Bridging the Knowing-Doing Gap for English Communicative Competence: A Reflective, 4Ps Approach

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ABSTRACT

Learning research often highlights a distinction in teaching and learning between less realistic, structured classroom practice activities and the use of classroom learning in 'realistic' contexts outside of formal learning environments, a gap labelled the *knowing-doing gap*. Reflective journaling is one example of reflective practice teachers can use to help address issues, such as the knowing-doing gap that arise in their teaching. In this article the author reports on a reflective journaling exercise based on the 4Ps approach to university active learning that sought to address the knowing-doing gap within the context of an English discussion course at Rikkyo University. Instances of the knowing-doing gap that arose during the journaling exercise are discussed, as are adaptations to the curriculum and teaching methods introduced by the teacher to address these challenges. The article concludes with reflections on potential strategies to address challenges associated with the knowing-doing gap.

INTRODUCTION

A range of literature in fields of learning research highlights "the challenge of applying classroom concepts, theory and knowledge to 'realistic' contexts of interest to students outside of formal learning environments", referred to as the *knowing-doing gap* (Banki, Valiente-Riedl, & Duffill, 2013, p. 318. Also see: Duffill, 2018; Hartley & McGaughey, 2018; McGaughey et al., 2019). Evidence for this gap comes from fields as diverse as memory (Baddeley, Eysenck, & Anderson, 2009, pp. 5-6; McDermott & Roediger, 2016; Neisser, 1967), learning approaches (Ramsden, 2003), learning styles (for example Fleming, 2012; Fleming & Mills, 1992), skill development stages (Adams, n.d.), cognitive science (Anderson et al., 2004; Criado, 2013; Taatgen & Anderson, 2008), higher education and professional competencies (Guest, 1991; Saviano, Polese, Caputo, & Walletzký, 2016; Schneider & Bowen, 2010; Spohrer & Maglio, 2010), university-level education through active learning and simulations (Banki et al., 2013; Duffill, 2018; Hartley & McGaughey, 2018; McGaughey et al., 2019), as well as intercultural communication and EFL (Criado, 2013; Crookes & Chaudron, 1991; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Johnson, 1996).

One framework that is in-line with problemisation of the knowing-doing gap is the *Presentation, Practice and Production* approach (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991), developed within Communicative Language Teaching where it has been widely applied (Brown, 2001; Criado, 2013; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Gavilán Galindo, 2008). More recently, PPP has been explicitly adapted to university-level active learning contexts and target skills or knowledge beyond language learning, including social justice education (Banki et al., 2016; Banki et al., 2013; Duffill, 2012, 2017). Presentation is where the teacher presents target skills or knowledge (referred to in the EFL context as *target language*) to students through methods such as demonstrations, lectures, or readings. In Practice, the target skill is usually split-up into smaller pieces and practiced in structured, scaffolded, low-context exercises. During Practice, the form of the target skill is prioritized and students can receive real-time feedback or correction from the teacher (McGaughey et al., 2019). In the EFL context Practice often involves drills and pattern-practice activities. Practice can range from Controlled Practice, to Free Practice, the latter of which serves as a bridge to more demanding Production activities. Production "creates realistic situations in the learning environment where students are free to experiment with the application of their knowledge" (Banki et al., 2013, p. 322). In Production activities students are free to creatively experiment as

they work to re-integrate the various aspects of the target skill and combine it with past learning and their personal interests. This occurs through realistic, less structured classroom activities, modelled on real situations that would occur outside the classroom. Production activities are carried out as much as possible in real-time with no feedback or intervention from their teacher. Typically, these activities also help students develop collaboration and team-work skills (McGaughey et al., 2019). Examples of Production activities include simulations, role-plays, internships, and service learning (structured, learning-focused volunteering) and, in the current context, discussions.

University-based active learning often involves some kind of post-Production assessment. Through its expanded application to university education beyond language learning, a fourth activity-type termed *Probe* has been integrated with PPP, to form an approach more closely linked to the university context. Probe encompasses assessment of student learning, and reflection, review, feedback, and helping students link their performance and experience during Production back to the theory, knowledge, and concepts introduced in earlier stages of the course, thus bridging theory to practice. Probe activities also aim to consolidate learning through reflection on that learning, and can help build academic writing skills through assessments such as learning reflection essays and journals. Probe encourages students to critically reflect on their own learning, consider their learning as both process and outcome, and examine their learning as something that exists separately from themselves that does not reflect negatively on themselves as a person (McGaughey et al., 2019). These four activity-types form the *4Ps* model (Duffill, 2018; Duffill et al., 2018; McGaughey et al., 2019) which was developed drawing on insights from the body of learning research noted in the opening paragraph and explicitly aims to address the knowing-doing gap in university education. The 4Ps approach does not assume a linear four-stage learning process, and the different activity-stages (the different "Ps") can be deliberately re-cycled through to enhanced student learning (also see: Ellis & Shintani, 2014, pp. 120-121; Hurling, 2012; McGaughey et al., 2019).

Reflective Practice and Journaling

Murphy (2014, pp. 615-616, drawing on Schon, 1983) outlines a framework of three cognitive dimensions of reflective teaching and practice that can support ongoing professional development. *Reflection-in-action* is the typical real-time decisions teachers make while teaching. *Reflection-on-action* is retrospective reflection on previous lesson events. However according to Murphy (citing Wilson, 2008) the "*raison d'être* of reflective teaching" is *reflection-for-action*, which is proactive, future-orientated, and builds on the other forms of reflections to develop action plans for the future (p. 616).

Keeping a reflective journal is one methodology for reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action. Farrell (2007), in a review of the research on journaling practice by language teachers, finds that it can serve a range of helpful professional development purposes such as exploring and monitoring one's own thinking, beliefs, and practices around teaching; problem solving; highlighting issues that may warrant further consideration; triggering insights about one's teaching and one's self as a teacher; and providing a record of one's teaching and a base for collaboration with other teachers. When viewed within the context of a progression of ongoing professional development, reflective journaling is also an example of a Probe activity within the 4Ps approach. Farrell (2016) argues that "the general consensus is that teachers who are encouraged to engage in reflective practice can gain new insight of their practice"(p. 224). Summarizing his findings from a review of 116 studies of reflective practice by English language teachers, he concludes that:

> the positive impact reported in most of these studies on the increased level of awareness that is generated from such reflections seems to provide further opportunities and motivation for TESOL teachers to further explore, and in some instances even challenge, their current approaches to their practice, especially when they note any tensions between their philosophy, principles, theory and practice both inside and outside the language classroom. (p. 241)

Overview of Current Journaling Context

The current journaling activity took place within the context of teaching the English Discussion Class (EDC) course at Rikkyo University (Hurling, 2012). EDC is one of the four required English language courses taken by all first-year students at Rikkyo University (the other three being Presentation, a combined Reading and Writing course, and E-Learning). EDC is run by the Center for English Discussion Class. The core objective of EDC is to enable students to develop their English communicative ability and speaking fluency within the context of English academic discussion. One notable feature of EDC is the small teacher-to-student ratio; class sizes are typically between seven and nine students. Classes run for ninety minutes, once a week, over two connected courses: the spring semester course, and then the follow-on fall semester course. Each semester course comprises 14 weeks of classes (meaning students complete a total of 28 weeks of classes). The curriculum consists of six different discussion skills each semester (for a total of 12 discussion skills over the two courses) and three communication skills common to both semesters. Each skill has a "speaker-side" skill (a skill typically used during a student's own speaking turn in a discussion) and a "listener-side" skill (usually used when a student is in the process of listening to another student during a discussion).

Regular EDC lessons have two small group discussions: Discussion 1 which is usually 10 minutes in duration, and Discussion 2, which is usually 16 minutes. In terms of the 4Ps approach, EDC lessons apply two different Production stages: Discussion 1 (which is followed by focused Probe and Practice activities) and then Discussion 2. Thus EDC lessons, like the other applications of the 4Ps framework noted above (Duffill, 2018; Duffill et al., 2018; McGaughey et al., 2019), do not subscribe to a linear four-step model of learning. Three discussion tests are also held throughout the semester. These discussion tests can be considered a form of Production, with the feedback students receive about their performance being an example of Probe.

EDC classes are streamed according to bands based on students' combined TOEIC listening and reading score – Level I (the highest), Level II, Level III, and Level IV (the lowest). The specific class chosen for this teaching journal was a Level II class, in which students have combined TOEIC Listening and Reading scores of between 480 and 679. This class was comprised of eight first-year students majoring in liberal arts subjects. The journal was kept for six lessons, from Lessons 5 to 10. This class was selected for the journaling exercise based on elements of student behavior observed in the lessons prior to the commencement of the journaling period. Students were observed to be typically studious, attentive, and fairly confident during Presentation activities, and seemed to apply themselves seriously and enthusiastically to Practice drills and fluency activities. Their behavior thus appeared to present an opportunity to reflect on instances of the knowing-doing gap that manifested within the class. Specifically, the journaling reflection focused on the question:

> To what degree, and how, did high student performance in Practice activities in the class transfer to performance in the Production activities (Discussion 1 and Discussion 2) and how might this transfer be enhanced?

DISCUSSION

The first lesson covered by the journaling period, Lesson 5, was Discussion Test 1 for the course. In this lesson, students were generally attentive during the review of the target language and applied themselves enthusiastically and seriously to the Practice activities. This lesson's Practice activities included four rounds of drills using patterns and scaffolded discussions using bingo worksheets. By the end of the Practice activities students were generally able to demonstrate correct target language use through use of the patterns and scaffolding of the key phrases provided by the teacher. However, during the Production stage (the Discussion Test) students showed markedly less ability in using the target language, in particular listener-side skills for some students and speaker-side skills for other students. Following this class, I reflected on the nature of this gap between Practice and Production performance, and considered strategies to close it. Insights from a range of bodies of learning research, as noted in the *Introduction* above, highlight distinctions between Presentation, Practice, and Production. I applied the 4Ps approach as an analytical lens by which to reflect upon this particular manifestation of the knowing-doing gap. Through this process, I postulated that this gap could be prevented in the next lesson (Lesson 6, a regular, non-test lesson) through reducing the gap in task requirements (and difficulty) between the Practice activities compared to the Production activities. I thus adapted the lesson plan to include Free Practice activities that provided a more thorough bridge between the less demanding, more structured, pattern drill exercises that were the Controlled Practice activities and the more demanding non-scaffolded Production activities that were Discussion 1 and Discussion 2. These Free Practice bridging activities entailed allowing students some limited scaffolding - they were able to look at the target language, in this case exemplar phrases for each discussion skill and communication skill - but were not provided scaffolding on when to use those phrases or the appropriate use of those phrases within the context of a larger discussion.

During the implementation of those changes to the lesson in Lesson 6, students showed enthusiasm and high performance in the Practice activities, and typically strong target language use in Discussion 2, but weaker target language use in Discussion 1. (Although a clear cause-effect relationship between the modifications to the lesson and this performance is of course difficult to ascertain for a range of reasons, and was not the focus of this reflective practice.) Following Lesson 6, I reflected on this different gap in performance that had emerged. Again applying the 4Ps framework, I wondered whether perhaps students did not have an awareness of their own actual "real-time" target language performance during the Production discussion activity. As noted above, the fourth step of the 4Ps model is Probe. EDC classes include two different Production activities: Discussion 1 and Discussion 2, separated by feedback (a Probe activity) and Practice activities. Up to this point, I had carried out the feedback activity by providing students with feedback on their performance in the preceding discussion. However, I now considered ways to help students increase their awareness of their own performance during Production. I decided that from Lesson 7 until the end of the course, I would provide students with self-feedback prompts during the feedback activity between Discussion 1 and Discussion 2. The following questions were used to help students discuss self-feedback in pairs:

1. Did you use this week's discussion skill, Listener and Speaker side?
2. Give two examples of this week's phrases you used
3. Was it easy or difficult?

During Lesson 7, students enthusiastically discussed the feedback questions and typically accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses in their use of the target language. They showed some increased attempts to use the target language during Production, both in Discussion 1 and Discussion 2. However, most students appeared to still be struggling with the appropriate use of the target language in response to the broader discussion dynamics and other students' input. I re-

considered the nature of Probe activities as an integral part of the broader lesson plan and 4Ps progression, and reflected on the importance of Probe activities being closely integrated with the purpose and function of the target language presented in the Presentation stage. Thus, I wondered whether this new challenge in appropriate use of the target language could be addressed with a self-feedback activity more closely linked to the function and goals of the target language. This Level II class typically exhibited quite strong reading and vocabulary skills. This combination of factors led me, after Lesson 8, to provide to students the following modified self-feedback questions:

1. Did you do the two key points in the grey Remember! box in the textbook under the key phrases for this week's lesson? [Note: The "two key points in the grey Remember box" refers to the purpose and function of the target language outlined in the Presentation stage of the lesson]
2. Give two examples of this week's phrases you used
3. What was easy and difficult?

During Lesson 8, following the use of these modified self-feedback questions between Discussion 1 and 2, I observed that the previous gap in students' performance between Discussion 1 and 2 decreased, and students seemed to have a stronger command of the appropriate use of the target language. However, the following lesson (Lesson 9) was Discussion Test 2, which involved one discussion test preceded by review and preparation activities. During Discussion Test 2, each student is evaluated on their ability to demonstrate the appropriate use of four different discussion skills within a discussion of a fixed time period averaging four minutes per student (typically, a discussion involves four students and runs for a total of 16 minutes). In regular lessons, students are required to demonstrate competence in only one discussion skill (plus the three communication skills). In my experience, students usually exhibit higher levels of pressure and stress within the discussion test compared to regular discussions in the non-test lessons. Given these considerations, for Lesson 9 I resolved to provide students with a different self-feedback activity more appropriate to the more varied discussion skill usage demanded of them in Discussion Test 2. During the in-class preparation activities in the lesson that contained Discussion Test 2 (Lesson 9) prior to Discussion Test 2 I introduced to students tips to address their most common mistakes in their use of discussion skills and communication skills. Students were then invited to discuss, with their partner, what were their biggest challenges for Discussion Test 2 (in terms of discussion skill and communication skill usage). Students were then asked to discuss which of the discussion skill tips provided by the teacher would be most useful for them personally. Finally, students practiced using their own key hints in pairs with the target language. Students' performance in the following Discussion Test 2 was typically high (with half the class achieving a perfect grade for their performance with most other students showing at least moderate achievement). However, as noted above, under these conditions a precise cause-effect relationship between the new self-feedback procedure and this performance was of course difficult to ascertain.

The final lesson of the journaling period was Lesson 10. This was a regular (non-test) lesson and students once again used the modified self-feedback questions first given to them in Lesson 8. All students except one demonstrated a high level of competency (and appropriacy) in the target language in both Production activities (Discussion 1 and Discussion 2). Thus, at the conclusion of the journaling period the previously identified gaps in student performance were no longer apparent to me as the teacher.

CONCLUSION

This experience of keeping a reflective journal of my teaching practice suggests that journaling can be a useful tool that can sit within the 4Ps' Probe stage of ongoing professional development,

for progressing from reflection-in-action to the above-noted cognitive dimensions of reflective practice outlined by Murphy (2014, and adapted from Schon, 1983): reflection-on-action and ultimately, reflection-for-action.

Reflection-for-action generated through this journaling exercise and application of the 4Ps approach suggest three potential strategies for addressing challenges in student performance associated with the knowing-doing gap. First, gaps in student performance between Practice and Production may be addressed by developing activities that provide a more even and gradual progression from Controlled Practice, to Free Practice, and then on to Production. Second, where student performance differs between separate, but connected, Production activities, this may be addressed by Probe activities such as self-reflection questions based on the purpose and appropriate use of the target language. Third, the 4Ps framework may be a useful tool to: analyze gaps in student performance associated with the knowing-doing gap; identify tools to address those gaps to promote a smooth and effective progression between stages of competency in lesson material; and help students use the target skills effectively in integration with their existing knowledge, experience, interests, and goals.

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