

Unit topic: What makes a good (English) teacher?

Tasks and activities on reflection for (pre-service) teacher education – inspired by Michael Legutke

Participants: pre-service (English) teachers at university level

Context: focus is on teaching EFL in Germany, but can be transferred to other areas

Ss = students (*the pre-service teachers*)

T = the teacher trainer

1. Introduction (the way Michael Legutke might do it)

- The teacher trainer (T) is approachable by chatting to some students (Ss) before the class, joking, making small-talk, answering questions they may have – in order to show the Ss that he/she truly wants to support them on their way of becoming a teacher
- Michael Legutke would then begin by saying: “Welcome to the show, ladies and gentleman”

2. Reflection I: Your best/worst (English) teacher

- T introduces the unit topic and outlines that by dealing with this topic, Ss will practise the most important skill for their future career: Being reflective
- T outlines what this encompasses (e.g. teachers should do something in a classroom because they have reflected on this choice beforehand, have weighed their options; that they do not do something simply because the course book tells them to or because it had worked well in last year’s group; that they take a critical look at their own actions)
- T asks Ss to think back to their own times as a student. Ss make notes individually on (one of) the best and (one of) the worst (English) teachers they have ever had and think about what made him/her a (not so) very good T
- Ss add any characteristics of a ‘good’ (English) teacher they feel is missing
- In small groups, Ss compare their lists and try to agree on the 5 most important characteristics or competences a ‘good’ (English) T should have in your eyes
- Each group presents their (number 1-2) choices. The class discuss and reflect on the choices (e.g. if “native speaker competence” is our number 1 criterion, wouldn’t that mean that we are all excellent teachers of our L1(s)?)

3. Why reflection?

- T reminds Ss of the need for reflection: As teachers, we have to ask ourselves why do we do certain things at a certain time. T asks Ss why they think he/she asked them to spend some time thinking about teachers that had a major impact on their lives
- T highlights the importance of reflection by discussing the following quotation by Howard B. Altman (1983: 24): “Teachers teach as they were taught, not as they were taught to teach.”
- T uses a quote by Kennedy (1989: 4) to explain why this is the case: “By the time we receive our bachelor’s degree, we have observed teachers and participated in their work for up to 3.060 days. In contrast, teacher preparation programs usually require

something in the neighbourhood of 75 days of classroom experience. What could possibly happen during these 75 days to significantly alter the practices learned during the preceding 3.060 days?"

- The class discuss a quotation by Legutke, who outlines the consequence: "Unless teachers explore and become aware of how they learn, they will continue to teach as they were taught, not as they were taught to teach" (e.g. quoted in Farrell 2019: 44)
- T summarises that this is because being a teacher can be very controversial and challenging profession: Because teachers deal with individuals, there is no master plan that will always work. Therefore, it is important for every teacher to always take a step back and look at his/her own practices from an observer's perspective, and reflect on them.
- Ss collect examples that show how learning conditions may vary, depending on the teacher, the learners, other circumstances (e.g. the teacher and/or the learners may be tired, concerned about what happens after the lesson, hungry, have just fallen in love, fighting allergies or missing their girlfriend).
- T gives further illustration of the multiple responsibilities that teachers have to take on, e.g. with the help of personal anecdotes or cartoons or quotations¹

4. Research on the 'good' (English) teacher

- T provides Ss with a short summary of selected research findings on areas that teachers need to develop in order to become professional (cf. e.g. the research summaries in Brunsmeier 2024; Legutke, Saunders & Scharf 2022; Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Dittfurth 2014; Wipperfurth 2009 – areas that could be mentioned are e.g. knowledge, experience, skills, attitudes, self-concept)
- T explains each area shortly (e.g. subject knowledge is not enough in order to be a 'good' teacher. Experience is something that new teachers are lacking and which can only develop from daily training and practice. New teachers thus cannot be experts from the start and should not have unrealistic expectations of themselves.)

5. Reflection II: Personal consequences

- T asks Ss to reflect on their personal development as teachers by asking them to read a list that suggests specific competences future teachers might be expected to have (e.g. adapted from Buchacher & Wimmer 2002 – thanks a lot to my former colleague, Dr. Andreas Hänssig, for making his handout available to me): T asks Ss to highlight a) areas that they feel they are good at; b) areas that they think they need to work on; c) areas that they would like to work on.

¹ In German-speaking contexts, the following quotations might be used e.g. from the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (18./19.12.2010): "Ein guter Lehrer führt seine Schüler an einer langen, aber straffen Leine: Freiheiten ja, Frechheiten nein. Ein guter Lehrer lernt mit und von seinen Schülern. Er weiß, dass Erziehung zu zehn Prozent aus Information und zu neunzig Prozent aus Vorleben besteht. Ein guter Lehrer ist den Kindern nah, aber er missbraucht die Nähe nicht. Die Schüler dieser Lehrer erkennt man daran, dass sie etwas wissen wollen, dass sie urteilsfähig sind, Kritik üben und selbständig handeln. Das alles geht nur, wenn der Lehrer die Schüler mag und respektiert" and by Wolf Müller-Limmroth in the Zurich weekly newspaper *Die Weltwoche* (02.06.1988): „Wahrscheinlich gibt es nicht viele Berufe, an die die Gesellschaft so widersprüchliche Anforderungen stellt: Gerecht soll er sein, der Lehrer, und zugleich menschlich und nachsichtig, straff soll er führen, doch taktvoll auf jedes Kind eingehen, Begabungen wecken, pädagogische Defizite ausgleichen, Suchtprophylaxe und Aids-Aufklärung betreiben, auf jeden Fall den Lehrplan einhalten, wobei hochbegabte Schüler gleichermaßen zu berücksichtigen sind wie begriffsstützige. Mit einem Wort: Der Lehrer hat die Aufgabe, eine Wandergruppe mit Spitzensportlern und Gehbehinderten bei Nebel durch unwegsames Gelände in nordsüdlicher Richtung zu führen, und zwar so, dass alle bei bester Laune und möglichst gleichzeitig an drei verschiedenen Zielorten ankommen.“

- T asks how Ss feel after having read the list and outlines that it is important for Ts to always be open for reflection, not to strive for perfection
- T asks if Ss want to share some of the areas they marked a) – c). Ss can share voluntarily and should not be forced to do so. T shares some of his/her points from each area that he/she is comfortable with. The class can comment on their classmates' and the T's choices. T highlights that each S must draw personal conclusions for themselves.
- T reviews that it is difficult to live up to all these expectations, but that there are tools to help teachers with this demanding task:
- T asks Ss to find out about these tools by reading a research text that outlines how reflection can be carried out in the classroom (e.g. Helmke & Schrader 2006; Farrell 2015; the contributions in Voerkel, Vaz Ferreira & Drescher 2024). While reading, Ss aim to answer the question: How can we approach this challenging situation? (answers can include e.g. learn to observe yourself closely, team up with colleagues and observe each other, action research).
- To conclude, T gives Ss some reflection prompts, asks them to pick at least one and to prepare to share their sentence with the class (e.g. I used to think... and now I believe/understand... // The most important thing I have learnt today is ... // What I found difficult is... // For me as a future teacher... // What still puzzles me is... // What I don't want to forget is... // I have really enjoyed...)

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