

Revisiting Publications for Reflective Practice by Using a Parallel-Thinking Process Tool

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Often it seems that when we write an article, we only return to it again if we want to use the material for another article. However, that article can also be viewed as a snapshot capturing our values and beliefs for that moment in time. This paper will compare and contrast changes in my values and practice as an EFL instructor since I wrote the article Exploring Students' and Instructors' Perceptions Regarding Learner Autonomy and More Independence in the Classroom (Arthurson, 2017). In order to compare and contrast these changes, de Bono's Six Thinking Hats (The de Bono Group, N. D.), a parallel-thinking process tool which was applied to reflective practice, will be discussed.

Introduction

Originally I had intended to examine data previously gathered and published from a research project entitled Exploring Students' and Instructors' Perceptions Regarding Learner Autonomy and More Independence in the Classroom (Arthurson, 2017) so that I could write another article. My interest in learner autonomy is rooted in my studies in social work, specifically social justice and egalitarianism. With learner autonomy learners can potentially share the same experience of decisions making as the instructor if they are given the opportunity to make choices about classroom management, performance evaluation and content-creation activities. As a result, instructors can improve the perception of empowerment in their EFL learners. As I began to review the data and article, it seemed that instead it may be more beneficial to first explore how my values and practice had changed since the project instead of repurposing the data from the article for a new article. A parallel-thinking tool, Six Thinking Hats (The de Bono Group, N. D.), was used to guide reflection. Though this is intended for a group, it seemed that using the six concrete perspectives could be modified for individual reflective practice. This paper will present the setting of the original article, outline the Six Thinking Hats and its modification for individual use, and then apply the modified tool to my process of reflective practice.

Setting of the Original Article

Exploring Students' and Instructors' Perceptions Regarding Learner Autonomy and More Independence in the Classroom (Arthurson, 2017) is an article for my university's in-house publication. It examined the perceptions between the similarities and differences of EFL university instructors and students regarding learner autonomy. Furthermore, it explored the activities instructors used and the feedback from students about those activities. Some EFL instructors assume that Japanese EFL learners cannot or do not want to have more autonomy in their learning, perhaps due to the traditional top-down style of teaching in most schools. As a result the article provided another perspective giving voice to learners' opinions of learner autonomy.

de Bono's Six Thinking Hats and Its Modification

Inspired by Mann and Walsh's inclusion of de Bono's Six Thinking Hats in their book *Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching* (2017), I was interested in how the activity could aid in individual reflective practice in EFL. De Bono's activity is a parallel-thinking process tool mainly aimed at groups for problem-solving by assigning members different focuses referred to as "hats". The following table outlines the role of each hat. While I have not participated in this activity, I was intrigued to see how it may aid in guiding my reflection of the article; and ultimately in assessing changes to my values and practice since I had written the article. However, I was unable to locate any other publications linking de Bono, EFL and the reflective practice through publications. Referencing Mann and Walsh (2017) as well as the Six Thinking Hats activity on de Bono's website (The de Bono Group, N. D.), I then modified the activity as a guide for individual reflection of *Exploring Students' and Instructors' Perceptions Regarding Learner Autonomy and More Independence in the Classroom* (Arthurson, 2017) to explore my values, specifically egalitarianism and in how that value was translated through my practice of learner autonomy.

Hats	Role of the Hats	Modified for Individual Use
White	Information known or the facts about the situation or issue	Research and data analysis summary of the article
Yellow	Positives and benefits of the situation or issue	Positive points of the article
Black	Difficulties and problems of the situation or issue	Negative points of the article
Red	Feelings, hopes and fears regarding the situation or issue	Hopes and fears of the article
Green	Alternatives and innovations to counteract Black Hat's points	Other directions of focus for new articles
Blue	Management of the thinking process to address the situation or issue	Changes to my values and approach since the article

De Bono's Six Thinking Hats (The de Bono Group, N. D.) and Modification for Individual Use

Reflection Through the Six Thinking Hats

This section will present the modified activity for individual use and be applied step-by-step to the reflection of the original article.

White Hat: Research and Data Analysis Summary of the Article

The White Hat outlines the article's facts. My 12 coworkers and three English discussion classes totaling 22 1st-year students were surveyed about learner autonomy between July and December 2016. The surveys used mostly open-ended questions to gather a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. The survey answers are based on the frequency of keywords in the data and are summarized as follows.

Yellow Hat: Positive Points of the Article

It has been over a year and a half since I completed the article, and I am generally satisfied with the original article. The article still mirrors my beliefs that students and teachers share similar opinions about learner autonomy, and that both groups' opinions are significant. It also outlines possible ways to create a more egalitarian EFL environment through activities which foster learner autonomy.

Comprehensive Definition of Learner Autonomy	
Instructors	Students
“The learner’s self-management and responsibility for making decisions using their own capacity without relying on other people enabling their own improvement and freedom” (p. 125).	“Using one’s own abilities to take action, as well as their own skills, without relying on others’ help to express their own ideas” (p. 125).
Learner Autonomy’s Advantages	
Instructors	Learners
“Improvement in not only students’ English skills but can potentially aid in their learning in other classes and after university resulting in more motivation, responsibility, understanding, confidence and creativity” (p. 124).	“Improvement in the English discussion class as well as interaction with other classmates with more opportunities to understand by being more active and making decisions” (p. 123-4).
Learner Autonomy’s Disadvantages	
Instructors	Learners
“Not enough feedback or explicit teaching; time-consuming; students may be confused regarding the goals of the class; the course losing its sense of direction; lowering the students’ quality of learning” (p. 124).	“Uncertainty; feelings such as nervousness and anxiety; a gap between talkative or assertive and quiet or passive students; and a disruption to the smoothness of the class” (p.124).
Activities for Fostering Learner Autonomy	
Types Used by Instructors (Number of Instructors Using the Activities) (p. 123)	Students’ Feedback of Activities Positive / Neutral / Negative (p. 127)
Performance evaluation (9/12)	14 / 7 / 1
Content creation (8/12)	15 / 7 / 0
Classroom management (6/12)	14 / 7 / 1

Summary of Survey Data (Arthurson, 2017)

Black Hat: Negative Points of the Article

The two areas in the article I have the most issues with are the omission of data from questions about students’ previous experience with activities fostering learner autonomy: content creative, evaluation and time management. I cannot recall why I overlooked this as learners’ previous experience as it could have allowed for richer data analysis. Also I chose 12 instructors who I knew valued learner autonomy. Without surveying instructors who I knew did not hold the same views, a balance was lacking. Furthermore their opinions could have helped me to understand the viewpoints of the students who also do not see the value in learner autonomy. At that time I think my understanding of learner autonomy was quite narrow, only focusing on classroom activities with less openness to exploring other applications or even to learning more about what those with differing opinions thought.

Red Hat: Hopes and Fears of the Article

In rereading the article, I had positive feelings. I recall that as I had started the project I sensed that the instructors and students would both see the value in learner autonomy and having more independence. Perhaps since my hypothesis was confirmed and I felt satisfied writing about learner autonomy, thereafter it enabled me to explore other areas of interest in

my teaching practice. If I am to use the Red Hat in using the Six Thinking Hats as a tool for reflective practice for this current paper, I do hope that others reading this article will feel encouraged to be more creative with their reflections by revisiting their publications and research projects. Green Hat: Focus for New Articles

In reviewing the article, I would like to write another based on the project data. When I do so, I would like to write for a wider audience as the original article was predominantly written for co-workers who teach the same English discussion class. However, sharing the similarities between two groups, EFL instructors and Japanese students, could help educators in creating more empowering environments for their learners and enabling them to have more control over their learning especially at the university level. As mentioned previously, incorporating the students' previous experiences with activities that foster learner autonomy such as through classroom management, content creation and self- and peer-feedback should be highlighted in the future article.

Blue Hat: Changes to My Values and Approach

The greatest change to my teaching approach when I started the project in April 2016 to now is that my focus is broader. I still hold egalitarianism through learner autonomy as one of the core values shaping my teaching beliefs and practice. However, I now feel that learner autonomy is not restricted to classroom activities. It is a manifestation of the respect I have for my students and their learning journey by my thoughts, words, actions, and practice. In the future I feel that I will be able to practice learner autonomy more holistically.

Conclusion

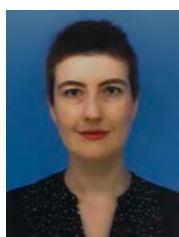
This paper has had two purposes; first as a reflection of my values and practice and second to determine if I want to write another article based on the previous data and article. Exploring my previous article through the six different lenses has aided me in not only reflective practice but given me the impetus to repurpose the data for another article. Additionally, it has allowed me to seek out new ways of doing reflective practice and understanding my values. I would encourage other teachers to revisit their papers and projects, as well as use tools from other fields not typically associated with EFL or ESL.

References

Arthurson, D. (2017). Exploring students' and instructors' perceptions regarding learner autonomy and more independence in the classroom. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning English Discussion 5*, 121-129.

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Bio:

I have been living in Japan for nearly ten years after graduating with a Bachelor of Social Work completing practicums in community development and research to affect policy change in Winnipeg, Canada. Recently I received a Master of Arts in Integrated Studies with a focus on global change and community studies.

Currently I am teaching at Rikkyo University in Tokyo where I have the opportunity to explore and experiment with fostering learning autonomy, developing inter-cultural awareness and using shadowing in English discussion classes. In my free time I enjoy volunteering to help the homeless, studying Japanese and doing yoga, as well as going to art museum and DJ parties.