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Diary Research

Catherine Smith

1. Introduction

Keeping a teaching diary has given me invaluable insight in to my teaching by focusing attention on my teaching methodology and the communicativeness of my classroom. In this article I will describe the framework I used to keep a diary and both its positive and negative results. At the time I began my diary study, my teaching environment had changed and I wanted to define how my methodology was evolving accordingly. Whilst I was able to identify a change, in doing so I became aware that my teaching was not as communicative as I had hoped. Both of these outcomes gave my teaching a new direction and I would highly recommend keeping a teaching diary as a result.

2. The diary framework

I adopted a procedure outlined by Bailey (1983, 1990) and referred to by Nunan. Nunan states that Bailey recommends: "a five stage procedure, beginning with an account of the diarist's personal learning history" (Nunan, 1992: 120). A diagram of the five procedures is included in Nunan (1989). After outlining the learning (or in this case, teaching) history, the diarist records their current teaching experience over a period of time and then revises the journal for the public version of the diary. The diarist then studies the entries to look for patterns, and in the final stage the observations identified as important to the teaching experience are discussed.

McDonough (1994) notes Bailey's (1990) distinction between writing a diary and doing a diary study. A diary is private, whilst a diary study is made available to the public. As this was to be a personal diary and not a diary study, stage three of the process was eliminated. It therefore became a four stage procedure as outlined below:

i. An outline of the teaching history, including a definition of my teaching methodology;

ii. The recording of the diary for three weeks;

iii. Study of the diary for patterns;

iv. Interpretation and discussion of the patterns.

Stage 1

Writing out my teaching history illustrated how many different students and experiences that I had had and how they had affected the gradual realization of my teaching methodology.

At the time of commencing my diary, I summarised my methodology as: " based on the communicative approach and in line with Johnson and Littlewood's (1984) description of the 'skill learning model' as described in Richards and Rodgers (1986). I incorporate cognitive and behavioural aspects into my lessons by setting the students up with the grammatical rules and social conventions governing speech. These are then practised in a communicative

environment to make their speech automatic and fluent." When starting my diary, I was aware that whilst still being based on the communicative approach, my methodology had started to change. I decided to use the diary to investigate how it had changed, and, as I claimed to base my teaching on the communicative approach, I decided to see how communicative my classroom actually was.

Stage 2

Keeping the diary was enjoyable; it helped to focus me after the lessons and served as a reminder of ideas that I wanted to follow up in later classes. However, there were difficulties involved in the process itself: in particular, a sense of audience and time.

I found it hard to ignore the fact that what had prompted me to keep the diary was an assignment for an MA course and so, on re-reading my diary, I was aware that I was writing for an audience. I used various quotes and academic references influenced by the course materials that I was reading at the time of the entries. By subconsciously writing for an audience, the candidness and the validity of my diary were all affected. For example, in one entry when I was questioning how much information to give students before a task, there is evidence of my attempts to 'prove' that I was doing the course reading. I quote Michael Swan: "Swan writes in Part 2 of his Criticism of the Communicative Approach that, 'it may be best to deal with such problems of form before students do communicative work on notions or functions in which they will have to mix these structures with others.'" Having kept a diary since this initial

study, whilst I might paraphrase something that I have read, or make a note to look for a relevant quote, I do not copy out quotes in such a formal manner.

The second difficulty was the time lag between the class and the diary entries. The diary is a retrospective research tool, and, as Nunan writes: "Retrospection has been criticised by a number of researchers (see, for example, Nisbett & Wilson 1977) on the grounds that the gap between the event and the reporting will lead to unreliable data" (Nunan, 1992: 124). Being aware of this, I tried to complete my diary as soon as possible after the class, but this was usually twenty-four to forty-eight hours later.

Stage 3

I analyzed the information to find my current methodology by asking only three questions: What methods are influencing me? Do I set up my activities according to my prior definition of my methodology, that is, in a Presentation, Practice, Production (3P) manner? Is my class communicative? For anyone thinking of doing a diary study, I would suggest more specific post analysis reflective questions such as those suggested in Richards and Lockhart (1994: 16-17). As it stands, the internal reliability of my diary was suspect due to the openness of the question, "Is my class communicative?" Another person could find different results, according to their definition of a communicative classroom. Despite this, the patterns that I found helped redefine my classroom practice.

Stage 4

What I found was that my methodology had become more task-

based and process-oriented. Rather than present the target of the lesson, for example: grammatical rules, functions, vocabulary, phonetics, points for discussion, etc.; in the initial stages of the lesson, I tried to give the students tasks that would generate my lesson's goals as they solved problems.

At the end of my study I redefined my methodology as based on the communicative approach with students learning the language in a task based manner while they solve problems or complete projects. The underlying influences on my practice were Community Language Learning (CLL) and the Natural Approach. For example, in one entry I write: "The students are beginning to reuse phrases that they have searched for during tasks. It reminds me of CLL where the students are provided with the language that they need to complete their dialogue." My diary confirmed that my teaching had changed to a more process-oriented methodology.

3. Implications

My diary showed that as a consequence of having recently adopted a more task-based lesson structure, there were weaknesses in my planning which affected the communicativeness of the classroom. For example, one entry recording a communications class where the girls were working on a drama production, I wrote: "I was hoping that as they decided on their parts, set up the scene, etc., that a lot of outer language as described by Willis (1987) would occur. Unfortunately, this only happened with the returnee students, as the others reverted to the L1." As a result of keeping a diary I realized the need to develop the nature of my tasks to

ensure that they produced more L2 communication.

4. Conclusion

Keeping a diary helped me to redefine my teaching beliefs and examine whether I "practise what I preach," so to speak. It thereby gave me pointers as to where my teaching needed improvement and questions that I needed to answer. The following are questions from my diary that I am still pondering: "I can keep students in the L2 when I set up activities in a controlled, 3P manner, but the language is definitely Inner Dependent. When I give them independent tasks they use their L1 a lot, but the language in the L2 tends to be more Outer. How do I decrease the use of the L1 in task based learning? Is this important?"

A diary is an accessible way in which to analyze and improve teaching practice. It is also a way to ensure that we do not get fixed in our ways to the detriment of our teaching. The diary enables us to spot strengths and weaknesses in many areas of the classroom, and identify questions and areas for change. Keeping a diary is the easy part, the questions it creates are the challenge.

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REVIEW

横溝紳一郎『日本語教師のための アクション・リサーチ』凡人社

良書です。アクション・リサーチに関心をもつ人のみならず、現場でのよい実践研究を模索している方、効果的で組織的な教育実習・新人研修についてお考えの方など全ての人にお勧めしたいと思います。「日本語教師のための・・・」とありますが、日本語教育の中だけでしか通用しない議論などは皆無に近く、この本は日本語教育以外の分野の人にも読まれるべきだと思います。ましてや第二言語教育という点で共通する英語教育の分野の人には是非読んでいただきたいと思います。（実際引用文献の多くは「第二言語としての英語教育」の文献です）。

この本を良書とするのは、この本が、具体的で、広がりをもち、正直な記述をしているからです。

「具体的」に関しては特に第三章と第四章が優れています。第三章（「日本語教育におけるアクション・リサーチの実践報告例」）では、特に51ページから108ページにかけて、著者の横溝さん自身のアクション・リサーチが公開されていますが、三つのサイクルにわたって「プロセス・シラバス」の導入と実施を追いかけたこのアクション・リサーチは記述がとても具体的です。自ら教壇に立つ現場教師なら、たとえ「プロセス・シラバス」について無知であったとしても、これを読み終える時には、プロセス・シラバスの功罪を横溝さんの記述とともに追体験し、理解を深めることでしょう。横溝さんは、予想とは異なるように変化する状況へ迅速かつ合理的に介入し、そこからのフィードバックに

よって問題の理解を深め、さらなる行動へと実践を進めてゆきます。この記述がもつ説得力と私たちが感じる（教師としての）共感の強さは、実験論文では得難いものです。このようなアクション・リサーチなら、様々なテーマで読んでゆきたいと多くの現場教師と研究者は思うことでしょう。また第四章（「アクション・リサーチを行なうために」）は、そのようなアクション・リサーチを進めるにはどうしたらよいかが、非常に親切に、手を取るようにして示されています。問題の設定の仕方、話し合いの深め方、観察・記録の仕方などが、通り一遍のリストにならず、リサーチを行なう人間の立場に立って書かれているのは、この著者自身が上に述べたような優れたアクション・リサーチをやっているからなのかもしれません。

「広がり」については、巻末の24ページにもわたる引用文献・参考文献のリストを一瞥しただけでも予感できると思いますが、その本領は第五章（「アクション・リサーチを深く理解するために」）で発揮されます。この章は非常に勉強になります。アクション・リサーチがどのような広がりを持つものかがわかり、アクション・リサーチに対する考えが深まります。第二章（「アクション・リサーチとは何か」）と合わせて読むならば、アクション・リサーチの姿が短時間で的確に理解できます。

「正直さ」については、第三章の横溝さんによるアクション・リサーチによく現れています。実験研究は、妥当性と信頼性を強調するあまり、「邪魔な」要因（＝ノイズ）をあの手この手で排除し、かつ書き手の試行錯誤も一切見せずに、あたかも研究がはじめから最後まで終始一貫整然と進んだような書き方をしばしばします。これは言い過ぎかもしれませんが、実験論文をジャーナルに採択してもらおうと思ったら、いかに整然と見せるか、瑕疵がないようにみせるか、仮説がいかに一貫して変わらなかったか等を印象づけるための記述に腐心する人も多いのではないでしょうか。たしかにそうして出来上がった記述はスマートで短時間に読めますが、一方で実践者としての共感はなかなか湧いてきません。反面、ここに見られるようなアクション・リサーチでは、思いがけない結果や試行錯誤が正直に語られます。正直に語られ、記述するからこそ、冷静に問題は省察され、次のステップへと実践は深まってゆきます。もちろん次の実践とて、完全からは程遠いものなの