Using journals in teacher training

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Abstract
Introspective writing, frequently in the form of journals or diaries, has become widely used in applied linguistics research. Its purpose is often to raise writers' awareness of a process they are undergoing, such as learning or teaching a second language. This paper explores and illustrates journal writing by two trainee teachers. Evidence is presented of the trainees' beliefs that such introspective work not only enhanced their teaching but also their interactions with each other as trainees and with their supervisors.

Introduction

The terms 'journal' and 'diary' are often used interchangeably in the literature. For Richards et al. (1992: 106), a 'diary study' for research in first and second language acquisition is "a regularly kept journal". Likewise, Bailey (1990: 215) uses one term to define the other; a diary study is "a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events". This overlapping terminology has led to confusion. While both journals and diaries involve introspective writing, the essential difference pertains to whether the writing is public or private.

Where there is an interaction between the writer and at least one other person (e.g., a reader who may write responses to the writer on a regular and potentially formative basis), there is a tendency to use the term 'journal'. 'Interactive journal writing' (also known as 'dialogue journal writing') refers to a procedure whereby the writer regularly completes an entry and the reader then reads and responds in some way. In contrast, the term 'diary' tends to refer to writing where the sole reader is the author. Nevertheless, although diaries are written in the knowledge that no one else will read them, for research purposes, the diarist will often eventually revise his or her entries to produce a draft for the researcher. Bailey and Ochsner (1981: 189) call this "a public version of the diary". Whether journals or diaries, the writing is writer-centred and largely unconstrained, allowing the writer to be autonomous.

This small study seeks to explore this kind of writing in the context of a teacher training course; more specifically, it aims to investigate whether the use of interactive journals written by teacher trainees and read by their supervisors can precipitate a sense of raised awareness in the writers. A brief literature review of journal writing in applied linguistics research is followed by a description of the study, its context and findings.

Introspective writing in applied linguistics

The purposes of this review are to illustrate the use of journal or diary writing in applied linguistics and to consider some of the advantages and disadvantages of using such writing for research in this field. Although, as already noted, this study uses interactive

journals, given the aforementioned definitional anarchy in the literature, the terms used in the studies cited (i.e., 'journals' or 'diaries') are observed here.

Studies of language learning, teaching and teacher training

In recent years, there have been several studies using journals or diaries to investigate adult second language learning. There are some interesting longitudinal studies of researchers recording their observations of both instructed and uninstructed learners (e.g., Schumann's 1976 study of 'Alberto', a Costa Rican man learning English; and Schmidt's 1983 study of 'Wes', a Japanese man learning English). There are also studies of teachers writing about their own development as language learners; these are often native speakers of English writing about their experience learning foreign languages (e.g., Schumann & Schumann's 1977 study of their own learning of Arabic in Tunisia and Farsi in Iran; Schmidt & Frota's 1986 study of Schmidt learning Portuguese in Brazil; and Clark Cummings' 2003 study of herself learning Japanese in Japan). Many of these researchers are veteran teacher trainers who feel the need to step back from their busy working lives and focus on whether their own language learning can inform their language teaching.

Focusing on teaching, Bartlett (1990) and Watson Todd (1997), among others, have noted that teachers can use journals to raise awareness of what goes on in the classroom, this awareness probably being raised during the process of writing their journals. Bartlett (1990) states that journal entries may include observations of teachers' behaviours in the classroom, their beliefs about teaching, critical incidents in a lesson, and events outside the classroom that influence their teaching.

In addition, there are studies by teacher educators who use trainees' written reflections to review and possibly modify their curricula. Numrich (1996: 148), for instance, observed that her analysis of novice teachers' diaries offered "insights into some of the unobservable factors influencing their experience". Without the benefit of reading these diaries, she felt she would have been unaware of some of their early preoccupations, such as the reasons they "choose to use or not to use particular teaching techniques … they had been taught".

Some advantages for researchers

This review now posits six possible benefits, several of which are interconnected, of the use of introspective writing in applied linguistics research: its lack of structure, its personal nature, the potential for an interactive dimension, its potential to raise awareness, its capacity for promoting positive affect and its permanence.

In their list of introspective elicitation procedures, Faerch and Kasper (1987: 16) refer to diaries as one of "the least structured instruments" as they leave informants to decide what, how much, when and how they provide introspective reports. Further, Cohen (1987, cited in Faerch and Kasper) makes the point that diaries are often written in a relatively informal context, such as at home, rather than in the classroom. The data would presumably be relatively informant-initiated, and the lack of pressure might foster open and frank reflection.

Bailey and Ochsner (1981: 189) note that "the central characteristic of the diary studies is that they are introspective: the diarist studies his [or her] own teaching or learning". They go on to say that an important contribution of the diary studies "lies in what they

can reveal about *personal* [their italics] variables in second language learning, acquisition, or teaching" (p. 191).

Writing reflectively, informants can articulate problems they are having and, assuming the entries are read, obtain help from the teacher, teacher trainer or researcher. Depending on the circumstances, feedback might be given in class or to an individual. Porter et al. (1990: 232-3) point out that, because it is "a safe place, students take advantage of the journal to talk about learning problems, and consequently more learning problems get addressed". Reticent and shy students or trainees might be emboldened to air their difficulties in a journal since writing about them is less face-threatening than initiating discussion of them in the public domain.

An interactive mode is thus created between teacher and student or teacher and teacher trainee, one that can empower the student or trainee and, at the same time, alert the researcher or teacher to unexpected difficulties. This interactive mode of communication challenges traditional notions of teacher and student/trainee roles, still very dominant in some East Asian contexts. It facilitates learner-centredness as student input can contribute towards shaping or reshaping course content (Porter et al. 1990: 237). The importance of an interaction with teachers has been reinforced by evidence from a recent study by Srimavin and Darasawang (forthcoming). Working in the area of autonomous learning, they had their subjects write journals focusing specifically on self-assessment. The researchers expressed disappointment in their results but attributed these, in part, to the lack of reactions from the teachers.

Porter et al. (1990) claim that autonomous learning can be promoted by journal writing, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, to make connections between course content and their own learning, and to evaluate course content critically. This awareness is deemed to be promoted by the very act of writing "because writing both stimulates and shapes ideas" (p. 234). While it is clearly hard to prove a connection between writing and the generation of critical and creative thinking, it is nonetheless intuitively appealing that such relatively unguided writing, whether it be by language learners, teacher trainees or teachers, should tap the metacognitive domain.

It is conceivable that positive affective factors are triggered by interactive journal writing as students gain confidence from generating original insights. As a result, according to Porter et al., journal writing may lead to more productive class discussion; students, having reflected on and written about an issue, come to class feeling prepared and more confident to talk about it. This observation is likely to apply equally to supervision sessions for teacher training.

Finally, one of the advantages of having a written record is that it is relatively permanent. While the very act of writing is widely believed to raise writers' awareness of issues nominated, its utility is likely to be greatly enhanced if writers periodically read and reread their journals. Such reading of old journal entries can act to maintain awareness and perhaps to make links with current issues. It may also make explicit old patterns, both good and less good; for the latter, the journal writer can ponder further on possible ways to solve or at least modify problems, even providing a chance for innovation. The benefits of having a record are of value not only for the writer but for the researcher interested in interviewing the writer as a subject some time later about the contents of the journal. Alternatively, as will be shown in this study, a record can assist

the researcher as a writer subsequently seeking to recall his or her own mental behaviour.

Some disadvantages for researchers

The principal criticisms of introspective data, such as those obtained through journal and diary writing, are that they have serious problems of validity and reliability. These are now reviewed briefly.

Since studies using journal or diary writing are usually conducted on small numbers of subjects, there is the obvious threat to external validity. The crucial point here seems to be the nature and extent of the claims a researcher makes from data collected in this way. Moreover, several methods of collecting introspective data may be adopted, and the journal data may be used to complement the other data. Schumann (1980), Matsumoto (1987) and Numrich (1996), among others, have pointed out that, if multiple subjects are used and diary data are quantified in some way, the results may be more generalizable to other novice teachers than if just one self-observational study is done. Where no single introspective method is anywhere near perfect, triangulation may obviate the limitations of each (e.g., Watson Todd 2003). In addition, the objectives for obtaining the journal data may go far beyond strict data analysis. Nonetheless, there is also the issue of internal validity; specifically, two researchers, analyzing the same data, might well develop different categorizations and come to different conclusions.

Another potential disadvantage of diary studies, again like that of many introspective data gathering methods, is that they are unreliable or, worse, neither reliable nor valid. The researcher cannot be sure whether a subject's entries accurately reflect what actually happened or whether they merely reflect the subject's belief or speculation about what happened. Indeed, it is clearly impossible to be absolutely sure of what goes on at an unconscious or highly automated level of processing.

Ironically, however, this argument can be turned on its head since, as noted above, introspective writing may well act, over time, as a consciousness raising activity (e.g., Schumann and Schumann 1977, Schmidt and Frota 1986, Porter et al. 1990, Clark Cummings 2003). Moreover, Nunan (1992: 123-4) points out that it is difficult to see how the "rich insights into some of the psychological, social, and cultural factors" involved in language learning and teaching could be yielded other than through journal or diary writing.

Conclusion

To conclude this review, Porter et al. (1990: 239-240) provide an eloquent plea for syllabi for teacher training courses to include introspective writing, even at the expense of more traditional syllabus items:

> "Teacher educators may find themselves concerned about the amount of time journals entail for both themselves and their students. However, we as teachers and students [the authors] strongly recommend the addition of a journal to teacher education courses even if this involves eliminating some readings and/or assignments from the syllabus of an already developed course. The benefits … demonstrate that journals provide opportunities for ongoing learning that most course assignments do not. Throughout the course, they allow for a dialogue between teacher and students; they allow students to learn through writing without being evaluated on the writing itself; and they alert teachers to student concerns

and needs, and allow for these needs to be met in the course. The journal … enables students to develop a professional approach towards learning and to write as members of the larger language teaching community. In sum, it teaches them to do what we do as professionals – to work to integrate new ideas with what we already know and to talk with each other as we do so."

Background to the study

Students participating in the English Language Teaching (ELT) strand of the masters in applied linguistics at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) are required to take a course called 'Techniques in Teaching Practice'. This course requires students to teach a secondary-level or tertiary-level class for two hours a week for a semester and be observed about six times concurrently by two supervisors. As teacher trainees, they work in pairs and observe each other's teaching.

In the case being reported here, working as a pair of trainees, the second and third writers of this paper taught at a local secondary school. Each of them was responsible for a different group of approximately 50 students whose English could be described as elementary (Matayom 4; age range, 15-16). The teaching took place on Monday and Wednesday mornings throughout Semester 1 of 2003. As shown in Table 1 below, one of the trainees, Tanya Pakpoom (TT1), who had two years of teaching experience, usually had to teach her lesson first while the other trainee, Saratoon Oonkaew (TT2), who had no prior experience, observed and facilitated. This gave TT2 the benefit of being able to rework his lesson plan as a result of observing the effects of TT1's lesson before teaching his class, with TT1 facilitating. Six times during the semester, the two supervisors, a senior teacher in the Department of Applied Linguistics and the first writer, observed both trainees in the same week for all, or most of, the two-hour classes.

Table 1: Teacher training routine

Day	Teaching	Facilitating	Observing
Monday	TT1	TT2	Both supervisors
Wednesday	TT2	TT1	Both supervisors

Supervision sessions attended by both the supervisors and the trainees took place on Thursday mornings in the same week.

An additional requirement of the teaching practice course is that the trainees keep regular interactive journals on their teaching. These were written after the Thursday supervision sessions and delivered to the supervisors. The trainees wrote one journal entry (usually on A4 size paper and 3-4 pages in length with 1.5 spacing), for each of the six occasions on which they were observed. Each supervisor would then react to the trainees' introspective writing with both written comments in the journals and verbal comments during the subsequent supervision session.

To help the trainees focus while writing, they were given Richards and Lockhart's (1994: 16-17) 'reflection questions to guide journal entries' (see appendix). These questions were designed to take trainees beyond typical class records, which often merely list syllabus items (e.g., "I taught the past tense today."). The hope was that these questions would generate a much richer record of processes, reactions, successes and failures; or, to use TT2's expressions, 'fill in the blanks' (i.e., gaps in the trainees' teaching experience) and 'delete the problems'. The contents of these journals included

reflections on their own teaching, their peer's teaching and previous written feedback given by the supervisors, all of which informed discussion in the supervision sessions.

As already stated, this research was exploratory and sought evidence of trainees' raised awareness of issues confronting them in their teaching practice. Data analysis, which took place about three months after the end of the teaching practice course, comprised the following steps. First, the trainees (i.e., the second and third writers) read or reread their own respective journals from beginning to end and listed what they perceived to be the most salient points, each with at least one illustrative extract. Second, one of the supervisors (i.e., the first writer) reviewed the journals and the trainees' selected points and extracts and sought clarification from the trainees on a number of points. Finally, a draft of this paper was written and reviewed by the supervisor and both trainees (i.e., all three writers). Clearly, and as noted in the preceding literature review, this procedure is highly subjective: the journals were subjective in the first place; the researchers' perception of salient themes was subjective; and the categorization and selection of illustrative extracts was subjective.

Findings

From her journals, TT1 identified three areas where she felt she benefited from her introspective writing:

- Self-awareness in teaching
- Learning from observing co-trainee
- Learning from feedback (from supervisors and co-trainee)

An example of the first of these areas came from a lesson aimed at teaching students how to order food in a restaurant. TT1 noted that she asked her students to work on a task before ensuring that they had sufficient active vocabulary to do so:

> "I see that one thing that I have to be more aware is that teaching vocabulary. I should prepare the vocabulary about food because some students did not know some words. So I have to improve this problem by present the words that used in the restaurant before letting them work because they asked me a lot about the words." (TT1)

In the follow-up supervision session, there was a discussion about whether some of the food items in such a task could be Thai rather than western. This might be more realistic for these students as they are probably more likely to be talking to foreigners about food in a Thai restaurant rather than a western one; in addition, it would reduce the vocabulary load in this task and allow the students to focus on fluency.

Perhaps less anticipated was TT1's second main insight, learning from observing her co-trainee (TT2), whom she observed teaching the same lesson two days later (see Table 1 above). In the following extract, TT1 writes about how she and her co-trainee had a problem in common:

> "From the observation, I see that my co-teacher had to face the same problem is that the students were noisy. I think that this problem we will talk later in the next lesson. We think that we should help to manage them to pay more attention in learning by using the exercises to them." (TT1)

TT1's third area of heightened awareness concerned the receipt of feedback from both supervisors and co-trainee. Taking the supervisors' feedback first, the next extract

illustrates how, following observation of her co-trainee's class and discussion in a supervision session, TT1 felt she might modify her plan if she had to teach the lesson again:

> "From this point, I agree with them [my supervisors], when I compared my teaching with my co-teacher [TT2]. His class looked more fun than my class. It may be because he elicited the sentences instead of using the dialogue only." (TT1)

Apart from giving feedback during supervision sessions, the supervisors wrote comments in the trainees' journals, thus making them 'interactive' or 'dialogue' journals. In the extract below, where these comments are italicized and placed in square brackets, TT1 feels that the supervisors' probing on particular points raised in her journal helped to deepen her reflection on those points:

> "After that, we presented the new language from the books in order to see the sentences in using the telephone. Then we let them work in pairs by using games so that they could see the challenge in working in-group. We set 2 situations about telephoning and then let them draw lots. Finally, they could practice by following what they have got. *[Why is using games challenging?]*" (TT1)

As for awareness-raising triggered by her co-trainee's feedback, the example below illustrates how TT1 felt she had learned from TT2 when the latter suggested she could have omitted a phase in her lesson:

> "My co-teacher suggested that the part of revision should be skipped because it looked like redundant lesson. I agreed with him that I should do the next activity because this lesson focused on communication speaking activity." (TT1)

In this case, TT2 almost certainly benefited from having first observed TT1 teach the lesson. One of the main themes throughout the semester was that, following changes in the national curriculum, the syllabus for these students involved a lot of revision. This meant that there were more opportunities than usual for teachers to elicit students' prior knowledge rather than present new material.

Turning to TT2, he readily acknowledged in a supervision session that he had initially doubted if journal writing could help him much as a teacher trainee and admitted that he only did it because it was a course requirement. However, his view soon changed as he began to feel that it accelerated his development as a teacher, partly by helping him "say 'no' to my weak points" and by promoting reflection while teaching the next class. Indeed, he now uses this introspective approach in teaching content courses such as mathematics and physics.

TT2 identified the following areas where he felt his journal writing had promoted his professional development:

- Self-awareness in teaching
- Awareness of what students enjoy
- Awareness of a teaching technique (elicitation)

While the first of these areas is identical to one of TT1's areas, the other two differ. Like TT1, TT2 wrote reflectively about how he could improve his teaching:

> "There was unnecessary that I asked [all] the students perform the activity in front of the class every time. This could make the students get bored. The

> teacher could choose some groups to perform the activity and choose another to perform next time." (TT2)

The second area where TT2 felt journal writing helped him focus his awareness was in knowing his students and what they enjoyed. One preference he identified was the use of realia in the classroom:

> "The teaching topic was 'telephoning'. I brought the real telephone into class *[Good idea!]* and elicited the conversation from the students. They had to think about the situation when they were on the phone. This stage could lead them to use their knowledge of the world in order to produce the conversation." (TT2)

For a lesson the following week on eating out, TT2 reported bringing to class plates, spoons, forks and glasses and that these realia helped the students predict the topic. On another occasion, he brought a collection of items such as bread, chocolate and toothpaste in order to teach the function of asking about prices. He concluded:

> "The reason why I brought the authentic material was when the students saw these things they would see clearer pictures and feel that lesson is closer to their real life." (TT2)

Finally, TT2 identified a teaching technique, elicitation, as an area where his journal writing enhanced his development as a teacher. Many new teachers stick closely to their lesson plans or to the language presented in the textbook; however, in his journal, TT2 reveals his belief in eliciting language from the students and, whenever possible, incorporating the language they produce into the lesson. The following extract refers to a lesson on shopping:

> "After that, I let the students think about the situation when they went to the shop and elicited its conversation from them. I used their answers for building the conversation in the shop. The students had a chance to use their knowledge of the world and the knowledge of the previous lesson in order to produce the conversation, for instance, when the customer came to the shop, the first sentence that the assistant would say was 'Can I help you?'. Some students' responses were not the same as the unit's communicative focus, for instance, the students gave the sentence 'I'm looking for …' used for things but in the unit's communicative focus the students should use 'Can I have …'. I did not ignore these responses because I wanted to make the students feel save when they participated in class. Besides, I wanted to let them know that there is no exactly sentence or pattern in real situations." (TT2)

This lengthy extract seems to reveal an important realization, one that could encourage more experienced teachers not to insist on sticking too closely to language that happens to be presented in the textbook. Allowing students to produce what they know and then using it in the lesson seems likely to give them a sense of progression, something that is particularly important where, as in this case, the syllabus contains a considerable amount of revision. Eliciting and using appropriate language that students produce allows lessons to be flexible and to focus on communicating meaning rather than on practicing prescribed language items.

To summarize, Table 2 below shows the aspects of teaching and sources of learning each trainee believed benefited from the process of journal writing.

Table 2: Categories identified by trainees

TT1	TT2
Self-awareness in teaching	Self-awareness in teaching
Learning from observing co-trainee	Awareness of what students enjoy
Learning from feedback	Awareness of a teaching technique

The perception of raised awareness is clearly a major factor in this study. While both trainees identified a broad area of awareness, TT2 identified two rather narrower areas involving his knowledge of his students' enjoyment of the use of realia and his realization of the potential of elicitation. What all three of TT2's areas have in common is a growing sense of confidence and flexibility in teaching; as mentioned in the literature review, Porter et al. (1990) also found evidence of positive affect in their study. In TT1's case, her perception of learning from her supervisors' feedback in journals is likely to be an outcome of the interactive nature of the journal writing under study; however, it is possible, for instance, that TT2's reported learning through observing her co-trainee could, at least in part, have occurred without such introspective writing. In other words, what precipitated the trainees' perceived learning and raised awareness may well be multifactorial.

Conclusion

While there is no proof that journal writing accelerates improvement in trainees' teaching, some things about such reflective writing seem clear. It gives trainees an opportunity to think about a class just taught and how subsequent teaching might be better. Any positive outcome from such a process is likely to be enhanced when trainees can also write about their reactions to co-trainees' teaching. In addition, interactive journals offer the opportunity for trainees to reflect on their supervisors' comments and for important issues to be targeted for discussion in supervision sessions. In this small study, trainees' reflections included evidence of awareness of a wide range of issues in teaching and learning, including providing sufficient language for students to do an activity, utilizing language elicited from students whenever possible, being aware of the need to seek and maintain students' interest and thinking of ways of achieving it, learning from observing and facilitating in fellow trainees' classes, and being open to feedback from various sources. These are all important issues in teacher education. There are several possible avenues for future research; one of these might be collaborative studies where teams of experienced and less experienced teachers within an institution write about their teaching, subsequently pooling their observations with a view to identifying common problems that can then be aired and addressed.

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Appendix: Reflection questions to guide journal entries

(Source: Richards & Lockhart 1994: 16-17)

Questions about what happened during a lesson

Questions about your teaching

1. What did you set out to teach?
2. Were you able to accomplish your goals?
3. What teaching materials did you use? How effective were they?
4. What techniques did you use?
5. What grouping arrangements did you use?
6. Was your lesson teacher-dominated?
7. What kind of teacher-student interaction occurred?
8. Did anything amusing or unusual occur?
9. Did you have any problems with the lesson?
10. Did you do anything differently from usual?
11. What kinds of decision making did you employ?
12. Did you depart from your lesson plan? If so, why? Did the changes make things go better or worse?
13. What was the main accomplishment of the lesson?
14. Which parts of the lesson were most successful?
15. Which parts of the lesson were least successful?
16. Would you teach the lesson differently if you taught it again?
17. Was your philosophy of teaching reflected in the lesson?
18. Did you discover anything new about your teaching?
19. What changes do you think you should make in your teaching?

Questions about the students

1. Did you teach all your students today?
2. Did students contribute actively to the lesson?

3. How did you respond to different students' needs?
4. Were students challenged by the lesson?
5. What do you think students really learned from the lesson?
6. What did they like most about the lesson?
7. What didn't they respond well to?

Questions to ask yourself as a language teacher

1. What is the source of my ideas about language teaching?
2. Where am I in my professional development?
3. How am I developing as a language teacher?
4. What are my strengths as a language teacher?
5. What are my limitations at present?
6. Are there any contradictions in my teaching?
7. How can I improve my language teaching?
8. How am I helping my students?
9. What satisfaction does language teaching give me?