Using Diaries to Promote Reflection on Teaching

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Abstract
This diary study reports on an experienced teacher's reflections on his teaching of two classes, one undergraduate and the other graduate, over half a semester. The data were subjected both to content analysis and keyword analysis, the latter to mitigate to some extent the effects of subjectivity. Issues found for the undergraduate class include the role of task type in motivating students to use English during group work, the amount of time expended on the pre-teaching of vocabulary and, related, a tendency to teacher-centredness; in contrast, in the graduate class, there was extensive evidence of teacher digression from lesson plans.

Introduction
In recent years, it has virtually become a mantra to say that learning to teach is, or should be, 'a lifelong process' (e.g. Arends 1989). This article investigates diary writing, arguably one of many possible ways in which this highly laudable objective can be approached. Specifically, this study attempts to show how, through writing a diary, an experienced teacher (the writer) can maintain, or even enhance, an awareness of some patterns of success and failure in the second-language (L2) classroom.

Having taught for more than thirty years, I was regularly receiving reasonably positive feedback from my students, both at undergraduate and graduate levels, on the regular midterm and end-of-term evaluations conducted by my university department. However, Thai culture seeks harmony and avoidance of loss of face and there is a long tradition of respecting teachers highly (e.g. O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk 1997), so I felt that my students' feedback on my teaching was probably far too indulgent. In any case, students' evaluations are only one of many possible sources from which teachers can receive feedback on their work in the classroom.

Inspiration to conduct this study was triggered by my experience of supervising teacher trainees in a course (LNG 614: 'Teaching Techniques in Practice') in the MA in Applied Linguistics at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). One of the requirements of this course is that trainees write journals reflecting on their teaching practice. Reading their reflections, I noticed the rich reflective quality of the trainees' journal writing. It seemed to me that the trainees' task of having to sit down and write about the lessons they had just taught raised their awareness of their teaching, and the trainees themselves reported that they felt likewise; that is, the reflective writing seemed to allow issues that might otherwise have remained unnoticed to rise to the conscious level (e.g. Bartlett 1990 and Watson Todd 1997). These issues could then be discussed during supervision sessions attended by both trainees and supervisors (as reported in Hull et al. 2004).

My next thought was that, if reflective writing could be so generative for trainee teachers, it could surely be similarly developmental for more experienced teachers as well as for teacher trainers. However, rather than revealing the probably fast-changing patterns of an inexperienced teacher, it would be more likely to reveal the ingrained

patterns of an experienced one (a point supported in the literature cited below). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to describe the process of conducting a diary study with a view to encouraging other teachers, whatever their experience, to consider writing their own teaching diary or journal.

Journals and diaries
The literature often uses the terms 'journal' and 'diary' in free variation, perhaps because they each refer to introspective writing. Indeed, Richards et al. (1992: 106) define a 'diary study' for research in first-language (L1) and L2 acquisition as "a regularly kept journal". However, despite the obvious overlap between the two terms, they often refer to two distinct reflective writing processes.

Journals tend to be written in the knowledge that their contents are in the public domain and that there are readers such as teacher trainers (e.g. Brinton et al. 1993) or colleagues (e.g. Brock et al. 1992) whereas diaries are often written in the understanding that their contents will only be made public with the writer's permission (e.g. Bailey & Ochsner 1981). Sometimes, diarists edit their writing to remove confidential or sensitive information before making it public, something that is routinely done when diaries are used for research purposes. Thus, diary writing is likely to be particularly writer-centred and unconstrained.

The title of this paper refers to the use of a diary rather than a journal because there were no readers during the period I wrote about my classroom teaching and I modified my writing, albeit very slightly (see procedures, below), before producing a public version of part of it.

Reflective writing on language teaching
The literature abounds with positive reasons for teachers to utilize diary writing to reflect on their teaching. Diary writers may, for instance, read and reread their diaries from time to time in order to identify emerging issues and focus on these in their future teaching and diary writing. Gebhard (1999) has pointed out that language teachers' reflecting on their experience as language learners through introspective writing can influence their beliefs and practices. This is echoed in Lortie's (1975) idea of the 'apprenticeship of observation', by which he means that all of us, as students, observe teachers and that this experience, if we become teachers, can influence our teaching.

Tait (2004) has written about how such writing can lead to reflection through four continuing stages: identifying or reassessing an issue, considering options for future action related to this issue, experimenting in the classroom with alternative approaches, assessing the impact of the changes, and so on. In a similar vein, Gebhard (1999) says that, however long their teaching experience, diarists can explore their teaching by focusing on a particular issue, such as lesson planning, observing what happens when implementing a plan, reflecting on plans that contain deliberate innovations or on the consequences of 'real-time' decisions to deviate from plans. (Later, I'll discuss the use of 'guide questions' to create a focus on particular issues.) This cyclical process, as Gebhard (1999: 79), citing others, has noted, can "function as a place to celebrate discoveries, successes, and 'golden moments' (Fanselow 1987) as well as to 'criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions' (Bailey 1990: 218)".

Reflecting on variation in the content of diary writing, Gebhard (1999: 86-87) has observed that *novice teachers* "tend to limit their questions to those about teaching techniques, ways to solve teaching problems, and survival concerns". Such issues include how to deal with learners' errors, give clear instructions and provide feedback on students' writing. In contrast, *experienced teachers* "seem to raise questions that transcend concern with 'What can I do tomorrow in class?' and 'What is the best way to teach?'". Instead, they express concerns about student learning and teaching issues. Such issues might be how to balance spontaneous communication with keeping control through discipline, and the use of real-world language as opposed to artificial classroom language (e.g. Freeman 1991).

In addition, as Numrich (1996: 148) observes, careful analysis of teachers' diaries "offers insights into some of the unobservable factors influencing their experience", in other words, factors that would not be apparent to an observer. Such factors can only readily see the light of day through mentalistic data such as those available from firsthand reflective writing or verbal reporting and include the processes that lead to decisions to deviate from lesson plans or, for that matter, sticking to them rigidly.

Methodology
Background
This study reports on two of the four courses for which I kept a diary. One of these was LNG 334: 'English for Information Technology 4', an undergraduate credit-bearing language course for mature final-year students pursuing a degree in Information Technology (IT). The students were aged 25-45 approximately (N=32), and their English proficiency ranged from elementary to lower intermediate. They were all employees of Telephone Operations Thailand (TOT) and had been earmarked for future promotion within the company. The other course was 'Language Improvement', a non-credit-bearing language course for first-year graduate students of applied linguistics that had three components: academic writing (N=5), speaking (N=4), pronunciation (N=1); since the latter only had one student, resulting, atypically, in one-on-one teaching, I have not reported on this component in this study. These students had been selected as needing extra language work as their proficiency level (mid-intermediate to upper-intermediate) was deemed insufficient for study at masters level.

Procedures
I wrote a diary entry as soon as possible after each lesson taught during the first half of Semester 2 (seven weeks) in the academic year 2003-04. I managed to write all the diary entries on the same day as I taught the class with the exception of one entry, which was written the following day; I completely forgot to write entries for two classes I taught during the data collection period. In total, there were fourteen diary entries for the undergraduate class and twelve entries for the graduate class (covering both academic writing and speaking components of the latter class); entries were of varying lengths.

There is a substantial literature on information processing theory (e.g. Simon 1979) and the human memory (e.g. Baddeley 1990) that points to the importance of recording introspections concurrently with the target event or as soon as possible afterwards. This procedure is actually quite a challenge logistically, and, inevitably, most entries were written (word-processed) under considerable time pressure (e.g. in breaks between classes).

In all entries, I sought to reflect as deeply as I could on how I felt the class had progressed. However, I wrote with an open mind and did not seek to focus on any particular aspect of my teaching; I did not, for instance, use any guide questions (see discussion below). After the writing ended, I reread the entire diary to ensure that it was suitable for the public domain, both in terms of avoiding breach of confidentiality and ensuring that it would be comprehensible. This necessitated only very minor changes, most of which involved minor linguistic points, such as clarifying pronoun references.

Data analysis
Having completed all the diary entries, following Pechsuttitanasan's (2005) diary study, I analyzed the data in two ways. First, for a content analysis, I read and reread the entries several times with the aim of finding themes, patterns and significant events, which were then grouped into broad categories. Subsequently, for a keyword-frequency analysis, I used Simple Concordance Program (SCP), version 4.07, discounted all the function words (prepositions, conjunctions, etc.) since they do not convey sufficient meaning for the purposes of this study, and listed all content words that occurred twenty or more times in each diary. Table 1 is shown below to help clarify this analysis (the findings in the table are discussed in the results section below).

Table: Frequencies of content words

Frequency	Word
212	student(s)
55	one
46	be
37	class
30	all
25	two
24	asked
21	writing
20	lab, what

Neither of these analyses is without problems: analyzing diary data for content is highly subjective (see discussion and limitations below); in contrast, word-frequency analyses, while less subjective, are mechanical and provide no context. Nonetheless, conducting the frequency analysis provided a way of monitoring, at least to a small extent, the subjectivity in the content analysis.

Results
This section begins by presenting and interpreting the findings from the content analysis and ends with those of the word-frequency analysis.

Findings from the content analysis
Five broad categories or themes emerged from the content analysis of the data, all exclusive to either the undergraduate or graduate class:
• Motivating students to use English during group work (undergraduate class)
• Dealing with unknown vocabulary (undergraduate class)
• Teacher-centredness (undergraduate class)
• Interpreting lesson plans flexibly (graduate class)
• Coping with inadequate technology (undergraduate class)

Each of these categories will now be illustrated with diary extracts and interpreted. It is important to note that these extracts represent themes running through the data, not one-off observations, though, as will be shown, some of the themes seemed to be of short-term concern, covering two or three weeks rather than the whole of the data-gathering period. In addition, the extracts may contain themes other than the one being illustrated, partly because, as will become apparent, some of the themes are intertwined. Nevertheless, ellipses are used in some of the extracts for the purpose of focusing clearly on a particular theme. Furthermore, the data presentation is predominantly descriptive; however, while there is no attempt at a formal comparison of the data from the two classes, obvious points of convergence and divergence are noted.

Motivating students to use English during group work
This is a perennial issue in classes where all the learners share the same L1, probably more so in contexts where English is a foreign language (EFL) than where it is a second language (ESL). Moreover, even within EFL contexts, it is likely to be more of an issue in essentially monolingual societies (such as Thailand) than in those where more than one language is widely used and code-switching is a norm for many people (e.g. Switzerland). The extract below illustrates the problem with the undergraduate class.

> *"…Even … with a class of 32 students, all of whom know each other well and all of whom are Thai speakers, it's hard to have all students speak English for the duration of … group work. In a way, all such oral tasks for this lower intermediate level in an EFL setting contain … artificiality … In speaking to each other in L2 rather than in L1, the students are, in effect, playing a role."* (Extract 1, third of fourteen entries, LNG 334)

Thus, while this finding is clearly no great revelation, it did serve to focus my attention on something I had long tolerated uncritically in my lower-proficiency classes. Clearly, there is no easy solution as teachers cannot expect such students to move to an ESL environment even for a short duration. In addition, teachers should be sensitive to local culture. Essential to Thai culture are 'face', 'sabai' (feeling comfortable) and 'sanook' (fun) (e.g. Adamson 2003); thus, an overly strict policy of 'English only' for students at this relatively low level might backfire in terms of quality of classroom atmosphere.

Thus, instead of attempting to apply greater discipline, I decided to consider the kinds of speaking tasks I was giving these students. The task that precipitated the above diary entry required the students to exchange information with each other about what they did during the preceding semester break. This kind of task has been popular in recent years because it is deemed 'communicative' and involves personalization and information gap; students have a chance to talk about their own lives. However, in a context such as this, where the students had all known each other for several years both as colleagues at work and as university students, it seems certain that exchanging such information would more naturally be done in L1.

I therefore decided to devise tasks that I hoped would foster a sense among these students that the use of English was necessary to accomplish the task. For instance, I used role play activities in which one student in each pair had to play the role of a non-native speaker (NNS) (see appendix). Although some students still spoke Thai some of the time during such role plays, it seemed that, when they played the role of the NNS, they had fun ('sanook') pretending to their partner that they could not speak Thai. In the

appended role play activity, the students also developed the idea of hospitality, something for which Thailand is well known, by asking lots of their own questions about how the NNS was settling into a new life in Thailand.

Thus, the conventional wisdom that personalization is an important ingredient in designing L2 speaking tasks did not seem to pertain to these students; rather, because they would naturally use L1 Thai to talk to each other about their own lives, playing a role, albeit an artificial one, where L2 English would be needed seemed to encourage its use.

Dealing with unknown vocabulary
Unlike the problem of sustaining learners' use of English during group work, the issue of teaching unknown vocabulary came as a big surprise to me. I had not realized the excessive amount of time I was regularly devoting to explaining unknown vocabulary items to these undergraduate students, as illustrated in this extract.

> *"The materials contain a lot of vocabulary that is hard for the majority of these students and it always seems to take ages checking that everyone has understood. The TA [teaching assistant] often translates, but I need to be sure he understands the difficult vocabulary items, too! Also, students ask questions about vocabulary items. This is partly as they are motivated and partly, perhaps, as they have a rather bottom-up approach to the materials."* (Extract 2, seventh of fourteen entries, LNG 334)

This is clearly an issue where teachers who are native speakers of Thai would be able judiciously to use translation and where foreign teachers working long-term in Thailand would benefit professionally from learning some Thai so that they could use the same technique. A quicker, but logistically awkward, solution might be for non-Thai-speaking teachers to add a stage to their lesson preparation by identifying all the difficult vocabulary items that are deemed necessary for students to complete tasks and then ask a Thai colleague to provide translations, perhaps on an overhead transparency in Thai script.

Again, however, I found myself looking at the materials I was using, ones that had been prepared by the department specifically for this course, and wondering if, even with translations, they contained a vocabulary overload. Nevertheless, when courses are taught concurrently in several parallel classes and the students have the same midterm and final exams, there does not seem to be a quick or easy way to change the materials. In this case, however, there appeared to be a rare opportunity for flexibility. Although the course is the last of four courses taught to all undergraduates studying IT, as noted above, this particular class comprised a closed group of mature students. It was therefore possible, with departmental assent, to consider varying the materials used for this different and distinct group.

Although no changes were made during the year in which the data for this study were collected, the following year, when no Thai-speaking TA was available, the materials were reviewed not only for vocabulary load but for suitability of content. About half of the materials had content that was more suitable for younger undergraduates, who would typically be seeking to enter the job market upon graduation, than for these mature students, who had long had secure jobs with TOT. Thus, materials with

unsuitable content (e.g. writing job application letters) were replaced with tasks that contained a somewhat lighter vocabulary load and exams were reworked to reflect these changes.

Nonetheless, it seemed that the issue of dealing with unknown vocabulary could be addressed from at least two additional perspectives, not least as these students had to study IT in English-language textbooks and read academic articles on the subject, both of which contained a heavy vocabulary load. First, in order to help these students become more autonomous as readers, it seemed that it might be beneficial to focus on strategies for decoding vocabulary in context. In addition and related, I tried to raise the students' awareness of strategies like tolerating ambiguity and ignoring unimportant words, though this was not immediately successful and requires further review. Often, these undergraduate students seemed to lack the confidence or willingness to take the risk of accepting only partial comprehension and, in any case, may not always have been sure if an unknown word was a keyword or could safely be ignored.

Teacher-centredness
The following extracts illustrate instances of the use of the terms 'teacher-centred' or 'teacher-centredness', and they occur for the undergraduate class in the seventh, eighth, ninth and twelfth entries. This seems to indicate that it was a continuing concern during part of the semester (Weeks 4-6).

> *"… it got a bit stuck in a teacher-centred mode, presenting difficult vocabulary. The materials contain a lot of vocabulary that is hard for the majority of these students and it always seems to take ages checking that everyone has understood …"* (Extract 3, seventh entry of fourteen, LNG 334)

> *"The first hour went well enough if you like teacher-centredness. But it took this amount of time just to go through the materials students were to confront in the listening lab in the second hour. So, is the material too hard?"* (Extract 4, eighth entry of fourteen, LNG 334)

> *"The second hour was standard fare from the prescribed materials. Again, it was more teacher-centred than I would like … vocabulary …"* (Extract 5, ninth entry of fourteen, LNG 334)

These extracts (along with further instances not included here due to space constraints) indicate that there was a link between perceived excessive teacher-centredness and the previous issue, discussed above, teaching vocabulary. However, underlying both these issues was the teacher's need to check on students' learning (see extract 3 above). Clearly, this is an important part of a teacher's job, particularly if the teacher wants higher proficiency students to translate words for lower proficiency students, a potentially time-saving technique. Likewise, extract 4 shows that the language level of the prescribed listening materials may have been too high for these students and/or the associated tasks may have been too bottom-up. Extract 5 provides further evidence of teacher-centredness associated with teaching vocabulary at this stage in the semester.

Interpreting lesson plans flexibly

As teachers gain experience, one of the things many of them can do with increasing confidence is to deviate from their lesson plans. However, while it is widely recognized that flexible interpretation of lessons plans can be highly beneficial to lesson outcomes (e.g. Richards & Lockhart 1994), it is possible for teachers to develop the habit of veering off lesson plans with excessive frequency. This is something that, if unmonitored, could result in lesson objectives (or, worse, course objectives) remaining unfulfilled. Here is an extract, taken from the speaking component of the graduate class, on the issue of adherence to lesson plans involving the use of published materials.

> *"This was a very simple text about a Korean student who strongly objected to having to learn English* [Day & Yamanaka 1997]. *I planned to have the students speculate briefly on differences in attitudes to English among East Asian nations. The discussion took off, sometimes tangentially, so I didn't distribute the text for nearly an hour. Given that this course is supposed to develop students' confidence in speaking, allowing them to talk happily seems to be a reasonable aim. Having distributed the text, the students didn't have much to add about the topic."* (Extract 6, fourth of twelve entries for Language Improvement, speaking component)

Here, the diary entry seems to serve as a reminder that, while lesson plans are an essential part of teaching, teachers can still decide in 'real time' to move away from the plan if this seems like a good idea. By deviating from my plan, the students had a rare opportunity in this EFL context of uninterrupted time to talk creatively, thus fulfilling one of the main objectives of the course. In this case, while I brought published materials to class with the intention of utilizing them to initiate a discussion, in the event, they served as a brief post-discussion supplement.

Another case of flexible interpretation of my lesson plan occurred in the academic writing component of the graduate class. My plan was that the students should work in pairs, read and give feedback on their partners' latest drafts of a literature review. In the event, for a variety of unanticipated reasons, none of the students had brought a new draft to class. I was therefore constrained radically to change my plan, adjusting to the varying points that individual students had reached in the assignment. This change of plan involved the following: allowing two students to print out their drafts in class time and then give each other feedback in pairs; allowing two students to work on their new drafts; and discussing resources with one student.

Such spontaneous and fundamental deviation from lesson plans may well be easier in small classes and at higher proficiency levels. Indeed, while reiterating the need for cautious interpretation of data using content analysis, the data seem to show that deviations for my lesson plans were more substantial and, arguably, more successful in the graduate class than in the undergraduate class. As already suggested above in relation to dealing with unknown vocabulary and teacher-centredness, deviation from my lesson plans for the undergraduate class often merely amounted to extensions to planned phases, leading to such unintended outcomes as protracted teacher talking time (TTT) devoted to teaching vocabulary and, consequently, reduced time for student talking time (STT).

Coping with inadequate technology
The final theme identified from the content analysis of the diary data figured prominently in the undergraduate class; this concerned difficulties utilizing an outdated and poorly functioning listening laboratory, as shown in this extract.

> *"Oh dear, this was one of the worst lessons I've 'taught' for ages! ...First, I assumed that the students would know that they were supposed to insert the blank cassettes I gave them into their tape machines before I played the tape. I should have been explicit about this. Second, I expected the tape I played to be recorded onto the Ss' cassettes; it didn't. Apparently, for this to happen, Ss have to press their 'record' buttons. Third, when all this was sorted out (with the help of Ss, the TA ... the technician), I pressed 'play', but nothing happened; it turned out that the tape had been mangled. I gave the Ss a ten-minute break in the middle of this technological kerfuffle and then went through a couple of the listening exercises that did not need the tape. But what a pathetic mess!"* (Extract 7, third entry of fourteen, LNG 334)

There were two obvious problems. First, I was insufficiently trained in how to use the laboratory. This is something where I could have sought assistance beyond a brief introduction from a technician. Second, there were so many booths that had malfunctioning cassette decks that I was constrained to operate the equipment centrally. This had the knock-on effect of precluding a key reason for using the lab: students' independent use of their own cassettes, allowing them to work at their own pace. For technology to be used to its full potential in the classroom, not only must teachers be able to master its use but it should be well maintained so that every student in the class can make full use of it. While one of two weekly two-hour classes was timetabled to take place in the listening lab (i.e. 50% of total class time), the following year, I ensured the availability of a normal classroom, where I reverted to using a traditional cassette recorder for listening practice. (In any case, the listening laboratory was dismantled and replaced by traditional classrooms some time after this study was conducted.)

Additional themes and issues
An additional issue that figured in the content analysis was that, for the graduate class, I frequently referred to handouts, which made me wonder if I had somehow adopted the assumption that I should take at least one handout to each class. Frequent use of handouts can be labour-intensive for teachers and may, in some cases, tend towards deductive rather than inductive learning. As a consequence of reading my diary entries during the data-gathering period, I reviewed the purpose and function of my handouts for this course. Given that its main objective was advanced-level language improvement, I subsequently deliberately sought students' input during lessons more often. The following extract illustrates how I did this while adding notes to my lesson plan in case students were unable to supply the necessary input for a task that lay the foundations for job interviews.

> *"I broke with a habit here. Instead of writing a tasksheet for the students, I merely listed in my lesson plan a series of issues I thought students would need to consider in order to* [prepare their] *job interviews."* (Extract 8, seventh of twelve entries for Language Improvement, speaking component)

Another minor issue from the content analysis in the data was giving instructions. On some occasions, it was clear that I had not anticipated how best to give instructions for particular pair or group activities, necessitating the interruption of students once they had started working on them in order to clarify the instructions. One way to focus on giving clear instructions is to put them on an OHT.

Findings from the word-frequency analysis
As mentioned earlier, the content analysis was supplemented by a word-frequency analysis. The table (see data analysis above) shows the content words that occurred twenty or more times in the diaries of the two classes being studied. As in (Pechsuttitanasan's (2005) study, the words in the frequency list appear to reveal very little beyond the findings already presented. Since the objective of the diaries that yielded the data for this study was to reflect on my classroom teaching, it is not particularly surprising that by far the most frequent word was 'student(s)'. The frequency of 'writing' (21 occurrences) can, in part, be explained by the inclusion of the subtitles of the Language Improvement graduate classes ('writing component' and 'speaking component'), which appeared at the beginning of each entry and thus were included in the analysis. The word 'lab' (20 occurrences) often collocated with 'listening' (which occurred 17 times) to form the term 'listening lab', which is discussed above under the category 'Coping with inadequate technology'.

Discussion
A central point that seems to come from this study is that, leaving aside the issue of whether it contains a direct message for others, it certainly raised my own awareness, as the diarist, of issues that I was already conscious of as well as those of which I was not conscious.

A clear example of the former is the issue of motivating students, particularly at relatively low proficiencies, to use English during pair or group work; however, before writing the diary, I had quite simply become inured to it over the years. What the process of writing and then reading the diary did was to galvanize me into trying to do something about it. Although the solution I came up with, having students role-play non-speakers of Thai, appeared to work well, additional ideas are clearly needed for courses that run for several weeks or entire semesters.

Instances of the latter (raising awareness of issues I was not conscious of) included the excessive time routinely devoted in the teacher-centred mode to teaching vocabulary and the consequent inadequate time devoted to student-student interaction. Another example was my assumption, perhaps because it is a widespread belief among teachers, that personalization tasks are meaningful to students and, thus, tend to motivate them to speak. In the case of my undergraduate class, such tasks merely seemed to motivate them to speak in their L1.

Such awareness-raising of ingrained patterns seems particularly likely to be tracked in an ongoing diary. Alternatives such as having colleagues observe one-off classes are clearly useful in identifying issues that occur in one particular class or those that have been anticipated prior to the observation; however, it is unrealistic to expect a colleague to observe a series of classes.

While it is hard to sustain continuous diary-writing, one possibility is to have a break and then begin a follow-up study, perhaps using 'guide questions' (e.g. Richards & Lockhart 1994: 16-17) focusing on issues that surfaced in the original diary. From the data yielded in this study, such guide questions for me could be:

- Did my students use English consistently during pair and group work? If not, how could I motivate them to do so?
- How much time did I spend teaching vocabulary? How could I teach it more efficiently?
- How much teacher talking time was there? How much student talking time? Do I need to change the balance?
- Were any handouts really necessary? Could the students have generated the necessary information themselves?
- Was I able to use any technology included in my plan? Was it in good working order?
- Were all my instructions clear? If not, how could I improve them?

Limitations

The main point to make here is that, like most diary studies, this one suffers from triple subjectivity; in other words, the researcher not only wrote the diary but then went on to analyze *and* interpret the data (particularly a problem with the content analysis). Schumann (1980) and Matsumoto (1987), among others, have pointed out that, if multiple diarists are used and their diary data are quantified in some way, the results may be more generalizable to other teachers than if just one self-observational study is done. Although this study sought to mitigate the high level of subjectivity by conducting a keyword analysis using a corpus, as recommended by Watson Todd (personal communication, 2006), it would be preferable to utilize more than one rater to analyze and interpret word frequencies of key content words.

Conclusion

While acknowledging the subjective element in diary studies and the possibility that their findings may directly benefit only the diarist, teachers undergoing the same process are likely to benefit as I believe I did. I found the process of keeping a diary developed its own momentum as I developed a routine where I wanted to find time to write about my impressions of how my classes had gone. It was often actually an enjoyable process. I began to feel less frustrated and less helpless about negative patterns in my teaching as I started to focus on ways to address these issues. This process seems to have the potential to enhance lifelong learning for all teachers, whether they are experienced or inexperienced. As Porter et al. (1990: 240) conclude in their journal writing study, reflective writing allows teachers "to work to integrate new ideas with what [they] already know".

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Appendix: Sample activity to encourage the use of English during pair work
This activity relates to diary extract 1.

Role play between two employees at TOT (Telephone Operations Thailand)

a) Imagine you have a new colleague in your office at TOT. He/She comes from another country. He/She speaks English and Chinese but doesn't speak Thai. You want to make him/her feel comfortable so you talk to him/her.
- What topics can you discuss with your new colleague?
- Think of some questions you can ask him.

b) Work with a partner and practice both roles. Use English, not Thai (or Chinese!) and keep each conversation going for five minutes. (When you have played both roles, find another partner and do the role play again.)

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