

# Concepts in Research: An Argument for Reflection in the Classroom

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## 要 旨：

### 研究コンセプト：教室内でのふりかえりに関する考察

教育の実践と教育の政策策定の基盤となる概念が果たす役割について、その議論は、根拠に基づく実践(evidence-based practices)すなわち実証主義を支持するグループと、ふりかえりの実践(reflective practices)すなわち構成主義に基づいた概念を好むグループとの間でかわされ続ける。本稿では、両者のキーポイントおよびそれぞれにかかわる教育政策について説明する。ある特定のカリキュラムに従って学習する理由を学生自身が理解できるよう手助けするには、ふりかえりが大いに役に立ち得ることを、著者の経験を通して考察する。本稿では、清泉女子大学の英語、スペイン語を主専攻とする学生のためのライティング・スピーキングクラスで用いたカリキュラムについて述べる。授業内で学生は、テキストを使用することが求められるほか、週に一度行われる授業の終わりには毎回、使用教材およびその有用性や理解度、授業内の作業との結び付きに関する質問に回答することで、ふりかえりを記録(reflective journals)することになっている。学生は、これらのふりかえりの記録をもとに、短いエッセイを期末に書く。その目的は、授業内でタスクやアクティビティが実施される理由を学生に理解させること、また、アクティビティの見直しや反省が、そのアクティビティの選択された理由をよりよく理解するのにつながるということを理解させること、およびふりかえりは有用で他の授業にも適用できることを理解させることである。本稿は、実践的な発見事項を示すことを意図するのではなく、研究が進むふたつの代表的な実践がもつ強みおよび弱点や、それぞれを支える理論を比較することを意図している。また、そのうちのひとつが、授業内における教材作成のベースをいかに形成するのか、その例を挙げることも目的としている。

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**Abstract :**

Arguments on the role of underlying concepts in educational practice and policy-making continue between those who support positivist evidence-based practice, and those who favour ideas based in constructivist reflective practices. In the light of these arguments this paper reviews the key points of both forms of practice and the educational policies that are associated with them. By means of an explanation of the author's own experience in reflective practice while creating materials and encouraging reflective practice in students, the paper will argue that reflective practice can be used to great effect to help students understand why they are following a specified curriculum. The curriculum discussed is offered as part of a Writing and Speaking class for English and Spanish majors (n=36) enrolled at Seisen University. Students taking part in the class were requested to use a text, and then write their reflections at the end of each class, in a weekly journal. The journal asked specific questions related to the material they were studying, its usefulness to them, their understanding of the material, and how the material might link to work they were undertaking in other classes. The journals were then used as the basis of a short essay written by the students at the end of the course. The aim was to have students understand why they were undertaking tasks and activities during the class, and how reviewing and reflecting on the activities could give them a better understanding of why the activities had been chosen, and how these activities may prove useful in other classes being taken. It should be noted that this paper is not intended to present empirical findings, but to consider the strengths and weaknesses of two common research practices and the rationale offered to support them. In addition, examples are included of how one of the practices formed the basis for creating materials in the classroom.

**Key words :**

根拠に基づく実践    ふりかえり    ふりかえりの記録    教育政策

Evidence-based Practice    Reflective practice    Reflective Journals  
Educational Policy

**Introduction**

Debate in education between proponents of evidence-based practice and advocates of reflective practice underscores a pedagogical dilemma for classroom teachers. Is pedagogy more advantageously guided by quantitative results in research studies, or the qualitative personal reflections of teachers students in their own practices? In other words, can teaching be improved by use of a cumulative body of evidence, or is the language classroom a unique context for each learner? For this reason, arguments and debates (Hargreaves, 1996. Hammersley, 1997. Elliot, 2001 ) persist on the viability of evidence-based findings on the one hand, and assumptions of the knowledge of theory and cognition that are needed for beneficial reflective practice, on the other. Critics argue over a range of complications that can occur in the course research. These can be determined by the social psychological, motivational, or contextual settings in which language teaching takes place. Language teaching in a Japanese higher education context would seem to favour the use of evidence-based practices, as reflection within an educational setting is often outside the knowledgeable experience of both teachers and learners. Without this experience, it can leave learners confused or lacking an understanding of reasons for reflective processes. However, with the correct instruction, practice has the potential to be a powerful tool in learning. This paper explores the range of views that separate the practices, and by touching on the author's own experience of reflective practice in creating classroom course materials, argues the beneficial role that reflective practice can take in a higher education context. Throughout the paper a link will be made between both

and reflective practice, but emphasis will be given to the advantages of using reflective practice in an educational environment. The first section presents the main features of the concept of evidence-based practice, the key aspects of reflective practice, and its relationship with experience and self-evaluation. The second section will highlight the effects of the two discourses on classroom pedagogy, and in the use of textbooks. The final section will show that practice by both teachers and students is essential if students are to achieve higher levels of cognitive ability.

### **The Concepts of Evidence-based Practice and Reflective Practice**

Advocates of evidence-based research (Hargreaves, 1996. Stephens and Crawley, 1994) argue that educational pedagogy and practice must be led, primarily, by research methods. They maintain that there should be an for educationalists to follow guidelines established after extensive research. involves the use of ‘effective practice’, or using research methods that have objectively demonstrated as effective. The origin of this form of practice is in social care. Evidence-based research methods can be found within the medical field and in other forms of health provision. Common methods of research are, for example, through laboratory experiments, observational studies, or randomised controlled trials. In a trial, groups are tested for the effective use of randomly allocated medical treatments. Through access to sizeable study and the systematic control of variables, randomised controlled trials are able to test expectations under changeable conditions. Prominence is given to those methods that are said to ‘work’. That is to say, in order to assess a treatment’s value, it is put through a system of trial and error to discover the methods that produce results. This form of practice stems from the positivist approach to knowledge with its belief in procedural objectivity - research that allows other replicate it - and its adherence to rigorous ‘scientific’ testing. While possibly an effective research method in health care, within education, there are several drawbacks to this form of research that will be returned to later in the paper. A

second feature of evidence-based practice is the emphasis on the collection of cumulative data. This stresses the need for a greater role for applied research, research that has a direct application to classroom pedagogy. Moore (1999) describes how the expectation in evidence-based practice in education is for teachers to take on the role of ‘craftsperson’ within a skills-based framework. Additionally, a structure is proposed that favours ‘finite lists of skills and practices’. Although conclusions are greatly contested, supporters of evidence-based practice reason that teaching is best served by following principles and guidelines of ‘good’ research. They maintain that the principles normative theory - the idea that we work with what ought to be rather than is - are important in guiding teachers in what should be done in particular classroom circumstances.

In contrast to evidence-based practice, proponents of reflective practice that techniques encouraging students and teachers to reflect on problems they encounter in the classroom would put them in the best position to develop new strategies for teaching and learning. These strategies would enable teachers to manage future problems and improve the quality of their lessons. For students, would give a greater understanding of what they are being asked to do and, importantly, why they are being asked to do it. Reflective practitioners claim that ‘professional skill and wisdom’ are developed by reflecting on practical experiences. They argue ‘real-world’ experiences and the resulting knowledge provides cannot easily be developed through researching and observing technical aspects of education. Furthermore, Schon (1983) argues that ‘real’ work ‘...is characterised by a knowing-in-action’ that differs in nature from purely scientific and technical research. He maintains that reflecting in the act teaching, and again after the experience, has profound value for the direction of future practice. This also holds true for students who reflect on the directions their learning takes. They reflect on their own experiences and may use the knowledge to create their own path in future learning. In addition, Moore

points out that reflective practice regards teachers' own evaluations of their practices on an equal footing with planning and management skills. This contradicts the evidence-based discourse that believes in the primacy of target setting and measurable outcomes. In contrast to evidence-based practice, reflective practice has its roots in interpretivism. This takes into account the attitudes and behaviours that students and teachers bring to their everyday interactions. Advocates argue that we cannot make sense of what happens in classroom without understanding how a particular individual perceives the world around them. This challenges the idea that students should be passive learners, or that large scale research studies can account for the circumstances and history of each and every learner.

### **The Concepts in Classroom Pedagogy**

Having outlined key points in the evidence-based and reflective discourses, what practical effects do they have on classroom pedagogy? One effect is in methodology employed within the discourses. According to Hargreaves (1996) evidence-based practice allows teachers to have more time to interact, and to have fewer concerns in discussing classroom practice with colleagues. The argument is made that as teachers would be making use of the same instruction methods, they would be less likely to spurn open discussion on techniques and strategies. This may be true, to one degree or another, for both practices. teaching practices are often the same in many classrooms. A faith in evidence-based practice is nowhere more evident than in the act of choosing a textbook for use in class. A number of universities in Japan, for example, have introduced textbook policies in which teachers have little or no choice in their use. The assumption being that the textbooks themselves are based on research that has been proven to 'work', and with the right use, will lead to in students abilities. This, of course, is not always the case. What counts as useful knowledge, layout design, or simply the need for 'interesting' activities can all take precedence over the material itself. There is no reliable proof that

suggests the material has any influence in the learning process at all. The practices a student or a teacher is using to facilitate activities for learning are wide and varied. Choosing a textbook could prove successful if it truly was demonstrated to include material that did, indeed, improve learner knowledge. Showing how the use of specific textbook tasks had improved learner scores in tests, or led to greater fluency in speaking classes, for example. This seems unlikely as all other influences would need to be discounted. For a student attending five classes in a day, a whole range of techniques and strategies is likely to be experienced. Moreover, previous learning or individual motivation are just as likely to have an influence on how much a student learns. Choices of textbook, however, could simply be the result of personal preference from few in positions of influence, rather than being chosen for their ‘proven’ The textbooks, therefore, might be of little practical use in lessons. The lack of clear, demonstrable techniques forces teachers to participate in forms of reflective practice. Teachers might discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a text, or talk about techniques they have found to work. They may advise each other on the chapters, through experience, they believe to be most beneficial to students. They share their own experiences and opinions of using a book with specific levels, or with students from various departments. In the author’s own experience, there is no indication, as Hargreaves has argued, of a culture of individualism that results from the use of reflective practices. That is to say, there has been no reluctance to share problems or knowledge, or any sense of isolation that is argued to be the consequence of a lack of evidence-based research. On the contrary, reflection by teachers has been observed to allow discussion on practice to the degree that Hargreaves has claimed to be exclusively found within the ‘professional’ use of evidence-based practice. Students have also indicated in classroom feedback that reflection has given them a greater understanding of the work they are doing. Journals written by students in class have revealed that reflection has been of great help in reminding them of what they have done, and in planning what they are going to

do next. In addition, it might be argued that reflection, discussion, and the subsequent changing of practice is, within limitations, a scaled down form of evidence-based practice in the use of ‘what works’. Having been cumulatively collected and checked, adapted to suit conditions, and trialled by multiple teachers and students it bears some of the hallmarks of evidence-based

Over the last four years a course in writing and speaking has been used by the author in the classroom. The course is named ‘*Creating Language*’, and has been constantly revised after each class. The revisions attempt to update the contents to the changing needs of the students. Revisions have included changes made after discussions with other teachers using the text and it might, therefore, be argued that evidence-based techniques, on a much smaller scale, have also been used. This has taken the form of evidence provided by teachers as to what ‘works’ in the classroom. The real revisions have taken place, however, after considerable reflection. Firstly, by the teachers who are responsible for teaching the classes. Secondly, by the students themselves who have been asked to reflect on their learning through journals and diaries. The changes thus suggested, have arguably, produced a text that creates and suggests the conditions for students to improve their learning. In addition, the revisions have changed students attitudes to learning itself. Journals made by the students have revealed that innovative strategies newly learned in the class have been used in other classes to help with tasks and activities.

Moore (1999) has suggested that both evidence-based and reflective discourses share the idea of a ‘psychological ideal, unified “self”’. He explains this as ‘...an Enlightenment view of social development’ that looks inwards at ‘self-improvement’ rather than outwards to the problems of society. By doing this, he suggests that both the discourses ‘shift debate’ away from issues of socio-economic and cultural relations to those of ‘individual blame’. Moreover, he suggests that both discourses ignore the ‘fragmented, material, multifaceted



nature of the self” and the importance of ‘re-contextualising’ teaching practices by relating them to the world outside the classroom. Goodson and Walker (1991), are concerned that *both* discourses emphasise action within the classroom while seeming to ignore social influences. They argue that evidence-based practice assumes a single way of doing things in the classroom while reflective practice ‘recognises’ only ‘...the messy complexity of the classroom’. In a similar vein, Prabhu (1992) talks of the ‘dimensions’ of the lesson that should take into account the cultural nature of a classroom and its unpredictability; as well as the histories, opinions, and personalities that and teachers bring with them that can be a source of conflict within the classroom. This may, possibly, explain the undoubted lack of progress in the abilities of many language students in Japan. Texts that emphasise a Western style of life and language use, ignore the social circumstances and values of Asian students. To assuage the lack of input from students, ‘*Creating*’ course students were consulted on possible topics and materials that they themselves found to be of interest. Students were asked to voluntarily attend meetings to discuss those parts of the course that they were interested in out more about, and to point out those topics and activities that they did not believe had any value. In this way, students themselves were able to have some input into what would be learned in the classroom. The constant revisions to text would also reflect recent issues within the experiences of students. Moreover, tasks and activities were revised after consultation with students on what was lacking or what they perceived to be of little value to them.

In order to be of use, both discourses understand the need to keep up-to-date with the latest research. One reason is that evidence needs to be interpreted by individual practitioners. Evidence-based practice needs to be correctly interpreted by course coordinators in order to develop policies and curriculum. Similarly, reflective practice needs an up-to-date knowledge of research in to recognise, interpret, and evaluate the events of the classroom. As mentioned

earlier in the paper, Moore (1999) claims that evidence-based policies can be skewed in much the same way as can happen in healthcare research. Evidence-based practice may be unrepresentative, only record averages, or ignore the judgments of practitioners who draw on their own experience and knowledge. It is argued that randomisation is not guaranteed to rule out background factors, or that practitioners may influence the allocation of treatments towards those who benefit the most. This may also be true for reflective practice. Without training, it is difficult for teachers to pull together the variations that can be found within a classroom. Different levels of different aims and goals, or divergent opinions of what is useful knowledge. In the author's own action research at a number of different universities, it was common for policies to be decided on the results of questionnaires filled in by students twice a year. There are a number of problems with this. Firstly, choice questions may have led the students to give answers they may not necessarily have wanted to give. Secondly, answers depended on students' motivations, personalities, and expectations of the course, which differ greatly. A final point is that many of the questions asked about areas of the curriculum that teachers had little or no involvement in deciding. It is likely that any credence of the results would be by judging the negative aspects of a course rather than any positive features. Ongoing reflection on the part of the teacher, coupled with input from students reflecting on their studies throughout a would have a far greater impact on policies, lesson planning, materials, and teaching tasks.

### **Contrasts in the Concepts**

The next section will highlight specific differences in the use of the One key contrast is that reflective practice encourages teachers and students to take responsibility themselves for organising, understanding, and evaluating their own performances in the classroom. This means there is less focus on receptive learning, or the checklists of skills given emphasis in the

evidence-based discourse. Without this sense of responsibility, it seems that a reliance on evidence-based practice could very well lead the teacher into following only those activities which are deemed to be acceptable, and have in specific circumstances proved to show results. It does not necessarily follow the same results would ensue. For students, there may be a tendency to learn only what is put before them. This can create the conditions to produce a who is content to follow guidelines set by others, without stepping outside the 'rules' or reflecting on their own practice. Students learn only those things needed without a full understanding of why they are using specific tasks or undertaking particular activities. It is the author's own uncorroborated experience, in colleges and language departments, that an increase in managerialist policies creates the conditions for teachers to closely follow course guidelines to the detriment of student learning. This occurs at the of using their own sometimes considerable experience. Moreover, it creates the conditions for teaching to textbooks alone. However, although a lack of experience can sometimes confuse students who are asked to 'think outside the box', or reflect in contexts that have been modified from those they are used to, benefits have been identified through the use of this approach. Having students reflect on their learning at regular intervals can help them to make sense of a course as a whole is integrated and linked. Students on the '*Creating Language*' course complete a diary in the last ten minutes of each class in order to reflect on what they have learned, how this is connected to previous classes, and how it might be linked to other classes they are taking. Through this it is hoped that they will reflect on the material, discuss with other students the points they are unsure on, find gaps in their learning, and think about how they can use strategies to improve their skills in future classes.

A further point is that evidence-based practice as proposed by Hargreaves (1997) sees individualism among teaching practitioners as 'old professionalism'. A managerialist outlook has seen policies enacted that ignore

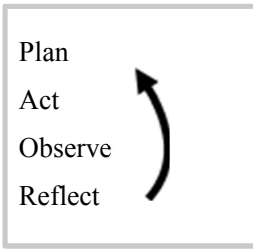
individual teachers' skills in favour of collective practices. It can be difficult for a teacher to draw on their own knowledge and experience of practice when asked to use prepared syllabi. They are forced to abandon or severely restrict their own methodologies in order to follow the dominant teaching approach. This might be associated with de-professionalisation. Evidence-based practice linked to managerialist policy-making, 'involving the specification of targets, the measurement of outcomes, and... the micromanaging of the work of those involved so as to improve their performance'. Schon's (1987) arguments for further reflection at the different stages of teaching seem to hold more weight in terms of professionalism. Reflection allows the teacher to think more about the particular circumstances of their classes in terms of the curricula unit, what the students need to learn, and how the teaching will be delivered. Evidence-based practice would assume that research and trials had already taken place in the field of teaching involved. In addition, it would assume that the research was more than just a single occasion, but cumulative research that had been verified and tested under conditions likely to be met by teachers. Moore (1999), however, argues that unlike reflective practice, important interpersonal relationships and skills are sidelined by an emphasis on areas such as 'subject knowledge, classroom management, and the assessment and recording of pupils' progress'. There is an implied supposition that there is only one right way of doing things. The inference is that collective knowledge has an answer for all that takes place in a classroom. The reflective teacher, however, can guide students towards asking the right questions about their learning. They can help students understand how their learning is influenced not only by actions within the classroom, but also by wider societal relationships and influences.

A final contrast concerns a teacher's knowledge base. Hargreaves (1997) argues that a teacher's knowledge base is far smaller than that of say, a doctor, and is therefore much weaker. Evidence-based practice is argued to provide the knowledge base lacking in the teaching profession generally, and reflective

practice in particular. Furthermore, Hargreaves argues that professionals are more interested in 'what works in what circumstances' in contrast to reflective practitioners who may be more interested in why something works. Hargreaves gives the impression that why something works is not of importance. practitioners might argue that their discourse is closer to what happens in practice. They contrast this with evidence-based researchers who would not necessarily be working day to day in an educational setting and might favour a knowledge base that might not be compatible or even relevant. What works in research may have little or no real effect in the average classroom. This can be somewhat remedied by students themselves reflecting on what might be relevant, and for the teacher to recognise the changing nature of each class of students and the interpersonal ongoing nature of the classroom. This means materials need to be adapted regularly to reflect a changeable classroom environment.

### **Teaching Implications**

Evidence-based practice seeks to find strategies aimed at 'avoiding or resolving problems' through skills or an understanding of particular areas of knowledge. For some, (Moore, 1999) this is associated with teaching as a science where progress is seen in 'measurable outcomes'. Reflective discourse, however, sees teaching as more like an art that promotes the practice of reflecting on problems actually experienced in the classroom. This allows practitioners to improve strategies for the future. The emphasis is on the strategic aspects of teaching. This means the reflective practitioner is more likely to use qualitative methods of research gathering. They might use ethnographic studies or action research. Action research has been key to the author's own research based professional development.



**Figure 1.** *An Action Research Process Model.*

Following the model in Costello (2003, p.7), systematic critical reflection has led the author to further action through the development of ‘*Creating Language*’ as a vehicle for experiment in a variety of tasks and activities. It is hoped that further revisions to the text will follow from further observation of students use of the text in the classroom. This will be receive further revision with input from student diaries and reflection journals. It is hoped that further improvement in the instruction method for using the diaries and journals will allow students to become more comfortable with reflection activities. In time, classroom practice suggests this will improve their ability to better understand not only what they are doing, but why they are being asked to do it. A reliance on textbooks, can create a distance between activities in the classroom, and what might seem relevant for students in the ‘real world’. Having students give input on materials after reflection, can bridge the gap between teachers and students. The fluid and inconstant nature of the classroom necessitates constantly evolving materials that can be the difference between valuable learning or passing a test with knowledge that is instantly forgettable.

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