

Reasoning Teaching - Understanding Your Teaching Process in EFL Classroom

Ge Yu , Dunhua Kuang

Foreign Language Department, Qiongtai Normal University, Hainan 571100, Haikou, China

Abstract: Reasoning teaching can help teachers understand what occurs in the teaching process including the teacher, the students, the context, the teaching contents and so on. This study first elaborates what is reasoning teaching and demonstrates that robust reasoning can promote teachers' learning and professional development by improving teachers' cognitive awareness.

Keywords: Reasoning teaching; Robust reasoning; Teacher decision making; Reflect

1. Introduction to reasoning teaching

What is reasoning teaching? Some researchers have focused the research on teaching on its process of reasoning and actions. Fenstermacher (1986) has proposed that teachers should be taught to reason soundly about their teaching and how to perform it. He points out that sound reasoning requires teachers to think about what they are doing and what facts, tenets, discipline, and experience influence their doing. Shulman (1987) has viewed the teaching process that it begins with an act of reason, continues with a process of reasoning, transforming, and is then thought about some more until the process can begin again. Based on the views of the teaching process, Shulman (1987) first presented the conception of pedagogic reasoning in the term of wisdom of practice and developed the model of pedagogic reasoning and action, a cycle of five activities in teaching: comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation and reflection. With stressing the fundamental importance of the reasoning of teaching, Johnson (1999) defined the reasoning teaching as "the complex ways in which teachers conceptualise, construct explanations for, and respond to what occurs both inside and outside their classrooms" (p. 130). To simplify this definition, reasoning teaching refers to teachers' interpretation to their instructional decisions.^[1]

2. What shapes teachers' reasoning?

Johnson (1999) has explained that the nature of teachers' reasoning has two interrelated and interdependent aspects, teacher decision making (what they think about) and their interpretations of the decisions (how they think), and both the two aspects of teachers' reasoning emerge from teacher cognition. According to Borg (2015), teacher cognition refers to teachers' knowledge, belief and thinking. Based on mainstream educational research on teacher cognition, Borg (2015) proposes the assumptions that "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (p. 61). The assumption shows that teachers shape the reason of decision by drawing on teacher knowledge, thinking and beliefs.^[2]

A considerable amount of research has shown that teachers' knowledge and beliefs direct the teacher to act in certain ways and to inform the classroom decisions. Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard (1999) have found that the reasons teachers mentioned based on aspects of their practical knowledge in a qualitative study. Pajares (1992) has identified that teacher belief as "the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives" (p. 307). Several studies point out teachers' prior language learning experiences as learners, their apprenticeship of observation, form the basis of their original understanding of learning and language learning (Borg, 2015), and teacher education programme has a variable influence on the form of teachers' cognition.^[3]

3. Why robust reasoning is important?

Johnson's (1999) definition of robust reasoning emphasises on the complex ways which indicate the complexity and the robust-

ness of the reasoning in teaching. By robustness, she means “the completeness of their understandings of themselves, of their students, and of the classrooms and schools where they work; the flexibility with which they make use of these understanding, the complexity of their reasoning; and the range of instructional consideration they make use of as they teach”(Johnson, 1999, p. 2). As time goes, the context changes all the time, so teachers’ knowledge and belief are also evolving as they experience at the different time, in different classrooms, with different individuals, and with different resources. For teachers’ professional development through their career, Johnson (1999) encourages teachers to ask themselves the following guiding questions repeatedly: “Who am I as a teacher? Who are my students? How do they experience my teaching? What do I know about the subject matter content that I teach? Why do I teach the way I do?” (p.139)^[4]

4. Robust reasoning and teacher learning

4.1 Teacher learning as a cognitive process

Richards (2009) has presented the approach to teacher learning as a cognitive process, which views teaching “as a complex cognitive activity and focuses on the nature of teachers’ beliefs and thinking and how these influence their teaching and learning” (P. 6). Teacher learning is not just the application of the pedagogic theory to skills, but also a cognitive process shaped by contextual factors, teaching aims, student motivation, and teachers’ classroom management (Borg, 2015).

4.2 Teacher cognition developed in reasoning teaching

When exploring their robust reasoning about themselves, students, teaching material and other aspects in their teaching context, teachers reflect and inquire what they are teaching and why they teach so, examine how well the students learn, seek for an more appropriate way in their context. In the process of robust reasoning, their knowledge becomes more automated, so teachers’ cognition is raised, constructed and reconstructed in reasoning teaching (Johnson, 1999).^[5]

5. How may robust reasoning affect teachers?

As teaching take place in an ever-changing context, no teacher can be effective and perfect in any context, so teacher is life long learners (Wedell and Malderez, 2013). For teachers’ lifelong term learning, Johnson (1999) suggests teachers to continually ask themselves the guiding questions of robust reasoning, by exploring, answering, sharing with other teachers, reevaluating, and reexploring them, construct teachers’ cognition and achieve a professional development through their career .^[6]

6. Conclusion

This study first gives a statement what is reasoning teaching and argues robust reasoning promote teachers’ learning and professional development by raising the awareness of teacher cognition. As the teaching context changes all the time, it is necessary for teachers to constantly ask robust reasoning questions, reflect themselves, renew and reconstruct teacher cognition and achieve a life-long development in their teaching career.^[7]

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