A Fourth-Year Reflection
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ABSTRACT
This paper summarizes an instructor’s self-reflection of his own teaching from a first-year and fourth-year video observation in Rikkyo University’s English Discussion Class (EDC) program. The instructor focuses on two main areas for his reflection: consistencies and changes to his teaching methods over the course of four years within the same English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum. This paper concludes with recommendations for further study and research for the instructor’s final year in the EDC program, based on results from the self-reflection analysis.

INTRODUCTION
The concept of reflection has been studied for over a century, originating outside of the education theory field in the early 1900s with famous figures such as John Dewey, who stated, “a moral individual would treat professional actions as experimental and reflect upon the actions and their consequences” (Pacheco, 2005, p. 2). Since the 1970s, many language educators have shown interest in the idea of reflection and inquiry (Pacheco, 2005), but most definitions stem from Dewey’s own: “To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings, which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind” (Pacheco, 2005, p. 1).

Even though many language educators take the time and effort to experiment with different teaching practices at the beginning of their teaching career, over time instructors often develop and retain methods in teaching that are easier or more comfortable to consistently implement, both inside and outside the classroom. However, research in the field of reflection suggests that critically analyzing one’s own teaching is beneficial to both instructors and students. Florez (2004) explains that reflective practice forces instructors to engage in a constant cycle of self-observation and evaluation to better understand one’s own actions and reactions. The goal of reflective practice is not always to solve a problem or answer a specific question before starting the reflective process, but rather to simply observe and refine teaching practices on an on-going basis. Crandall (2000) believes that reflection on experience aids educators at any level of experience in making tacit beliefs and practical knowledge more explicit. By using what teachers already know, reflection can lead to new, and possibly better, knowledge and instruction for students.

There are many ways to define self-reflection in language education research, but this paper uses Pickett’s (1996) definition of a teacher engaged in reflection-on-action as “a practitioner [who] reflects on the tacit understandings and assumptions s/he holds and subjects them to scrutiny in order to achieve a deeper understanding of instructor/student roles, motivations and behaviors” (p. 1). The original idea of reflection-on-action was proposed by A.D. Schon in the 1980’s when he explained that teachers gain knowledge from experience through critical and retrospective analysis (Schon, 1987). Through self-reflection, instructors may discover bad habits that can be improved or discover new ways of teaching that prove to be effective. This paper is a self-reflection of a fourth-year instructor comparing two class video observations, one from his first year and one from his fourth year in Rikkyo University’s English Discussion Class (EDC) program. A reflection that focuses on major differences and similarities between the two video observations is given, as well as a set of goals for this instructor to focus on in his fifth and final year as an EDC instructor. This paper hopes to promote an ongoing self-reflection into the instructor’s fifth year, as well as promote other beginning and experienced instructors to consider pursuing some type of self-reflection in order to promote improvement and professional growth.
DISCUSSION
The data analyzed for this paper consists of two full-length class video observations of one instructor in his first and fourth year in EDC. Florez (2004) states that there does not always need to be a specific problem or question before initiating a self-reflection, but to give this project focus, a few general questions were established: (1) What did you do in your first year as an EDC instructor that you still do now in your fourth year? (2) What do you do differently in your fourth year compared to your first year in the EDC program? Both 90-minute videos were watched in their entirety, while the instructor took notes and addressed each of the above reflection questions. The results of this self-reflection are detailed below.

What Remained the Same
In terms of overall procedures, several things have remained consistent from the instructor’s first to fourth year as an EDC instructor. One example is the focus on maintaining a fun and friendly classroom atmosphere between students and teacher. In both video observations, all members are smiling and laughing, while still actively participating in class activities. The teacher also makes a point to use each student’s name several times throughout both observed lessons. This type of atmosphere seems to help students relax and feel more comfortable using English with their peers as well as the instructor. Another example of similarity is how the instructor works with students individually and in groups in both video observations. Instead of only monitoring students during pair and group activities, the teacher consistently interacts with students by reacting and asking questions to student speakers, as well as providing his own opinions in discussions. The large amount of teacher interaction seems to create a more lively and communicative dynamic throughout the lessons, not only during group discussions. One final example is how the instructor tries to provide consistent feedback on the same points throughout the observed lessons. The instructor made sure to comment on the effective use of the target language taught in class, as well as points to improve upon in future discussions (e.g. using more English reactions to be an active listener). For both of these observations, three main points of feedback were given in order to help the students understand their strengths and weaknesses.

What Changed
Although several aspects have remained the same in this instructor’s teaching methods since his first semester in the EDC program, some significant changes can be seen as well, mainly in the areas of Japanese use and feedback methods. It is interesting to note that the beliefs of using Japanese (L1) in this English (L2) classroom context have clearly changed from the instructor’s first to fourth year. In the first-year video observation, the instructor makes a point to write “English Only!” on the whiteboard, and discourages the use of Japanese from the students. To enforce this point, the instructor reminds his students to ask the previously taught question, “How do you say ___ in English?” instead of using Japanese, and avoids using Japanese himself. However, in the fourth-year observation the instructor no longer has an “English Only” reminder on the whiteboard, and instead of reminding the students about not using Japanese in discussions, he makes casual remarks such as, “Great discussion, and by the way, how do you say めんどくさい in English? We learned the English for this word in Lesson 1. Does anybody remember?” The instructor even uses Japanese reactions himself (e.g. ええ〜) as a joke after hearing several students use the same reaction during a pair activity. It seems that this instructor has changed the method he uses to help students avoid using Japanese in class, and feels comfortable being more indirect with pointing out Japanese use.

Another main point of change in this instructor’s teaching methods is the way he gives
feedback. While he did not give any specific examples of student utterances or use the whiteboard for providing teacher-fronted feedback to students in his first year, the instructor did both of these things in his fourth year. For example, the instructor pointed out one student in particular who was the only person to use a Check Understanding question during the first group discussion (“Do you understand?”), as well as which students made use of each target language phrase at the end of both group discussions (e.g. “Student 1, you didn’t use any phrases in Discussion 1! What happened? Haha. Okay. Your goal for Discussion 2 is four phrases or more. Student 2, can you make sure Student 1 uses the phrases in our next activity?”). The instructor was also able to make better use of the class whiteboard by writing examples of student-generated follow-up questions from the second group discussion (e.g. “Where do you live?”), which he did not do in his first-year video observation. In addition to teacher-fronted feedback, the instructor also made use of student-fronted feedback at the end of the second discussion by giving both groups time to share what they felt were their strong and weak points. The instructor followed up with the student-generated feedback points by giving his own feedback, and made use of the whiteboard in order to support his verbal feedback with written examples.

CONCLUSION
Overall, this self-reflection has been very helpful in reviewing what this instructor has kept the same and changed in order to create a positive and productive class environment for his L2 English students. In addition, questions were raised as to what the instructor can do differently to improve his teaching methods. Below are a few possible practices to try, and possibly study, in his fifth and final year as an EDC instructor.

One possible point to experiment with is changing how student-teacher communication is implemented in class. When trying to develop students’ L2 English communication skills, several factors must be considered, including how an instructor should support and interact with his students. For example, teacher interaction can be limited to only monitoring students as they try to understand and complete class activities with little or no teacher support. Teacher feedback can also be limited with the hopes of developing students’ own self-awareness and ability to improve their skills without instructor support. Alternatively, an instructor can provide a large amount of support by constantly explaining how to complete class activities, as well as point out problems and correct mistakes as they arise. Varying the amount of teacher support is one aspect of teaching that may be useful to experiment with.

Another aspect of instruction that may be beneficial to experiment with is the type of instructor feedback given to students. One way to do this is by changing the focus of instructor feedback between language use and content – in other words, analyzing what would happen if instructor feedback focused entirely (or almost entirely) on student-generated ideas and questions (content), versus focusing feedback on the correct use of words and phrases (language use). It would be interesting to see what kinds of effects this would have on student output, as well as how students would react to different kinds of feedback. Further research in the area of self-reflection may help in developing more effective and consistent teaching practices in the future.

REFERENCES
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