Part 3: Inquiry into instructional practices

12 Professionalism is personal: How teachers in Japan help themselves develop through self-reflection practices

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ABOUT NANCY

I have taught in Japan for the past twenty years, and am teaching at Kobe Steel's in-house English training program. I have been teaching workshop and practicum courses at Teachers College, Columbia since1988. Recently, I have been pursuing research in teacher and learner autonomy, reflection and motivation.

日本での教育経験は20年におよび、現在は神戸製鋼の社内英語研修プログラムで教えています。また、1988年よりコロンビア大学ティーチャーズ・カレッジ東京校でワークショップ、教育実習などを担当しています。近年の研究として教師および学習者自律性と内省、そして動機付けについて追求しています。

ABOUT STACEY

I have been teaching English for 17 years in Japan. Currently I am teaching English for academic purposes at Meikai University, and assist Nanci Graves teaching practicum courses at Teachers College, Columbia at the Tokyo campus. I am also a fan and co-coordinator of the Learner Development SIG at JALT.

日本において、17年間の英語教師歴があります。現在、明海大学で学術目的の英語教育を行い、コロンビア大学ティーチャーズ・カレッジ東京校において、ナンシー・グレーヴズの教育実習のコースを補佐しています。またJALTの学習者発達を専門とする分野別研究会の大ファンであり、コーディーネーターのひとりです。

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter we discover what motivates in-service teachers to use self-reflective practices personally and professionally. The rationale is that teacher development courses ask teachers to reflect on ourselves, however whether we continue to examine our beliefs and practices is another matter. We believe this is not simply an issue of self-interest, because if teachers find self-reflection activities useful in their lives, they will be well-informed while explaining their benefits to language learners, which is a critical process of learner autonomy. To gain insights on reflective teaching, we did an extensive review of literature, and then teachers responded to an open-ended survey on self-reflection. We report the voices of these teachers' self-reflective practices, which suggest that self-reflection connected with their lives helps keep them being inspired. Because of this, we hope the reader can decide if and what kind of self-reflective practices are meaningful for themselves.

この章では、現職教師に自己内省を行おうと思わせる個人的そして専門的な動機とは何かを明らかにする。教師養成コースにおいて、我々教師は自己を省みることを要求されるが、果たして自分自身の信念や教育法を追求し続けているかというのは、また別問題である。著者らは、これは単に自己利益の問題ではないと考える。もし教師たちが内省的取り組みが生活上、有益であると知っていれば、その利点をよく認識できると同時に、言語学習者にも伝えることができるためで、これは自律的学習の重要なプロセスである。内省型教育法を理解するため、著者らは広範な文献検索と自由回答式のアンケート調査を行った。アンケートに回答した教師たちの自己内省に対する声を報告するとともに、これらの意見から、生活にまつわる自己内省はインスピレーションを刺激し続けるのに役立つということが示唆された。本章を読んで、内省型教育が分自にとって有意義であるかどうか、またそうであればどのような手法が有用か判断できることを期待する。

Many teacher education sources recommend that teachers regularly engage in a self-reflective process to refine their teaching skills and deepen their understanding of learning from the learner's perspective. Teacher development courses consequently often ask teachers to study themselves through such means as diary studies, reader-response journals, and autobiographical histories. Whether we continue to examine our beliefs, our practices and ourselves throughout our careers is another matter, however. In the midst of other demands, even the most conscientious of teachers may find it difficult to devote sufficient time to reflect on their own developmental needs in beneficial ways. The purpose of the current study is therefore to reconsider what value self-reflection activities hold for us and what motivates us to make the choice to voluntarily engage in them.

Our main interest lies in discovering why and how in-service teachers utilize self-reflection practices for both personal and professional reasons. Without downgrading the importance of instructional growth, we feel that it might be worthwhile to explore whether limiting our focus to the improvement of teaching skills as the central goal of self-reflection can sustain an on-going process of self-inquiry. Rather than primarily work-related, the incentive to develop is generally strongest when the effort has direct personal benefits. For that reason, it appears advantageous for teachers to see themselves as the first learner for whose sake they need to review their instructional abilities at different stages of their lives, and adopt self-reflection practices that aid their own development as life-long learners. This is not purely a matter of self-interest since, if teachers have experienced efficacious results from self-reflection activities, they will also be better able to explain to students how to get the greatest value from their use. Clarifying the multiple goals of self-reflection beyond the professional sphere is thus one aspect we want to investigate in this study.

A further aspect we wish to consider is how the metacognitive strategies used for self-reflection can serve a therapeutic function to reduce teacher stress and increase self-understanding. If these strategies are found to help us deal more effectively with the changes and dilemmas we encounter both in and outside the classroom, it should become easier to recognize how involving ourselves in some form of self-reflective activity can literally be good for us, not only as teachers but also as people who have to cope with whatever life throws at us. Particularly in the absence of peer or institutional support, teachers' proficient use of self-help strategies could provide an essential safety net to carry them through difficult experiences.

It is our belief that working to understand autonomous learning and how to foster it in the classroom should be seen as an opportunity for teachers to review and forward their own level of autonomous development. For both learners and teachers, the benefits of personal autonomy are not limited to the academic sphere but encompass the holistic realm of our growth as human beings. Certainly, gaining a fuller sense of control over our inner development will increase our confidence and expertise as guides and counselors of our students. More directly, however, we will function better as our own guides and counselors as we pursue our individual paths to self-actualization. Although the process is a universal construct, it is valuable for EFL teachers in Japan to consider how various self-reflective practices might contribute to their personal as well as professional development.

WHY ARE SELF-REFLECTIVE PRACTICES CONSIDERED IMPORTANT FOR TEACHERS?

Before reviewing how self-reflective practices have been described in English language teaching literature, we would first like to base our discussion on a broad view of what reflection means and what it can be useful for. As defined by Wikipedia (2006):

> Human self-reflection is the capacity of humans to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about our fundamental nature, purpose and essence. The earliest historical records demonstrate the great interest which humanity has had in itself. Human self-reflection invariably leads to inquiry into the human condition and the essence of humankind as a whole.

Additionally, self-reflection is closely connected with the psychological need to make sense of and draw individual meaning from our experiences, which can include the formation of a personal philosophy as well as a search for 'the truth' in tangible terms. Equally important is the metacognitive ability to step back and view ourselves with greater objectivity, which can raise our awareness of outer reality and be used to intelligently shape the beliefs we hold as well as the choices and decisions we make. Thus, although reflection takes place within the self, it functions as a connective device that guides how we learn from our encounters with the world at large.

Although the importance of self-reflection is not a new idea in teacher education (Jersild, 1955), there still seems to be a dissonant tendency for teachers to expect their students to become more reflective learners without considering their own need for self-reflection. Since the nature of teaching requires teachers to deal with psychological factors that support or limit the capacity to learn:

> A teacher cannot make much headway in understanding others or in helping others to understand themselves unless he is endeavoring to understand himself. If he is not engaged in this endeavor, he will continue to see those whom he teaches through the bias and distortions of his own unrecognized needs, fears, desires, anxieties, and hostile impulses (p.14).

Krishnamurti (2000) also believes that teachers are able to give, grow, and awaken intelligences in learners only if they themselves practice this reflective process. Accordingly, it makes sense that when teachers exhibit a willingness to reflect, learn, and change, they provide a role model for students to do the same, transforming the classroom into a collaborative community of learners on a shared journey to explore the meaning of their experience (Imel, 1998). This communal collaboration is of course equally important within the wider context of teacher education courses, teaching staffs and other professional group learning experiences.

Within language teaching in EFL settings, Plain (1991) advocates the importance of teacher reflection by suggesting that a crucial element in the teacher/learner connection is the practice of a teacher's awareness of self. This is not an easy task, because teachers tend to focus awareness on learners' development without looking at their own. Similarly, psychology and language learning researchers Williams and Burden (1997) promote a *humanistic approach* in education that places an individual's thoughts and emotions as a priority for the personal growth of both learners and teachers. The rationale is that teachers' views of teaching mirror their own views of themselves, and their teaching behavior reflects their essence as a person. The *humanistic approach* can thus be seen as person-centered, rather than simply *learner-centered,* highlighting the fact that a reflective teacher is vital for the learning process.

Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) also suggest that, just as students are ultimately responsible for their own learning, so are teachers. While avenues of growth should be available in the teacher's workplace, that is not always a reality, and so seeking their own ways to develop become necessary. Furthermore, as Jersild (1955) points out, no amount of outside assistance can overcome the sense of alienation that stems from a lack of self-understanding: "It is the

person who is not at home with his own thoughts, the one who is alien to his own feelings, the one who is a stranger to himself – he is the loneliest person of all" (p.75). *Teachers therefore* need to be able to pick themselves up by their boot straps so to speak, by relying less on contextual support and more on their own self-counseling abilities to cope with whatever challenges they might face.

Oprandy (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2001) believes that self-reflection is crucial for language teachers because the closer teachers in the classroom are to who and how they are outside it, the more genuine they can become in the presence of students. Perhaps more significantly, the more teachers are self-actualized, the more inner resources they will have to draw upon both during classes and in life in general. The value of authenticity is also noted by Barlett (1990), who includes "Is the teacher I am the person I am?" (p.206) in a list of questions a critically reflective teacher might ask herself. Rather than attempting to conform to a stereotyped image of the ideal teacher, a humanistic approach to the process of self-reflection in teacher education thus emphasizes the importance of better understanding and expressing our personal identity through the activity of teaching.

HOW IS SELF-REFLECTION CONNECTED TO TEACHER AUTONOMY?

Although teacher autonomy is less researched than learner autonomy, it should be noted that discussion of its meaning has developed beyond the sake of fostering autonomy for learners and can also be incorporated as part of a broader definition of the teacher's own need for professional freedom and personal reflection (Benson, 2001). Self-reflection to recognize obstacles that impede one's development of inner autonomy is hard work and can be ego deflating, but without it, the teacher ignores greater potential for both personal and professional growth.

In a teacher narrative study, Aoki (2003), like Oprandy, addresses the interconnectedness of personal and professional development by revealing that teacher autonomy complexly involves the person's multiple facets as a whole person. Viewing teacher development as a matter of conducting action research to stimulate reflection merely as a professional is therefore too simplistic in scope. Along similar lines, Smith (2003) proposes a definition of autonomy that includes the notion that the teacher is a learner going through a learning reflective process, described as *teacher-learner autonomy*. In his words (Smith, 2003): "In order for teachers to gain better abilities and a greater willingness to learn for themselves in developing 'an appropriate expertise of their own,' this kind of reflection seems essential" (p.8).

Through an introspective study of her own learning experiences as a language learner and teacher, Sakui (2002) also discovered the complexities of learning, teaching, and developing teacher expertise by recognizing that both her personal and professional experiences compelled her to ask questions that helped develop and modify her practices, knowledge, and beliefs. Posing such questions in relation to the self and reflecting upon them for a deeper understanding of one's own identity may therefore offer a more facilitating approach to teachers' development of autonomy in EFL teaching contexts such as Japan.

WHY IS SELF-REFLECTION NEEDED IN JAPAN?

Obstacles to a teacher's development of both personal and professional autonomy are clearly not limited to the classroom. It was thus refreshing to find familiar causes of stress described in a report by EFL teachers who have had experience with Japan (Edwards Okazaki & Rinvolucri, 2005). While all teachers are prone to experience stress, for EFL teachers working abroad there

are particular factors that can result in depression with potentially little help available. Edwards Okazaki (2005) points out stressors such as culture shock, language barriers, and adjusting to the written and unwritten rules of a new school. In such circumstances, teachers' ability to reflect on their reactions and find ways to maintain their equilibrium can determine whether they learn from their environment or are damaged by it.

In addition, Edwards Okazaki and Rinvolucri (2005) emphasize that the topic of depression in EFL is somewhat "hidden" and needs to be discussed more openly in educational settings. They point out that "EFL literature is perhaps unrealistically suffused with sunshine and laughter" (p.4) and suggest counterbalancing this tendency by encouraging teachers to publicly share their problems and failures as well as their successes. Rinvolucri himself describes how his attempt to stoically 'soldier on' with his classes while undergoing a major bout of depression had a damaging effect on two of his students, and how, by reflecting on this experience and discussing it with his colleagues, he was able to avoid its recurrence.

Clearly, in stressful environments, individuals devise coping strategies that may or may not be genuinely beneficial to themselves or those around them. Simon-Maeda (2005) shows through in-depth, open-ended life history interviews of native, foreign, and Japanese female EFL instructors that educators face a myriad of oppressive ideologies and calls for TESOL professionals to look at how marginalization and discrimination work in Japan. She suggests that the phenomena is not exclusively gender-based, but rather uncovers how teachers interact within the constraints they face in their contexts by constructing unique identities, and attempt to change the ideological status quo by introducing their students to alternative perspectives on global and local social concerns. More information on teachers' autonomous self-reflection and action of this kind could encourage more attention being paid and support being provided to improve the mental health condition of English teachers working in Japan.

ASKING TEACHERS ABOUT THEIR SELF-REFLECTIVE PRACTICES IN JAPAN

In pursuit of teachers' insights on self-reflective practices, we did an extensive search of literature in EFL and TESOL, education, psychology, and holistic-alternative sources during the onset of our project. Subsequently, we conducted an open-ended survey by posting a call on a TESOL graduate information web, to which teachers in the program, alumni, and professors have access (Appendix A). In addition, we posted our survey to individual colleagues we know in Japan. We deliberately posed vague questions, not defining what "self-reflective practices" are in hopes of not influencing the responses. We simply asked what self-reflection strategies our respondents use to support their development in their personal and professional lives.

We received responses from teachers of five different countries who teach in Japan, six of whom are American; four Japanese; three Canadians; and one British and New Zealander respectively. According to gender, there are nine women from all five nationalities and six men from America, Japan, and Canada. Although three respondents are in their 30's, as well as three in their 50's, the average age of respondents is in their 40's. Among the 11 foreign nationals living in Japan, their average length of stay in Japan is just over 15 years. As far as years of English teaching, the participants' experience ranged from one year to 27 years, with the average being just under 10 years.

HOW THESE TEACHERS PRACTICE SELF-REFLECTION

Since the respondents mentioned a wide variety of reflective practices from formalized and ongoing to informal and occasional in both personal and professional settings, we decided to

focus our discussion of the survey results on the activities they do and why they do them. In this way, we will show what the respondents believe are the different purposes and benefits of self-reflection, and suggest how personal and professional reflective opportunities might be viewed from a holistic standpoint.

We have categorized their responses in terms of the means through which their self-reflection was developed and sustained. Within the core category of personal and professional self-reflection, we broadly categorize five reflections that branch out from this core, according to whether the activity predominately involved mindfulness training, reading, writing, listening, or speaking respectively. (see the "Respondents' Self-Reflection Mandala Spectrum Figure 1.1" for a visual image of the activities categorized). The personal and professional self-reflections in the center circle in the Yin Yang shape represent the balance of the variety of responses between the personal and professional realms discussed previously. The five broad activities have linking arrows through each practice because many respondents mentioned a variety of these reflective practices that they do concurrently. From the five activities there are petals around the circled core that branch out to represent the kinds of reflective practices the respondents mention.

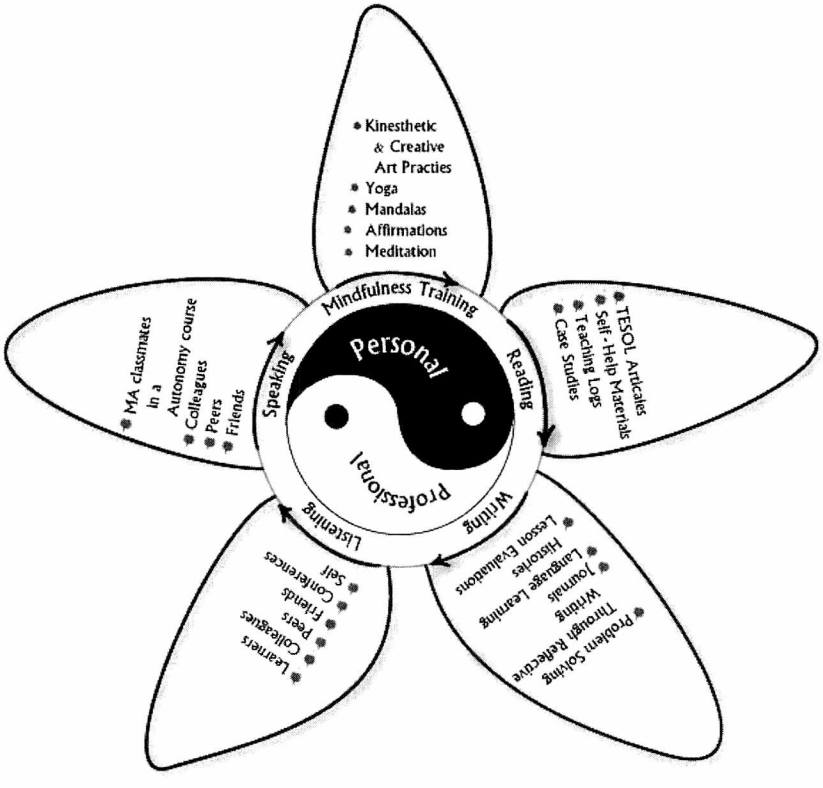

Figure 1. Respondents' Self-Reflection Mandala Spectrum.

MINDFULNESS TRAINING

Altogether, half of the survey respondents reported that their use of a reflection practice involving yoga, the creative arts, and/or meditation was a valuable tool that crossed over from their personal to professional development. We have grouped these practices under the

category of mindfulness, as they were deemed important for purposes that included facilitating awareness, clarifying the thinking process, re-energizing, and engendering a greater sense of both inner control and connectedness with outer reality. This result seemed significant, as we had found few specific references in the TESOL literature to alternative reflective approaches other than Gebhard (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2001), who described how reflecting on his yoga and teaching practices helped him clarify his identity as both a person and teacher:

> ...I have been making connections between who I was and am as a practitioner of yoga and who I am as a teacher. To explore this connection, I selected a set of learning experiences from my past, reflected on these experiences by writing down and organizing these thoughts and feelings about them, attempted to make links between them and my present teaching beliefs and practices, and considered the complexity of reflection itself. I am happy that I did this because I have made connections between who I am and who I am as a teacher – perhaps the most important awareness of all in our professional, as well as personal, exploration. (pp.211-219)

KINESTHETIC AND CREATIVE ARTS PRACTICES

Like Gebhard (2001), three respondents listed yoga as one of their personal self-reflection activities. However, while using this practice to explore their identity might be called a common factor, they did not reflect on their roles as learners of yoga but rather cited the direct beneficial effects that yoga had on their ability to think and self-develop, as this comment illustrates:

> I do Yoga, which makes me think deeply and grow as a human. [R5]

An initial aspect to note here is that, for many respondents, the kinesthetic element forwarded a mind-body connection that they believed was an essential part of the reflection process. Through movement and interaction with the natural world, respondents gained access to a deeper experience of reality that in turn sharpened their intellectual faculties and helped them maintain a balanced view of life. The following respondent, for example, pursues multiple physically active self-reflection practices for such awareness-expanding purposes:

> Taking a walk, yoga exercises, and taking photos always give me a feeling of connectedness to the nature and to the higher dimension of life, and also helping me prioritize and see life in a bigger picture. [R15]

Another respondent also described the profound effect that being in touch with nature in solitude had had on the development of his observational and self-reflective abilities, recalling the type of all-encompassing reflection that the Wikipedia definition specified:

> ...I spent a lot of time in the Canadian backcountry on my own. Nature - the air, earth, water and biomass - and the relations between them, these things are my favourite teachers - when I have the time to watch and listen. For some time, I've observed how this kind of self-reflective activity is rare and the more ritualized expressions increasingly so. But lending an ear to nature has taught me that there's nothing like physical presence, and social and biological imperatives to wake you up to reality (and here I mean the widest possible reality a person can embrace and act along with - a global reality of nature and human societies). [R 8]

Practices involving kinesthetic elements were often but not necessarily solitary. For the following respondent, walking provided a context that facilitated reflective professional discussion:

> In my current position, a colleague and I share a love of walking so we spend 30 minutes per day at lunchtime taking a brisk walk around the campus together. [R7]

Another respondent cited her participation in creative arts such as drama and dance as collaborative reflection activities:

> I've done theatre workshops, drama productions and have collaborated with fellow teachers. Right now I take dance classes and meditate regularly. These are my training courses. [R14]

As in this case, two other respondents brought out a link among kinesthetic, artistic and mindfulness practices:

> Playing the flute and singing bring me back a simple but profound 'joy of being and expressing.' Writing journals and draw[ing] pictures are output of my flash of image and good way of keeping and organizing ideas. [R15]

> Sometimes I'll do reflective art exercises (mandala drawings) to help center myself or for relaxation/meditation. [R3]

In addition to the element of movement, these comments suggest that people with auditory or visual learning styles might prefer reflection practices associated with the creative arts. They also confirm that the creative aspect, which enhances self-expression as well as calms the mind, can be an important part of reflection, allowing access to the unconscious in ways that energize, refresh, and improve cognitive functioning. The state may be similar to the kind of optimal flow experience that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) investigated, in which "people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity itself becomes spontaneous, almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions that they are performing" (p.53). As with the mandala reflection practice cited, the activity may also lead to a meditative state that provides solace as well as psychological insight.

MEDITATION

Formal meditation was reported by several other respondents to be a reflection practice that raised their awareness in ways that impacted on their professional work. This respondent recognized the positive effects that a consistent practice of mindfulness meditation had on her thinking, as well as on enhancing her degree of inner control while she was teaching:

> The quality of thinking is better after some time just being, e.g. meditative... Practicing meditation focused on "mindfulness of breathing" over the past four years has helped me to be present in the classroom mentally and to sense and transform emotional states more quickly. [R2]

This same respondent was further inspired to utilize another mindfulness-centered approach to actively re-train her mind to help maintain a positive attitude towards her work as a teacher:

> I've also written affirmations for several years and recently thought, why not do something about my teaching. Specifically, "Teaching mindfully I find new resources of energy, humour, and confidence." I think it's working to a certain extent. [R2]

Another respondent also found that the analytic stage of her meditation practice enhanced her awareness of self in a way that transferred beyond the meditation session:

> When I do insight meditation, part [of] the practice is reviewing what was experienced during the 55-minute sit (in terms of body sensations, thoughts and feelings etc.) This self-reflective practice naturally extends into daily life. [R14]

In a similar vein, one respondent *[R6]* linked "quiet time [and] peaceful practices" with her ability to maintain congruence between her life purpose and her daily work. This idea, that self-reflection encompasses practices that calm the mind as well as those that involve intellectual thought, seems an important insight to fully define the self-reflection process.

Hart (2204), who advocates using mindfulness-focused activities in the classroom to increase attentiveness, describes how awareness is raised when distracting thoughts are stilled:

> The contemplative mind is opened and activated through a wide range of approaches—from pondering to poetry to meditation—that are designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insight. Although various practices may evoke different kinds of awareness, such as creative breakthrough or compassion, they share in common a distinct nonlinear consciousness that invites an inner opening of awareness. This opening within us in turn enables a corresponding opening toward the world before us. Through a fresh lens, our worldview, sense of self, and relationships may be powerfully transformed (p.1).

King (2006), a psychological counselor, concurs with the belief that meditation gives greater access to intuitive thinking and explains how meditation provides a space between an event and our reaction to it, so that we can make choices about our behavior with increased autonomous control:

> The regular practice of meditation gives us greater presence of mind [with which] comes the possibility of choice: we can continue to react to the events of our lives from our unprocessed emotional history or make a more appropriate response. A reaction is simply a reactivation of a neural pathway system throughout the brain and body. Until we are present, aware, we don't see the choice, we simply react. It is liberating when we react less to events in our lives and have a greater ability to respond to them instead. (p.19)

In an article for the Mindfulness in Education Network that outlines the different types of meditation practices and strongly recommends introducing them to primary and secondary school students, Levete (2004) describes how meditation serves as a form of mental training that improves both cognitive activity and emotional stability:

> Meditation is an effective way of learning how to focus the mind so that it becomes easier to absorb information. As the mind learns the habit of being able to focus, so it can become more alert and attentive. Much of daily life involves distraction and activity. A crowded, anxious or overexcited mind cannot be one pointed, a relaxed, focused one can. Learning to develop the habit of stillness and attention can sharpen

> the mind's ability to think clearly. The benefits from regular meditation, be it for a very short time, can permeate into other areas of activity making it easier to respond with equanimity to the ups and downs of daily life. (p.3)

Increasing the receptiveness of the mind for learning is thus one benefit of a mindfulness reflection practice, but there is also tremendous potential for tapping into levels of creative expression as well as for inner transformation. Interestingly, Cutler (2001) points out that "... analytic meditation may also play a role in positive psychology, a new field of psychology that focuses on developing positive states of mind and is gaining popularity in the 21st century" (p.2). Such possibilities forge a closer connection between awareness-developing reflection practices and the field of education, as positive psychology is also currently influencing educational research through the work of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), and others.

READING

Not unexpectedly, five respondents cited reading as a valuable impetus for reflection. The sources they selected ranged from ones within the EFL field to those from general education, psychology, philosophy and literature, as well as learner feedback and the teacher's own observation notes. It is worth pointing out that, even when engaged in for primarily professional reasons, reading may be seen to contain a personal element in terms of how and why individuals utilize the activity for self-reflection. Beyond seeking to remain informed about current language teaching issues, teachers in the survey appear to have forged meaningful links with written material in ways that address their particular developmental needs.

For this respondent, reading in the field was directly linked to an ongoing consideration of her decisions in the classroom:

> [Another] strategy, which I use continually, is to read the research literature in the Applied Linguistics area. This prompts me to reflect on what I am doing in my own teaching practice. [R7]

The following three respondents mentioned specific authors from outside the EFL field whose ideas had resonated with them and provided content for continual reflection. In the first case, the author cited had in effect served as a guide for the respondent's professional growth:

> David Bleich's work in subjective criticism, collaborative learning and teaching, and content journals has greatly influenced my development as a teacher, although I encountered his work through my graduate studies in literature rather than in the field of Education. [R13]

In a similar vein, the second respondent described how a favored writer's set of ethical principles provided him with a useful philosophical reference point:

> Don Miguel Ruiz's "four agreements" have been a handy tool in approaching all aspects of my life, both professional and personal.... In brief, the four agreements are, 1) speak (within and without) with impeccability, 2) Don't take anything anyone says personally, 3) Don't assume anything and finally 4) Always do your best. These four "suggestions" on how to approach life in general can be applied to all aspects of one's life (including one's professional endeavours as in this case, an educator) as a kind of credo. Using such a defined code of behaviour (or rather, way of thinking), one is able to see the results in direct relation to this practiced approach...and hopefully, learn from this application. [R11]

The third respondent had recourse to various psychological self-help texts during a stressful period in her work as a high school teacher, which motivated her "to explore what I really want in my life." As a result, she constructed her own reading list of sources on which she continues to reflect:

- Maslow, Abraham H. *Toward a Psychology of Being*
- Tolle, Eckhart. *Power of Now*
- Bolles, Richard N. *What Color is Your Parachute?*
- Albom, Mitch *Tuesdays with Morrie*
- Carl Jung and other publications on psychology, health, food & nutrition medicine, etc. [R15]

Taken as a whole, the respondents' diverse list of readings suggests that, as adult learners, they recognize a need to reflect on their experiences and behavior in multiple dimensions of their lives. The sources that continue to inspire them are used as reflective tools that increase their self-understanding and offer information and support in practical, philosophical, and therapeutic ways.

WRITING

We think it is significant that five of the respondents have reported that writing reflections either for trouble shooting and improving certain situations or for refining the process of writing itself helps them gain clarity and confidence in the actions they are considering undertaking. Regardless of the kind of writing involved, it seems important that a teacher discovers that the process is meaningful for oneself.

PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH REFLECTIVE WRITING

Setting aside time to reflect on difficulties that have occurred during research projects, teaching, and personal events have allowed these two respondents to identify or discover problems and to find new ways to improve situations. This respondent describes how she uses problem solving by writing about and reflecting on research projects and events:

> After I finish a project or procedure that I will be doing again, I always think back over it to find where there was trouble. I then talk to others (usually people somehow connected to the event) about the problems and jot down a few notes about how to fix or at least improve them the next time. [R1]

Although the next respondent does not explicitly state that writing is the strategy used, solving difficulties through reflection helps her come up with surprising results. We therefore decided it was beneficial to include her comments in this section, as her approach has similarities with the previous respondent's reflections in terms of problem solving:

> In my professional life, I find it very useful to solve difficulties that I have in teaching. By reflecting on the difficulties, I often find that issues were very different from what I had expected. In my personal life, in order to find out what is really bothering me, I use it. Again, I often find answers that are really different from what I had expected. [R 4]

The respondents' problem-solving practices remind us of the term 'exploratory teaching' that Alright and Bailey (1991) characterize as being when teachers explore, they not only try

out ideas, but reflect and learn as much as possible in the process. Exploratory teaching is practiced in action research as a tool to discover what processes are going on and how they can be improved upon, particularly through diary studies and journal writing (Alright & Bailey, 1991; Burns, 1999; Gebhard & Oprandy, 2001). As has been seen, strategies that are useful in the improvement of teaching practice can effectively be transferred to other problematic areas of a teacher's life.

DISCOVERING THE BENEFITS OF WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

Nevertheless, even with familiar teacher self-reflection activities such as journal writing, the time required may not seem worth the effort if the purpose is unclear. These three respondents, for example, discovered for themselves that increased confidence and clarified thinking, which had both personal and professional benefits, resulted from their written reflections:

> I participated as a subject for some PhD research and had to keep a reflective journal on my professional writing. It was very useful and the way it grew in depth surprised me. I gained confidence in myself as a writer through the experience, and that confidence seeped into other areas of my life. [R1]

> Writing lesson evaluations was part of my initial teacher training and has been helpful subsequently too. I do a lot of thinking about my teaching, (Maybe too much & used to do it even more.) Writing helps me to keep a handle on the quality of my thinking. [R2]

> Writing journals ...[are a] good way of keeping and organizing ideas. [R15]

For these respondents, journal writing is beneficial, nevertheless it is important to emphasize that the practice is valuable only if it proves to be personally meaningful. This respondent, for example, found the academic research process rather than introspective teacher diary studies helpful:

> [Of value were] general research procedures learned in graduate school (doctoral level), especially those dealing with statistics and probability and (formal) Conversation Analysis. As for journal writing and what have you (which is what I roughly guess you might mean by self-reflection), I have found such practices to be of little use. [R 9]

The following respondent found another way to discover the benefits of reflective writing when his teacher suggested he write a Language Learning History for a presentation that produced critical self-reflections:

> Her class was full of opportunities to reflect on our language learning history both as a student and a teacher. She suggested that I should consider how I had been studying and teaching. While looking into my history I was aware of the fact there was not any particular impeccable teaching method. Each learner has his own character and even the same learner tend to choose learning method in the context of various situations. This idea should be considered in teaching ....Again ****** 's self-reflection covered personal life, too ....I focused on my own father... "Although English was stigmatized as a hostile language, my father kept a small English dictionary in his hand and he picked up some local language in the countries he served as an army soldier. His

> attitude toward languages has inspired me most." Without ******'s class, I would not have been aware of my father's contribution in my language learning. [R10]

Respondent 10's surprising realization helps to illustrate how written reflections can bring out a "whole bag of tricks," of which instructors need to be aware, just as Aoki (2003) suggests in her narrative study mentioned previously. The complexities that follow the realizations of the writer involve the person in processing information that teachers/researchers may not be ready to assist with. It may therefore be shortsighted to recommend conducting action research to stimulate reflection unless one is prepared to deal with the consequences of the writer's feelings.

LISTENING

LISTENING TO LEARNERS

Just as teachers can have their awareness raised by writing about themselves as learners, three participants reported that listening to learners is important for self-reflection. The first participant uses the same process to learn from both her peers and her students:

> I talk with and listen to peers as much as possible, to learn as I do with my students. [R5]

To understand how to be a professional, this respondent learned to listen in order to view issues 'outside' himself, including language input and instructions from a learners' point of view:

> ... the feedback I used to get for my teaching tasks in the RSA Cert in TEFL really had an effect on me in seeing the language input and instructions from the STUDENTS' point of view.... Now after 16+ years, I'm finding myself more and more interested in individual students' processes, and in sharing my own with students....On a more pragmatic level, my professionalisation has meant more responsibilities (research), and I seem to have less time to hear my students' stories (which I understand as a self-reflective activity for me), and to tell my own (ditto). But I still try. [R8]

The following respondent advocates that teachers should listen to learners enough to be able to set and reach goals simultaneously with their students:

> Insights I would like to share with others are [that] teachers should not [impose their] own philosophy.... Both teachers and learners ...should work to reach goals. As long as we remain bystanders, the results we obtain tend to be shallow and poor. [R10]

All three participants are working on developing critical awareness of the processes in their lives by listening to learners and critically realizing their students are going through the same interconnected developmental awareness as the teacher. Barfield (2003) has participated in this process by interweaving the development of learner and teacher autonomy to reveal parallels in both processes. Through his collaboration in listening to dialogues with colleagues and his own inner voice about the progress of a learner in one of his classes, he realized that the learner should come up with her own interpretation of her reflective autonomous learning, just as he should interpret his own awareness of growth in the study without imposing his interpretations about his student.

LISTENING TO OTHERS

Listening to colleagues, speakers at conferences, and one's own inner voice is an important component of being able to gain awareness in discussing issues that lead to further self-reflection. As this element is interconnected with speaking and interacting with others, we feel there is a strong link with the "Speaking" section that follows.

SPEAKING

The practice of speaking, discussing issues, and interacting with other people was important for several respondents to gain clarity and/or verify what they had already believed. Some found that taking a course on autonomy helpful to provide multiple opportunities for discussions with classmates and their instructors; others found speaking with colleagues beneficial, while one respondent found solace in speaking with friends.

AUTONOMY AS A REFLECTIVE PROCESS

Two respondents reported that speaking about autonomy as a reflective process in the same learner autonomy graduate course at Teachers College (TC) provided opportunities that led to further desire for personal on-going reflection. Although the insights teachers gained were different because the activities involved them in discovering what autonomy meant to them and how it could be adapted to their teaching contexts, the respondents reported that they benefited from the process. This respondent began focusing on psychological issues:

> In the Autonomy course, I had lots of chances, which made me reflect on various things. In particular, psychological things attracted my attention and I decided to have a focus on something (related to) psychology since then. [R5]

And this respondent received support that qualified or reinforced existing beliefs:

> Not so much "practices" as ideas and beliefs already present, being reinforced by teacher-training courses ....I did find support for this approach to teacher development by meeting like-minded people in the autonomy course. Having the respect, encouragement and support of others who shared a similar approach, had a big impact on qualifying or reinforcing what I already believed in. [R11]

Ramanathan (2002) emphasizes that TC educators have a responsibility to heighten such metacognitive awareness by encouraging participants to connect personal actions and goals for themselves, and to build on various activities to foster the practice into the curriculum, as this autonomy course at TC provided. Not surprisingly Hedge (2003), in her explorative study on 38 teachers from 23 countries, discovered that although teacher-trainers encourage their MA candidates to implement autonomous changes, when they enter their teaching environments the teachers reported they were confronted with suspicion and various constraints. We agree with Hedge's recommendation that more guidance and peer discussion is needed on dealing with these constraints throughout MA programs.

A third respondent in the same TC program that had not taken the autonomy course felt there were not enough safe or meaningful opportunities for self-reflection in his courses:

> I took a course in teacher reflection ...but I don't recall any of it. I don't think I felt safe in such courses at TC; too many people and too little time and too much ground

> to cover...I tend to self-reveal in these courses (another self-reflection strategy) and in this context I tend to leave feeling unacknowledged and silly; there is a void of context (for my experiences) and there is no follow-up (eg mirroring back etc). I haven't taken all the TC courses but I feel that in this regard, TC failed to encourage teachers to listen to other teachers, especially about the connection between personal and professional contexts. [R8]

SPEAKING WITH COLLEAGUES

Three respondents felt that discussing issues with trusted colleagues encourages self-reflection, because the process of speaking with others heightens self-awareness in a safe environment. This respondent schedules regular meetings for the practice:

> The simplest and most effective practice for me is simply to talk to colleagues. In my current position, a colleague and I share a love of walking so we spend 30 minutes per day at lunchtime taking a brisk walk around the campus together. During this walk, we always talk about professional matters, either reflecting on classes recently taught, "critical incidents" in lessons, or other broader topics, such as research projects we are currently engaged in. I find this regular scheduled opportunity for reflection immensely stimulating and encouraging. I also use e-mail to "talk" to colleagues further afield about important teaching issues. [R7]

Another respondent not only invites discussion with "like-minded" colleagues, but also those that disagree with her because discussions trigger chances for self-reflection along with other practices:

> Discussions with trusted and like-minded colleagues, discussions with those who disagree with me, collaboration with colleagues on projects, presentations, and articles, journaling (and I swore that I would never use "journal" as a verb!), brief notes to myself written during and after class, student feedback in the form of reflection papers and learning journals, reading and annotating, keeping current in my field - all these are reflective practices- or at least provide an occasion for reflection.[R13]

A third respondent also believes that professional opportunities for learning and sharing serve as catalysts for self-reflection:

> I believe that attending conferences and seminars, and similar opportunities for learning and sharing are very important and are often catalysts for my own self-reflection and goal-setting. [R3]

As these three respondents are teaching in the university context, their remarks bring to mind Deci, Kasser, and Ryan's (1996) *self-determination theory* study of similar educators, which suggests that if the environment of the university faculty is supportive and open to meaningful discussions, it creates autonomous conditions for intrinsic self-determined motivation emanating from the person. However, when the conditions of the faculty are non-autonomous or controlled by topdown directives, the situation becomes coerced from an external force, and motivation has less meaning to a teacher's integrated sense of self. The conditions for *self-determination* therefore are important to create a supportive environment that leads to growth as both professors and individuals.

SPEAKING WITH FRIENDS

It is worthy to note that for educators who may work in strictly controlled environments, friends and colleagues from other universities with the same interests can create welcoming environments conducive to critical awareness and self-reflection. This respondent finds solace in the quality of self-reflections that comes from discussing issues with friends:

> I think the idea that reflection is helpful, presupposes a certain kind of reflection. If I'm reflecting alone, I have certain patterns that are less helpful...but it's good to laugh at my negative patterns – and talk to a close friend. [R2]

CONCLUSION

Overall, we feel the survey responses support the idea that 'professionalism is personal' and suggest that, in accord with the humanistic view of teaching and learning, taking an integrated perspective towards reflection could aid our understanding of how we might, individually and collectively, utilize self-reflective practices to develop both the personal and professional dimensions of our lives. Several respondents in fact noted their awareness of how the personal spilled over to the professional sphere and vice versa, with the last explicitly stating that he did not place any boundaries between them:

> The reflective practices that I practiced in my personal life found application in my teaching. [R13]

> ...I'm very insecure as a teacher. I always over prepare for lessons and take little for granted. The same applies to my personal life...I am thus constantly reviewing my thoughts, words and deeds. [R12]

> ... [One thing] I really learned in the TC program: I have an issue with authority figures, so depending on my instructor, I really had to reflect on my 'natural' feelings about him/her i.e. what was a fair criticism, what was there to praise etc. ...This learning extends to my personal life. But this of course was not a self-reflection activity that was taught to me in teacher training; it was a strategy I developed from self-reflection.... [R8]

> I don't draw any distinction between me as an educator and me as a person. It is through the person, that I do my work as an educator. There is no division. Ultimately, what is enhanced or worked on by the person on the person will have an impact on the development of the "teacher." [R11]

By acknowledging that "...in every teaching act the teacher defines herself as a person" (Williams & Burden 1997, p.63), we may be better able to close the gap between our personal and professional identities and thus gain a greater sense of authenticity and autonomy. Doing so also perhaps more overtly follows the process described in the Wikipedia definition, in which reflection on the self naturally leads to reflection on the wider human condition and consequently deepens our own philosophical vision of the meaning of our existence. In this approach, emphasis is placed on cultivating a heightened degree of awareness that can guide our thoughts and actions in ways that benefit us, and others, both within and outside the

classroom. Two respondents who shared their definitions of self-reflection viewed it in exactly this way, as a continual metacognitive activity that primarily involved taking an attentive attitude to daily life:

> Perhaps...reflection is an orientation and a state of mind rather than a collection of techniques or strategies or practices...Life provides the occasion for reflection. One just needs to pay attention. "For God's sake, keep your eyes open. Notice what's going on around you."— William Burroughs [R13]

> I am having trouble with the word "self-reflective". It seems to me, that it is basic nature as a human being to be self-reflective. It's an everyday thing. Learning by experience, reflecting on the results of one's input/output and so on...To me, the ultimate objective of education should be to help give opportunity to raise people's awareness.... It is the relinquishment of control, the letting go of what we think we know, in exchange for silent (no input of previous knowledge) observation and discovery. As soon as boundaries are drawn, the gates of discovery close shut or at least start to become harder to open! I suppose one could argue that there are certain things that can be learned specifically for the development of oneself as a teacher, and this is of course true. But it all comes back to how we truly learn, which is through this state of increased awareness. [R11]

Another respondent, while concurring with the importance of ongoing reflection, also noted that nonetheless reflective practice was difficult to sustain in the midst of other time-demands:

> I think I've sort of structured my life so that self-reflection is built-in (assuming I reflect on my daily experiences in an intercultural/interracial relationship, in a culture different from my own); [but] reflection had become a rarified and increasingly dissonant practice in my busy life. Not sure, but as it is presented here it sounds like something I SHOULD do but haven't really been supported in doing (i.e. like writing well in high-school). [R8]

This brings up the additionally important point that, although self-reflection is a 'natural' human activity, we also need to acknowledge that for most of us it is a complex skill that requires training, continued practice, and support. Thus, while we have emphasized the importance of self-reliance and self-responsibility in the management of our own development, it is nonetheless equally important for teacher educators to share the burden in this regard, as the above respondent goes on to explain:

> As for encouraging self-reflection in teacher development, I think facilitators have a huge responsibility in defining what it is and supporting what comes up. Perhaps self-reflection might be defined functionally, according to what it leads to? [R8]

As with learning in general, factors that are likely to increase the value of self-reflection activities include exposing teachers to a broad range of practices, clearly specifying how these practices might fulfill different developmental needs, and guiding them through the practice with regular feedback. Furthermore, we believe it is important to provide teachers with the opportunity to assess these strategies to determine if they suit their preferred learning styles, since, as we have seen, a key element in maintaining a practice is whether the individual finds it effective as a 'mirror' for growth or not. The 'test' of self-reflection practices may in fact lie

in the realm of self-efficacy, which Erhman (1996) defined as "the belief that one can cope and succeed" (p.143), naming it as a factor that increases motivation, risk-taking and independence as well as builds self-esteem. Given that teaching is a kind of work in which many aspects lie outside the teacher's control, increasing the capacity to gain this sense of greater inner autonomy appears to be an especially important goal of self-reflection. It is thus possible that any self-reflection practice that facilitates a teacher's sense of autonomy may contribute simultaneously to their personal and professional development.

Finally, just as teachers need to involve themselves in self-reflective practices in order to truly understand how their students can gain value from their use, so teacher educators need to be practionners of self-reflection themselves. Although there is an assumption especially with adult learners that the 'person' will develop along with the 'teacher,' we have seen how both personal and professional developmental needs are a life-long undertaking that must be addressed in an ongoing and balanced way.

One example of an EFL teacher educator noticing this interconnectedness is McClure's (2001) realization that, when she carried out a study on developing reflective practices in postgraduates to acquire greater self-direction and autonomy, she was undergoing the same reflective process, which led to her discovery of the underlying assumptions in her own curriculum and autonomous practices. Skjei (2004) also realized, while facilitating a workshop on exploring leadership skills in women, that it was only when she applied the self-reflective model being used to herself that she could see what was lacking in her instruction; "It suddenly became crystal clear to me that I needed to involve the participants more in relating the model to their own lives, allowing them to discover their own inspiration about what is possible" (p.3).

The teachers who responded to our study were able to discover as McClure (2001) and Skjei (2004) recommend that reflective activities that connect with their lives in some way helped keep them inspired. For this reason, rather than suggesting specific reflective practices in this paper, we prefer to leave it up to readers what type of practice is meaningful for themselves. In this way, we hope that realizing the close connection between learning and teaching needs may therefore inspire teachers to use self-reflection to pursue both personal and professional growth throughout their teaching lives.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

KEVIN BODWELL

Professional obligations ranging from research, to counseling, to curriculum development, and even to financial necessity, drive us to distraction from not only reflective classroom practices, but from our personal selves as well. Between crowded trains and tight schedules we feel guilty for not considering our classes more. And time devoted to personal reflection or development can seem like time wasted. So my first reaction is appreciation for Graves and Vye in reminding us that this is a trap and in fact personal development is not only related to professional development. It is vital to it. My vague feelings of guilt for taking a little time for myself are unnecessary.

The article also highlights the variety of reflective activities that teachers use. It occurs to me that I have a tendency over time to become set in my ways. What was once innovative and helpful can become stale. Trying different reflective methods might help me understand myself and my teaching differently, and help me continue challenging myself. Perhaps we teachers

should consciously seek variety in the means of self-reflection and share, as this article does, techniques with others.

A related aspect of the professional/personal connection that might bear examination is personally fulfilling activities outside work that are not necessarily reflective. I believe I am often just as productive overall when I take a break and exercise or spend time with my family as I am when I spend all that time in my office working. My brain seems to continue to work on whatever issues are at hand whether I consciously think about them or not. When I return to work, solutions come to me more easily. Conversations with other teachers tell me I am not alone in that belief. In sports, for example, I lose myself in activities where the rules are straightforward, and goals are literally goals –unlike the less definite rules and goals of teaching and life in general. Somehow, I emerge refreshed and better able to engage in the more complex real world. I feel better and think more clearly. Surely other teachers have similar experiences from other activities.

Graves and Vye remind us that personal development is conducive to better teaching and we should pursue it as a basis for professional development. Thanks to their article, I'll be a little less inclined to neglect myself.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

MARK SURMA AND MIYUKI USUKI

Graves and Vye's paper clearly shows us how important self-reflections are for teacher development in general. Also the paper makes clear connections between autonomy and self-reflections.

We hope the authors are aware that due to work commitments, there might still be many teachers who find it difficult to devote sufficient time to reflect on their own developmental needs (p.155). Therefore, for teachers this paper is a valuable document as it reminds them of the various reasons to continue to improve their self-reflection through teacher autonomy. As a result of doing so, in addition to the improvement of our teaching skills, students' learning may also improve a lot.

However, regarding the research on teachers' ways of self-reflection, we would like to see the effects of self-reflections on teachers, rather than showing us some examples of how teachers are reflecting on themselves. We think that the paper should give us convincing evidence of a clear link between the importance of self-reflection and its value (effect) on language teaching, especially in Japan. Furthermore, we would like to see some data showing why self-reflections are so important and how they relate to the improvement of teacher autonomy. We must admit, however, that it has never crossed our minds that practising yoga or creative arts could help one to become a more reflective language teacher.

Regarding the authors' data collection and the responses received from teachers from five different countries, we noticed that the average respondent's age was 40. We wonder therefore, if the teachers' age played any role in the way they responded. Surely one would think that in their late 20's or late 60's people would probably reply differently to the survey. Similarly we could not help but notice the huge gap in teachers' experience (1 year to 27 years of teaching). Would that also be a factor behind their responses?