

REFLECTIONS

Regular Feedback on Teachers' Journal Entries for Professional Development

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This paper explores the significance of teachers receiving regular feedback on their journal entries based on the three authors' collaborative reflections on their experiences. The practitioner, Tomohide, kept journals for two periods and received feedback from a teacher educator, Akiko, and a colleague, Yuya. Although both types of feedback were meaningful for Tomohide, he noticed that the types of feedback were different and that the two readers played different roles. Thus, we decided to analyze in detail what types of feedback were provided on the journal entries and reflect on the intentions Akiko and Yuya had with their feedback. Tomohide then reflected on the role of the feedback in his practice based on the results of the analysis and intentions of the two individuals who provided feedback. The results of the analysis showed that nine types of comments were provided. Of these, two types of comments were not made by the teacher educator, while one type of comment was not made by the colleague. According to the practitioner's reflections, the positionalities of the journal readers had different impacts on him, but at the same time, the presence of the journal readers and their encouraging comments

were substantial motivations for him to keep a journal.

Keywords: reflection, journal, feedback, professional development

The purpose of this paper is to explore the significance of a Japanese high school teacher receiving regular feedback on his journal entries by comparing a teacher educator's feedback with that of a colleague. We aim to present three different perspectives on feedback on these journals, using narrative reflection to examine how the writer of the journal perceived the feedback from the two different commenters rather than following a typical research format.

The first author, Akiko, is a university teacher who has been involved in pre-service and in-service teacher education for about 16 years. Her main research interest is teacher education, and she has been interested in the role of reflection since she engaged in various types of reflection activities when earning her Master of Arts (MA) degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) at an American university in her 20s. Tomohide (the third author) and Yuya (the second author) graduated from the university Akiko works for in 2012 and 2015, respectively. When they were undergraduates, they took Akiko's English

teaching methodology course in their third year. Tomohide majored in English and American literature, while Yuya majored in education. Both completed an MA in TESOL in England. Tomohide worked in a public junior high school for six years and now works in a private integrated junior and senior high school. Yuya worked for a different private integrated junior and senior high school for more than five years and then enrolled in a doctoral program in the US. Tomohide met Yuya in Akiko's study group on qualitative research methodology in 2019. Since then, Akiko has played the role of a mentor to the other two authors, and the three of us have communicated closely to facilitate our professional development.

We would first like to explain how Tomohide started to write a teacher's journal. When he visited Akiko's office at the beginning of spring semester 2016, he had a strong desire to improve his teaching. It was his first time contacting her after graduation from university. He struggled to develop his students' speaking and writing skills, especially in terms of fluency. Akiko recommended that he engage in practitioner research and write a journal regularly to support his reflections. She offered to read his journals and make comments to help him continue writing for a certain period. He was successful not only in keeping journals for two years (one year with Akiko's feedback, and the second year without her feedback) but also in improving his teaching practice.

Reflecting on Tomohide's experience (Takagi & Warabi, 2020), initially, he had had some difficulty in getting into a routine of reflection. However, as he became more comfortable with regular reflection in the process of his practitioner research, he gained a new perspective on his practice. He also improved his awareness of his teaching and students through increased dialogues with his colleagues both inside and outside the school. As a result, his cycle of reflection went smoothly, and he came to recognize the improvement of his practice and his own

growth, as he mentioned in an interview after his practitioner research was over (Takagi & Warabi, 2021).

A few years later, Tomohide decided to start keeping journals regularly again. This time, a colleague of his, Yuya, volunteered to read them and make comments. Tomohide was again successful in keeping journals for one year and improved his journaling and teaching practice as a result. Although both experiences were meaningful for Tomohide, each reader of his journal seemed to play a different role. Thus, in this article, we investigated what kinds of feedback comments were provided in the journals by the teacher educator and by the colleague. In addition, the role of feedback in Tomohide's reflection and professional development is discussed. Akiko took the lead in writing the article but collaborated with Yuya to write the results section. Tomohide took responsibility for the section "Tomohide's Reflections."

Journal Writing and Feedback for Professional Development

Journals play an important role as teacher reflection tools and are widely used for professional development. According to Farrell's (2016) analysis of 166 articles on reflective practice, journals were the second most used tool after discussions. Journal entries provide a means of generating questions and hypotheses about the teaching and learning process and exploring teaching and learning experiences (Richards & Ho, 1998). The act of writing enables teachers to recognize their own knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as to question their own practice (Rathert & Okan, 2015).

Feedback on journal entries is also beneficial for teachers to deepen their reflections because it allows them to reflect on their practice from various perspectives and question their personal values and beliefs (Farrell, 2015). However, few studies have examined different kinds of feedback on journal entries. Krol (1996) placed teacher

educators' comments into four categories: affirming comments, nudging comments, information-giving comments, and personal comments. In another study (Todd et al., 2001), nine types of responses were identified: supporting, probing, evaluating, understanding, analyzing, suggesting, adding information, agreeing, and thanking.

Our Journal Writing and Feedback

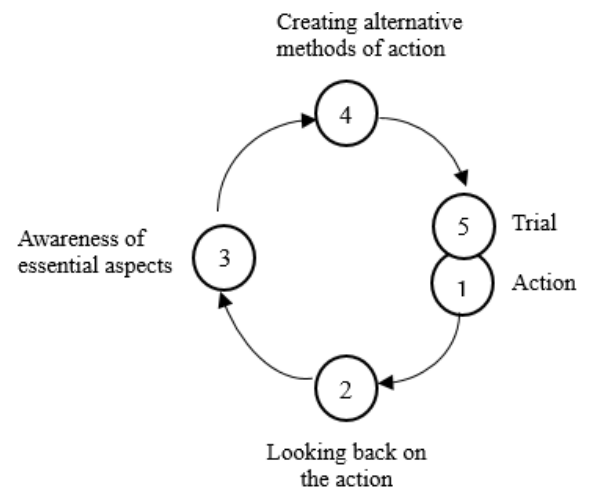
In the first period, Tomohide wrote journals in Japanese from April 2016 to February 2017. A total of 27 journal entries were written at a rate of one per week, excluding vacations, with each focusing on one class. Akiko received a journal entry weekly via email and returned it with comments. At that time, Tomohide intended to undertake a two-year practitioner research project to improve his teaching, so he used journals to enhance reflection on his practice and as a data sample for his research.

In the second period, Tomohide wrote 28 journal entries between April 2020 and March 2021. Yuya made comments on these entries after receiving one each week. One difference between Akiko's and Yuya's comments is that Tomohide replied to most of Yuya's comments. The main purpose of keeping journals during this period was to seek better ways to instruct students in a high school at which he had just started working. For this reason, he picked four classes (two from the first year, one from the second year, and one from the third year) to reflect on each week.

In both periods, the ALACT model (Figure 1) was used as the framework for the journal description. ALACT is named after the first letters of the framework's five phases: 1) action, 2) looking back on the action, 3) awareness of the essential aspects, 4) creating alternative methods of action, and 5) trial. The ALACT model was proposed by Korthagen et al. (2001) and is intended to help teachers change and improve through self-reflection.

Figure 1

ALACT Model (Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 44)



By reflecting on their practical experiences, specifically their concerns and anxieties about their actions in the classroom, teachers can become aware of the irrational aspects of their actions and the causes of their anxious feelings. An awareness of why particular actions occurred is important, as it leads to more options for subsequent action. Using this model, the journal is described from four perspectives: the learners' and teacher's goals, how the teaching procedure was implemented and how the students acted, what the teacher and students thought during the class, and what they felt when they spoke and acted in class.

Analysis of Comments

Comments on Tomohide's 55 journal entries over the two years were analyzed and coded to identify the categories of feedback. First, Akiko and Yuya extracted all the journal sections of entries about which comments had been made, the comments themselves, and Tomohide's responses to Yuya's comments. In Akiko's case, email messages concerning the journal entries about which comments had not been made were also extracted. Second, all the data were entered into an Excel file, and Yuya conducted trial

coding to develop preliminary categories for his feedback. The three authors then discussed and refined the names of the categories on the coding list. After Yuya's coding list was revised, Akiko used the list to analyze her data, added a new category, and refined the list with the other two authors. Finally, the three authors determined the frequency of the different categories of feedback.

In the next section, Akiko reflects on the types of comments she left and the intentions behind them based on the results of analyzing the comments. Following that, Yuya explains and reflects on his comments. After reviewing the types of comments left by Akiko and Yuya and the intentions behind them, Tomohide discusses the meaning of their feedback for him.

Feedback From a Teacher Educator (Akiko)

Table 1 shows the categories and numbers of comments Yuya and I provided. I made 62 comments on Tomohide's journal entries (56 comments made directly in the journals and six comments by email). The comments I provided were classified into six categories: giving opinions (18), encouraging (15), suggesting (11), asking for clarification of content confirmation (9), giving advice on how to write a journal (8), and asking for clarification regarding students' behaviors and changes (1).

The most frequent type of comment was "giving opinions." The following exchange shows my opinions on Tomohide's error correction assignment:

Tomohide's statement: I will have my students work on error correction before the next writing task.

Akiko's comment: It is a good idea to have students work on their own error correction tasks. Focusing on fluency and then shifting the focus to accuracy may create a good cycle of focusing on fluency and accuracy in turn. However, it is difficult to determine how much attention should be paid to accuracy, because it is natural for students to make mistakes in

the process of language acquisition when we consider their interlanguage. (8th journal entry)

Table 1

Categories and Numbers of Comments

Categories of comments	Numbers of comments	
	Akiko	Yuya
Asking for clarification of content confirmation	9	26
Asking for clarification regarding students' behavior and changes	1	22
Asking for clarification based on colleagues' teaching interests	0	13
Asking for clarification from the researcher's perspective	0	11
Giving opinions	18	38
Encouraging	15	18
Suggesting	11	7
Self-disclosing	0	15
Giving advice on how to write a journal	8	0
Total	62	150

Three out of 18 comments were opinions on research ideas related to Tomohide's practice, as the following excerpt shows:

Tomohide's statement: The amount of writing students did in five minutes doubled in both sentences and words.

Akiko's comment: It will be interesting to follow how the quantity and quality of writing changes, although you can work on this topic next year. (19th journal entry)

The second most frequently made group of comments was from the "encouraging" category. For the second,

fourth, fifth, tenth, nineteenth, and twenty-first journal entries, comments were made via email. They were all comments to encourage Tomohide to continue to write a journal, as seen in the following excerpt: "You wrote the journal in detail. Is this not a burden for you? I hope that you continue without putting too much burden on yourself. I have included a brief comment. Keep up the good work" (e-mail message for the 5th journal entry).

At a later stage, I encouraged Tomohide again by praising his continued reflection on his practice: "You are properly able to verbalize and engage in your reflections using the written word. However, some teachers do not seem to be good at such things. Time flies, and you have already written 21 journal entries" (21st journal entry).

The third type of comment was "suggesting." Nine comments included my teaching ideas. In contrast, three comments were suggestions for conducting a questionnaire to elicit students' thoughts:

Tomohide's statement: He doesn't make any effort. Maybe the topic was of no interest to him.

Akiko's comment: You might ask in a questionnaire about the impact of topic interest on students' motivation to write. (22nd journal entry)

I made nine comments "asking for clarification of content confirmation." The purpose of this type of comment was to clarify the content and facts of Tomohide's practice because some statements were unclear to me. Only one comment was made to ask for clarification regarding students' behavior and changes.

Finally, I made eight comments for the purpose of "giving advice on how to write a journal." For example, in the first journal entry, I made the following comment in the section of "students' thoughts":

It would be better to describe the basis for your judgment. Also, you have written collectively about all the students' thoughts, but do they all think the same way? Are there any student behaviors or thoughts that are of particular concern? (1st journal entry)

When I reflect on my feedback to Tomohide, I tended to take the perspective of a teacher educator consciously and unconsciously. For example, when I gave opinions about error correction, as seen in the above excerpt, I had a second language acquisition theory in mind, and tried to encourage Tomohide to connect theory and his practice. Additionally, the three comments related to research ideas indicate that I gave him some ideas for how he could conduct practitioner research.

At the same time, I always cared about encouraging him to keep writing journal entries at his own pace because keeping a journal is not an easy task for a busy teacher. As a teacher educator, I believed that keeping a journal would help him to reflect on his practice constantly for professional development based on the literature I have read and my own experience with having in-service teachers keep a journal. I also thought that journal entries could be utilized as data later for his research. Giving advice on how to write a journal also shows that I positioned myself as a teacher educator. I intended to deepen his reflections on his practice and make him aware of a new perspective on his students, which could lead to changes in his practice. Asking for clarification of content confirmation also reflects my position as a teacher educator because my intention was to have his tacit knowledge made more explicit to the reader of the journal, which would also help deepen his reflections.

On the other hand, my position as a teacher educator rather than a practitioner made me hesitate to offer practical teaching ideas as suggestions on his practice, as I have little experience with teaching secondary students. Moreover, I knew that

Tomohide constantly made a great effort to improve his teaching and try out various ideas he obtained from books or workshops he attended.

Feedback From a Colleague (Yuya)

In comparison with Akiko, I offered 150 comments on Tomohide's journal entries. The comments were categorized into eight types: giving opinions (38), asking for clarification of content confirmation (26), asking for clarification regarding students' behavior and changes (22), encouraging (18), self-disclosing (15), asking for clarification based on colleagues' teaching interests (13), asking for clarification from the researcher's perspective (11), and suggesting (7).

As with Akiko, the type of comments I made the most fell under "giving opinions." I offered my impressions of and ideas about Tomohide's journals, such as, "I hope that your students' sense of achievement will strengthen their learning motivation" (8th journal entry).

Regarding the second most frequent category of comments, "asking for clarification of content confirmation," Tomohide was asked to describe his statements in his journal entries in more detail to make them clear. This helped me more deeply comprehend Tomohide's teaching practice. One representative example of this can be seen in the following extract: "How often do you change topics when you implement a presentation task?" (28th journal entry)

I also left 22 comments "asking for clarification regarding students' behavior and changes." As one example of this type, Tomohide implemented the activity of having his students describe their reasoning when they answered true or false questions from the textbook over two weeks. I asked about any change in Tomohide's students in class: "Is there any change in your students' behavior toward the activity compared with that of last week?" (4th journal entry)

The fourth category of comments was "encouraging." When Tomohide changed the format of his journal to make it more understandable, I applauded him and thanked him for his revision: "The new style of your journal is more comprehensible than before. Thank you for revising the format" (11th journal entry).

Fifteen of my comments were "self-disclosing." I shared my experiences or thoughts as a teacher concerning English teaching. The following excerpt illustrates an attempt to share my teaching experience with having the students ask questions:

Tomohide's statement: I let my students ask a question related to a friend's presentation and write it on a worksheet. I also had them evaluate other peers' presentations.

My comment: As you did during the presentation task, I also asked my students to ask questions concerning topics in their news journals. I found that many of them were not good at questioning. (15th journal entry)

"Asking for clarification based on colleagues' teaching interests" was the sixth category of feedback, as I asked Tomohide to explain the teaching activities in which I was interested. For instance, Tomohide provided three criteria, including linking phonetics, to describe a test of reading aloud. As I had an interest in how I should teach the rules of linking sounds, I asked the following question: "Have you taught the rules of linking sounds and reduction since the first semester?" (10th journal entry)

The seventh category of comment was "asking for clarification from the researcher's perspective." I urged him to clarify things that may be related to his beliefs and perceptions as a teacher. In the following exchange, I asked Tomohide to clarify the purpose of a presentation:

Tomohide's statement: I placed importance on the idea that the purpose of the presentation was to let the audience take action.

My comment: What made you recognize this purpose of the presentation?

Tomohide's reply: I might have been influenced by TED talks. Likewise, I saw the textbook that I used in class stating the importance of influencing others through presentations. (7th journal entry)

Finally, I made seven "suggesting" comments, which offered practical suggestions on Tomohide's reflections and English teaching based on my teaching experience: "It may be better to encourage your students to think profoundly about environmental problems and plastic garbage, as the lesson topic is fascinating" (3rd journal entry).

Reflecting on my comments to Tomohide, some of the types of feedback chosen could have been significantly influenced by my experience as an English teacher in Japan. For instance, I asked Tomohide to particularly elaborate on his students' behaviors and changes during his classes. Based on my teaching experience, I was convinced that students' behaviors and changes can be an effective measure for determining whether teaching works well because some students are often honest about evaluating their classes by adopting a positive or negative attitude in class. My teaching experience also led me to affirm and praise his reflections and taught me to encourage Tomohide to write journal entries regularly. I was impressed by Tomohide's busy life as an English teacher in Japan, as I had also experienced a teacher's workload within a Japanese secondary school. Thus, I wanted to motivate him to continue keeping a journal by offering positive comments on his teaching and ideas. Furthermore, I used the "self-disclosing" type of feedback to demonstrate empathy for his reflections on or concern about my English teaching.

Unlike Akiko, whose role was being a teacher educator, I also offered some kinds of feedback based on my teaching and academic interests. One clear example of this

can be seen when I asked for clarification based on my teaching interests. While my priority in this exchange with Tomohide about his journal was to help him reflect on his teaching, I also tried to incorporate some of Tomohide's teaching activities that appealed to me into my own classes. Regarding the type of feedback "asking for clarification from the researcher's perspective," I attempted to explore Tomohide's teaching beliefs and cognition by making comments on his teaching and reflection. This step was influenced by my research interest in teachers' professional development. Through dialogic interaction with Tomohide, I was able to identify factors, such as TED talks, that might have led him to think about listeners when his students made presentations.

Tomohide's Reflections on Feedback from a Teacher Educator and His Colleague

One of the main points in this section is how the feedback from Akiko and Yuya benefited me in different ways. The feedback received from Akiko was mainly based on a theoretical framework, and I began to reflect on my English classes in light of the ALACT model. Through the process of writing a journal, I realized that I only had a teacher's perspective on my classes. Reflective opportunities based on the ALACT model allowed me to consider not only my goals as a teacher but also the students' goals, so I began to observe how the students acted in response to the activities I introduced in class and imagine what the students were thinking and feeling while they were doing the activities. I realized that I had not been able to reflect on these experiences from the students' point of view and had only been able to see the students' superficial aspects. On the other hand, feedback from Yuya benefited me in practical ways. I was inspired by Yuya's self-disclosures, which Akiko did not provide: "In my case of conducting debate class, I let the audience evaluate the debate team's performance" (Yuya's

feedback, 14th journal entry). Yuya's self-disclosure allowed me to get a glimpse of the English classes at another school, which would help us form a mutually stimulating relationship.

Akiko and Yuya provided many comments "asking for clarification of content confirmation," which implied that a newly introduced activity that was not well explained in the journals had probably not been well explained to the students. The opportunity to explain new activities to Akiko and Yuya might have been important in improving the explanations given to my classes. They also provided multiple "encouraging" comments. It may seem difficult to find something problematic to reflect on during the class and to deal with problems, but I was able to continue writing journals and improving my teaching practices thanks to the encouragement from Akiko and Yuya. It is questionable whether I could have continued writing the journal if I had been writing it alone, but the presence of the journal readers energized me to carry on.

The feedback from Akiko and Yuya contributed to my keeping journals to be aware of the essential aspects emphasized by the ALACT model. As I wrote a journal on students' actions and inferred their thoughts and feelings, I began to come up with ideas for how to improve my teaching and what to do next. Akiko suggested that I write explicitly what I would do next time in my journal: "What will you do next to help students understand what they don't understand in this class?" (Akiko's feedback, 2nd journal entry)

Another main point in this section is how I acted on feedback from Akiko and Yuya in terms of journals and classroom practices. When Akiko gave me advice and suggestions on how to write a journal, I tried to incorporate them into my journals as much as possible: "Overall, there are not enough descriptions of the classroom. Describe it in more detail. Don't use too many bullet points, include evidence, and try to describe

the classroom in a vivid way" (Akiko's feedback, 1st journal entry). Since this was my first time writing a journal, I did not know what was appropriate to include. Thus, I added items (e.g., self-evaluations of my teaching practices based on students' reactions) to the journal accordingly. In Yuya's case, although I used his suggestions merely for reference purposes, I began to add the expression "New!" to make it easier for the journal reader, as a colleague, to understand which items were newly introduced. Yuya appreciated this: "The new style of your journal is more comprehensible than before. Thank you for revising the format" (Yuya's feedback, 11th journal entry). Yuya's positive reactions gave me the energy to continue enriching journal content and implementing new teaching ideas in my classes.

As shown above, how the journals were written was affected by the implicit audience of a teacher educator (Akiko) and colleague (Yuya). In fact, I felt pressure when I wrote journal entries for Akiko. I used much of my time writing, even on weekends, and I managed to submit the journal each Monday. I struggled with integrating the theoretical framework into my teaching practices. This struggle would be essential for my teacher development, as it helped me observe my teaching more carefully. In Yuya's case, I was able to write and send the journal early Monday mornings without taking much time. Since I had already established a journal format and knew what to write from my previous journaling experience, I enjoyed writing the journal entries. The enjoyment came from sharing teaching practices, which led to forming an equal and stimulating relationship.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the comments on Tomohide's journal entries and his reflections on these comments show that the different positionalities of Akiko and Yuya had a great influence on the types of comments left and intentions behind them. At the same time,

Tomohide's reflection revealed how he perceived the different types of feedback and the emotions he experienced.

Despite the different positionalities, both Akiko and Yuya respected Tomohide's endeavor to improve his practice and tried to encourage him to continue his journal writing. This helped Tomohide stay motivated to keep journals. The ALACT model seemed to work more effectively with the presence of a reader who offered feedback because Tomohide was able to verbalize his tacit knowledge and become aware of the essential aspects he needed to address in his teaching based on this model and the feedback he received.

Akiko always positioned herself as a teacher educator. She was concerned about how Tomohide could use the journal as a tool for his practitioner research and to reflect on his practice more deeply while keeping the theoretical aspects in mind. The relationships with Akiko and Tomohide were not equal, so Tomohide felt pressure to follow Akiko's suggestions and did not always enjoy writing the journal. Despite Tomohide's struggles in those moments, he reflected on his experience as an essential part of his teacher development. He was able to integrate a theoretical framework into his practice, which helped him observe his practice more deeply. One thing we need to remember is that feedback from a teacher educator can sometimes cause too much pressure or be a burden for practitioners, so teacher educators need to be careful not to impose their beliefs or opinions on practitioners.

In contrast, Yuya's position as a colleague enabled Tomohide to feel relaxed and enjoy writing a journal and reading comments. However, we also believe that the exchange of the journals might have been smooth from the beginning because

Tomohide had already established the format and routine of the journal after his existing experience of sharing a journal with Akiko. Some of Yuya's comments were influenced by his teaching experience as well as his practical and academic interests. He particularly focused on Tomohide's students' behaviors and changes, which were not referred to often in Akiko's feedback. Observing students' actions and inferring their thoughts and feelings is an essential aspect of the ALACT model. Tomohide received different perspectives and further questions about the students' thoughts, actions, and feelings. This stimulated his thoughts and contributed to deeper reflection. Although Yuya offered many other opinions and some suggestions about Tomohide's practice, Tomohide did not feel as pressured to use them, and as such he incorporated them selectively to enhance his teaching.

One notable benefit of feedback from a colleague is that practitioners can be stimulated by self-disclosing types of comments and feel that they are engaging in mutual professional development in an equal relationship.

This study revealed that the backgrounds, experiences, and positions of the two commentators explicitly or implicitly influenced their feedback and how it was perceived and adopted by the journal author. Since different roles of commentators thus have different benefits for practitioners, teachers need to be aware of journal readers' different positionalities and interests and proactively make use of their feedback for further reflection. In addition, if possible, getting feedback from different people in different positions can promote deeper reflection and, in turn, lead to teachers' professional development.

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