: Do you share the success or the failure of your lessons with your other colleagues?

Maha: Definitely. Definitely, yeah. If I'm teaching the same material the same class, I would ask her, what did you do, it didn't work with me. It would work with her but it could, sometimes it won't work with me, or the other way round. Especially if I'm taking material from my office mate, and hmm especially this happens with games.

They call it games but actually activities. If I'm taking and the activity worked with her very well, but didn't work well with me. Part of it because hmm maybe me, the way I just introduced the activity, it wasn't very successful one. But maybe she introduced it in a better way. So we just talk about it together.

Shahla: Great! Great! What are the advantages of being a reflective teacher, that you are now?

Maha: (No response)

Shahla: What do you see very good about it?

Maha: (No response)

Shahla: To improve yourself?

Maha: Mainly, professional development, social development, yes.

Shahla: Any disadvantages?

Maha: No! Why? No. Hmm, the other thing is that because when we used to work with the lab, I didn't know what the hell should we do over there, I'm taking my second Masters right now.

Shahla: Really? Great!

Maha: Yeah. Instructional Technology.

Shahla: Wow!

Maha: So, and it helped me, but I do the activities and course work I do for my Masters, some of them, I take some of them and apply it and I share it with my students. So, it's just continuous professional development and headache! (laughing)

Shahla: No disadvantages?

Maha: (laughing and moving her head, indicating a negative answer)

Shahla: Have you ever found yourself resisting reflection?

Maha: No, no.

Shahla: You didn't want to or you didn't have time to do that?

Maha: It's not a matter of time. It won't take (pause) time. Because once you sit back for five minutes and at night all that happened in the morning comes back to you, and I did this, I didn't do that. Maybe next time I'll do this, maybe next time. So, it happens by nature. I can say, I can't stop it, because it's part of your career. Like doctors, can they stop developing themselves?

Shahla: No. Of course not.

Maha: That's it!

Shahla: Have you ever seen people, colleagues, that resist reflection or they don't want to do that?

Maha: Yeah.

Shahla: Why do you think they don't want to do that?

Maha: I guess it could be, it's a cultural thing. Maybe, it's a cultural thing.

Shahla: Aha. Yeah. Maybe some people are more open to reflection (interrupted)

Maha: Ok! Some of them think ok, I've been doing this for 20 years. I don't need anyone to suggest anything. I don't want anyone to **advise** me how to do it. At this point, that's it! They lost it.

Shahla: So, actually they don't resist reflection; they resist change.

Maha: (pause) could be. Part of it is ok you change because you reflect.

Shahla: Yeah.

Maha: So, it is the whole thing.

Shahla: Yes, you're right! Is there anything else you want to add to our conversation about reflection or reflective teaching?

Maha: For me, I'm ok. If you have any questions, I'm pleased to answer you
(laughing).

Shahla: Ok. Thank you. So, how do you feel know? You know, if you want to
compare your experience with, as you said, your first semester (interrupted by the
interviewee)

Maha: Oh.., definitely, much much better this time. Every year. Sometimes there are
ups and downs; but in general, I'm much more confident than the first. I know my
potentials. I'm willing to learn and I share my success and failure with my others.
This is a very good thing. I didn't used to do that the first semester. So I'm more
confident when it comes to what I'm doing right now. And I ask for help if I want to.

Shahla: That's a great thing!

Maha: (Smiling)

Shahla: To ask for help!

Maha: I ask. I'm not, it is not that I don't know, because I need to know how to do it
in the best way I can. So I ask. Some teachers answer sincerely, and the other just give
you this straight answers. Ok. I understand and then I go and ask someone else.

Shahla: Great! Wow, it was really a nice lovely chat.

Maha: My pleasure!

Shahla: There's just one question.

Maha: Sure!

Shahla: If you don't want to (interrupted by the interviewee)

Maha: Definitely!

Shahla: ...don't answer it. How old are you?

Maha: 38

Shahla: Ok. So it was not a secret!

Maha: (Laughing) Common knowledge!

Shahla: (laughing) Thank you very much.

VITA

Shahla Yassaei received a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Shahid Bahonar, Kerman, Iran, in 2005. She also has a Certificate in TESOL from Trinity, England. Prior to moving to the UAE, she taught English to adults for five years in Qeshm Language Center, which is a private language institute in Kerman, Iran.