English Language Teachers' Continuous Professional Development through Reflective Practice

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With the unprecedented pandemic ongoing across the globe, a lot of unforeseen changes have taken place in the lives of English language teaching professionals. I feel the lockdown period has given uninterrupted personal time for teachers to introspect about their teaching. Further, it has provided space from their busy schedules to experiment with new Edu-tech tools for online teaching. In my presentation, I will be narrating my exciting self-reflective journey of transformation from low-tech teaching to hi-tech teaching with an exclusive focus on four tech tools: Nearpod, Floop, Flipgrid, and Screencast-O-Matic.

Objectives

- To narrate my reflective practices, self-awareness, and professional development that I attained through online teaching.
- To motivate teachers to learn and use some of these effective tech tools to improve their classroom teaching.

Practical Implications

In the initial days of online teaching, I was concerned about whether my students were able to comprehend what I expected them to. After assessing a few tools, I decided to use Nearpod because it made my e-lessons interactive and boosted learners' participation through polls and game-based quizzes and helped me monitor the progress of my students. Nearpod further provided scope for customizing certain teaching materials on vocabulary (synonyms and antonyms) and to correct students' writing samples. For instance, I designed a vocabulary activity to define and pronounce words through direct method, i.e. demonstration/lecture method, to introduce confusing and unfamiliar words. While attempting the vocabulary activity, students completed a gap filling and cloze test activity in Nearpod. Moreover, the vocabulary activities challenged learners' ability and reinforced their understanding of the words. Nearpod being an innovative and convenient tool enabled my students and I to enjoy it thoroughly.

One of the problems I encountered in virtual teaching was how to conduct formative assessments besides giving them regular feedback. During an informal discussion with colleagues, they suggested a tool called 'Floop' which saved time during assessments and provided feedback to students instantaneously. This tool was particularly helpful for me in giving interactive feedback virtually on students' scanned copies of assignments uploaded online. While correcting essay writing assignments, I was able to mark-up scripts, give feedback and answer students' questions privately. Additionally, Floop promotes social learning, i.e. learners can collaborate, view others' submissions and give and receive feedback from their peers and the teachers.

The experience of using Nearpod and Floop was highly satisfactory, though I felt I needed virtual video discussions with my students to make classes more interactive and engaging. Necessity is the mother of invention; fortunately, I found Flipgrid, a free online tool, fulfilled my requirements in many ways. In order to use it, I set up an account and created a few prompts (topics/assignments on describing places/people/events) for my students. In response, many of them made and uploaded short videos (one to two minutes long) on their favorite prompts. After watching these, the students and I gave feedback in the form of video responses. For language teachers, this provides ample room for their students to engage in real-time discussion and to fine-tune their communicative competence. It was a thrilling experience for everyone to generate video based discussions through Flipgrid.

In addition to Floop and Flipgrid, modern ESL/EFL teachers need an exclusive video making tool to maximize learning within and beyond the four walls of the classroom. One such tool I used was Screencast-O-Matic. It is a video recording tool I used to design video lessons for a few classroom topics on an experimental basis. After sharing them with students, they gave positive feedback and

suggested the incorporation of relevant captions, images, animation effects and background sounds. Being a newbie to technology, I was a bit worried initially. However, I was able to incorporate most of the suggestions through Screencast-O-Matic to improve students' interaction and engagement. Using Screencast-O-Matic has given me a great sense of satisfaction because of its user-friendliness and scope for technology driven teaching. By creating videos, I have provided comfort and equal opportunity for all types of learners to learn at their own pace, place, and time. Moreover, the instructional videos have greatly helped with increasing the retention and comprehension of content while captivating students' attention and boosting their learning experiences.

Reflective Conclusion

During this lockdown, I have made step by step progress in adapting online tech tools into my teaching. The whole experience was challenging and exciting for me and my learners. By integrating technology, I recorded, modified, and improved my classroom lectures from time to time. It further equipped me in creating a lot of interactive presentations on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and a host of other topics which also contained quizzes, polls, videos, collaboration boards, and more. Further, I have reviewed my video lectures, elicited students' feedback and used them for systematic self-reflection on the aspects of quality of content, the relevance of illustrations, and clarity of language. Such critical reflections have provided me with deeper insights into the process of teaching and learning and motivated me to improve myself regularly to keep pace with the changing times.

As time passes by, I have become more self-aware and self-conscious with an aim to progress. My ability to focus on my thoughts, actions, decisions, and emotions has gradually improved. Being self-aware and self-conscious has prompted me to objectively evaluate myself as a teacher, assess my teaching material, elicit my learners' views, strive to improve every session, and manage my emotions. Being self-aware has helped me in gauging my own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher and it prompted me to turn weaknesses into strengths.

Self-reflection through feedback from students has been a common practice for many teachers whereas in my case, during the lockdown, it has become more organized and meticulous. It helped me to focus and elicit the learning insights and expectations of the students as a necessity to customize my teaching as well as learning. Therefore, I consider every online class that I have delivered has prompted systematic self-introspection and it has resulted in opportunities for my continuous professional development.

About the Author

Krishna Chaitanya E. is a PhD holder in Teacher Development and Classroom Research with specialization in ELT. He currently works as Assistant Professor to the B.Tech & M.Tech students at MGIT, India. His research interests are Teacher Development, Action Research, Flipped Classroom, ESP and ESL teaching methodologies.

Link to presentation on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d67rG6JW5Pg