

**Journal Writing: A Means of Professional Development in ESL Classroom at  
Undergraduate Level**

**D. Samrajya Lakshmi**

**bslvss@yahoo.co.in**

**Abstract:**

The duty of the Teacher of English is not merely teaching English texts but he/she should help the students in enhancing various other skills like communicative, analytical, logical and soft skills. To compete with the growing demands on the English teachers, timely orientation towards professionalism is of dire importance. For over three decades now, it has been found that methodology, training and concept alone will not make a teacher competent enough to train the students at college level to meet the students' requirements. In this fast changing global scenario, no other processes excepting reflective practice, which is highly exploratory is the best and could serve the ever growing needs of the English language learners and teachers by integrating both theory and practice. This paper focuses on the potential of journal writing as a reflective professional development tool, which is purely a personal low-tech way of incorporating reflective practice in day-to-day classroom teaching by individual teachers. My attempt through this paper is to advertise the use of journal writing not only to the experienced but also to the novice teacher to make his/her class effective.

**Key Words:** Reflective practice, Journal writing, professional Development.

**1. Introduction:**

The teacher of English, in addition to his competence in the language, is also expected to develop skills relevant to his area, which includes not just teaching but taking instant decisions, facing classroom challenges, maintaining rapport with the students by understanding their behaviors, attitudes, etc. The scope of professionalism of teachers has undergone true metamorphosis. The feeling that teachers of English pack professionalism and that their practice as classroom teachers is dictated by outmoded beliefs is becoming

more widespread than ever now. It is the teacher of English at the tertiary level who is called upon to develop delivery-related skills in the undergraduate learner. While it would be unreasonable to expect the teacher to work a magic, given all the constraints within which he/she operates, the fact remains that, largely, his classroom practice continues to be as traditional as ever without his reflecting much on the newer demands.

### **1.1 Present Day Education and Orientation for Language Teachers:**

At the college level, most teachers enter the profession without any training in teaching. After the entry, however, they may undergo in-service training of two kinds. They may attend Orientation Programmes and Refresher Courses offered by the Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs) established by the University Grants Commission (UGC). However, owing to two factors, namely, the inadequate number of ASCs, and college managements not being favourably disposed towards their teachers being away from their classrooms for over three weeks on a refresher course, very few college teachers can attend these courses. Again, the refresher courses organized by the ASCs do not have the potential to train teachers in language teaching because they are heavily slanted towards literature with inadequate, if not perfunctory, attention to language teaching in which the emphasis is on theory rather than practice. “Moreover, in most of the ASCs no systematic procedure of internal evaluation of the performance of participating teachers is followed.” (Chaudhary, 2002)

Though the secondary education commission (1952-53) stated the importance of teacher training yet it has emphasized the responsibility of universities to prepare teachers for higher education (1964-66), still to-day there is no provision for the professional initiation and orientation to the university teachers.

S.K. Yadav (2007) in his paper entitled ‘Professional teachers in higher education’ says, “ASC’s, and university departments are not organizing the orientation and refresher courses in a professional and specialized manner. The courses are organized in an adhoc manner just for promotional purposes ... not organized on the basis of their needs and requirements ... The competent resource persons are not employed”.

Another important reason for deterioration of quality in the degree colleges is appointment of teachers on 'contract' basis, where the teacher strives hard to maintain the post but never cares for quality of teaching and prospects of his/her learners. Most of the lecturers teaching English at degree level have come from Telugu medium (Telugu is one of the south Indian Languages) background, wherein they fail to communicate in English properly.

Secondly, teachers of English may enhance their professional competence by participating in professional development programmes such as workshops, seminars, and conferences. However, these programmes are also inadequate for at least two reasons. First, such programmes are rare, and so not all teachers of English get opportunities to participate in them. Secondly, the approach of these programmes is based on the applied science model according to which experts convey findings of scientific knowledge and experimentation to classroom teachers, and it is up to the teachers to put this "received knowledge" into practice. This traditional teacher education model has failed to help because of the almost complete separation between theory and practice it creates.

### **1.2 Need for Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching:**

Ashutosh Biswal(2007) says, " ... we live in a time of rapid change where change itself is changing and becoming faster ... It has been observed that the development of any society depends upon the dynamic nature of its education systems ... teachers can be manipulated to make education system developed."

Teachers need tremendous efforts to handle the present day curriculum and student community. They should broaden their horizon, to reach the level of their students, and to satisfy their queries. They should face the challenges of the electronic media and try to use them for educational purpose or else they find themselves in a world where their present knowledge and teaching skills, would become obsolete.

"The whole notion of teacher as disseminator of knowledge is now turned on its head. While in the old scenario, the teacher was the boss, in the new scenario, the teacher

becomes facilitator. The teachers, who employ knowledge in the classroom, do not funnel information into their student's heads. The teacher is no longer the sage on the stage, but the guide on the side becoming less central to the learning process." (M.Akhtar Siddiqui, 2002) The teacher is considered as the researcher (Stenhouse, 1975), reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983), decision maker (Reagon, 1993), and even as a strategist (Moore, 2004).

In this fast changing global scenario, no other processes excepting reflective practice, which is highly exploratory is the best and could serve the ever growing needs of the English language learners and teachers by integrating both theory and practice (Bartlett,1990).

Reflective practice aims at the development of alternative teaching strategies that improve the teaching skills of the students. It involves inquiry as a way of understanding (a) the conditions that support or inhibit change (b) the nature of change (c) the process of change and (d) the results of change.

It may not be very scientific but involves aspects such as (a) felt need (b) quick feedback (c) immediate result (d) improvement in levels of knowledge & skills and (e) immediate applicability.

Reflective teaching is extremely valuable as a stance, state of mind, a healthy, questioning attitude towards the practice of teaching profession. It is worthy doing because it creates a context, which promotes professional development. The reflective approach promises to address this need. It is an 'insider' approach or 'self-directed' approach (Richards and Farrell, 2005). It seeks to offer a dynamic, reliable, and viable means by which the teacher can develop his/her professionalism, because it is teacher-initiated and teacher-directed: it involves teachers observing themselves, collecting data about their own classrooms and their roles within them, and using the data as a basis for self-evaluation and change and their professional growth.(Richards and Lockhart,1994). In other words, in the reflective approach, the teacher "experiences" knowledge: he/she constructs his/her own theories of teaching, drawing on his knowledge, skills, training, and his own experience of teaching. His/her professional growth takes place through the process of critical reflection that this involves. This is in marked contrast to the widely

prevalent applied science model in which the teacher merely receives knowledge and applies it.

## **2. Journal Writing –A Means of Reflective Practice:**

**2.1 Journal Keeping:** Journal keeping involves making reflections explicit through writing and thereby making them available to inform action. A journal can also include collecting pasted articles and drawings. Journals can be used both as an occasional tool for reflection and on a regular basis.

### **2.2 Notes on Journal Writing:**

Keeping a reflective journal enables the English teacher to think about the issues he confronts during his day-to-day classroom teaching, and helps to develop reflective and critical thinking skills, and prepare for class discussions. In preparing to compose a reflective journal, the teacher may ask herself the following questions:

- (i)What ideas from the reading caught my attention?
- (ii)What ideas from the reading were new to me?
- (iii)What is my personal response to the reading? What is the basis for such a response?
- (iv)What conclusions can I derive from the reading material?
- (v)How can I implement the ideas contained in the text in my professional life?

### **2.3 Use of Diary as a Research Tool:**

Nunan asserts in this context “diaries, logs and journals are important introspective tools in language research.” (1992:118).

### **2.4 Diary/Journal Study- Purpose:**

Diary writing is a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights. The advantage of writing diaries is, being able to review or reread earlier reflection and a progressive clarification of insights gained by these reflections. The following procedures are recommended for keeping a journal (Bailey 1990):

- Make entries on a regular basis. It may be useful to spend five or ten minutes after teaching a lesson to write about it or record it.
- Review the journal entries regularly

### **2.5 Use of Diaries/Journals in Professional Development:**

Donald Schon (1983) ‘the practitioner moves from the problem to reframing the theory which accounts for the problem, to new action. In this respect, writing professional diaries is very useful.

A journal is a teacher’s written response to teaching events. Keeping a journal serves two purposes:

- Events and ideas are recorded for the purpose of later reflection.
- The process of writing itself helps trigger insights about teaching.

Journal writing in this sense serves as a discovery process. Many different topics from classroom experiences can be explored through journal writing, for example:

- Personal reactions to things that happen in the classroom
- Questions or observations about problems that occur in teaching
- Descriptions of significant aspects of lessons or events
- Ideas for future analysis or reminders of things to take action

### **3. Instances from the Journal Entries Written by English Language Teacher:**

About the Teacher: The teacher is working in an engineering college with 17 years experience in the field. She was formally trained in English language teaching. She has decided to write journal entries after each class. Through the entries discussed below she found her self undergoing professional development gradually.

Entry I:

Before Reflection

One day, when I was teaching gerund form of verb, the class was quite passive. I thought the monotony might be because of the hot afternoon. I went on explaining verbs

and rules for using gerund form of the verb giving examples to each condition. My students were busily noting down my lesson in their notebooks. When I started asking them to give the sentences of their own, no one could do it correctly. Then I realized that the fifty minutes class was futile.

#### After Reflection

After going to my room, I pondered for a while in a disturbed mood. Later I went to the library, collected newspapers of few days, and got some funny anecdotes from the newspapers photocopied. Next day, I entered the class with confidence, distributed the articles, and asked them to underline the verbs in gerund form. Students were busy doing the exercise while enjoying the anecdotes. Thus, I could make the class interesting. Later when I asked them to give sentences, using gerund on their own, it was a child's play for them.

#### Entry II:

#### Before Reflection

In one of my communication skills classes, I thought of making my students describe a person of their choice. I have given the list of words to be used to describe a person. I have also given the meanings of those words, to make the task easy for them. I asked them to prepare for ten minutes and then I thought of asking them to present. Astonishingly, I found them silently working with their task. After ten minutes, when I called each one of them by their roll numbers on to the platform in the English language laboratory, they started speaking something but have no proper sequence and they were not speaking with confidence.

### After Reflection

That night I could not sleep properly. I switched on T.V to change my mood. Suddenly, a flash of idea stuck my mind. The next day I went to the laboratory with C.D in my hand and with the help of C.D player and the screen, I have shown the picture of a person with a voice describing him. As it was a visual aid of teaching, my students enjoyed watching it; on the other hand, they could realize the sequence of description. Later, when I asked them to describe their own classmate, they were doing it in a play way. It was really a fruitful class for me and for my students.

### Entry III:

#### Before Reflection

While I was doing prose lesson in one of my classes, one of the last bench students was found to be naughty and found disturbing other students sitting in his bench. I starred at him, warned him and at last sent him out of my class. However, I was rather disturbed, as I have not done a good thing by sending him out, as I know that controlling the class is one of my duties.

#### After Reflection

I went to the department and discussed with my colleagues. Even they expressed despair about that student. I have decided to correct him by next class. I entered the same class the next morning and found the boy-making nuisance. Then I called him to come forward and asked him to read the lesson and explain. He started reading the lesson hesitantly but failed to explain and was feeling guilty for that. Then I asked him to read the lesson aloud and I started explaining what ever he read. This strategy worked out well. He was never a problem from then in my class and others expressed their interest to read the lesson aloud for the class. This experience not only helped me to control the boy but also helped me with a new pattern of teaching.



Entry IV:

Before Reflection

While teaching written communication to degree students, I thought of making them write a paragraph on 'solar energy'. I have given them some hints after thoroughly making them understand the structure of the paragraph. After few minutes, I checked the notebooks and found myself at bay.

After Reflection

After thinking a while, I gave them a model of a well-structured paragraph on 'Thermal power' and then divided the class into groups of five encouraging them to discuss and write a paragraph. Then I found the class to be highly interactive and enjoying the task of paragraph writing. After some time, I started checking their notebooks. I spent lot of time giving suggestions to most of them but not to all of them. Time management was my problem in that class. From then, I planned for every class thoroughly and was never disappointed about my work.

Entry V:

Before Reflection

In one of my degree classes, I found a girl doing mischief and disturbing her neighbours. As I am getting disturbed, I asked the girl to sit in a separate bench. Though she was silent, I found her doing something seriously. When I checked her notebook, it was a badly written poem with a remark on me.

### After Reflection

Though I felt bad about it, it made me think for a while and thought of using this to correct that girl. Therefore, I took that notebook to the teacher's table and read the poem written aloud to the class, appreciating her creativity. From then onwards she was never mischievous and doing her English class with utmost interest.

### Entry VI:

### Before Reflection

Once I happen to teach drama and the lesson was an extract from Shakespeare's 'As you like it'. Though it was a wonderful piece of work, as it was afternoon class, students were lazy listening to the lesson. I was giving meanings to the difficult words and was almost enacting while teaching the lesson. However, unfortunately, nothing went into the minds of fifty percent of the students. This was realized when questions were asked on the lesson.

### After Reflection

After the class, as usual I went into the staffroom and had a discussion with my colleagues on this issue. Some were finding fault with the course designer for selecting a drama in prose and a few were trying to suggest a better way to teach drama in class. Of all the suggestions, I thought of making students take the roles in the drama and enact. Next day I called the volunteers to do the same. Though sometimes they were mumbling, they did it absolutely well and the class was active enjoying and learning it bit by bit. When I asked questions on it, every one attempted to answer them.

Through experiencing her own classes through journal writing, the teacher could realize that reflective practice is a potential device for professional development. It was also found that though many teachers try to make their classes understandable and

effective through regular reflection, most of them are unaware of the term 'reflective practice'. It was also observed that writing diaries is not a regular practice with the teachers teaching English language at undergraduate level. Some knowledge about reflective practice and the use of journal writing should be given to both in and pre service teachers for better use of diaries for reflection which in turn make their classes productive and more effective. They should also be trained to make diaries public and to reveal their experiences to others to attain at a better solution to the problems they encounter in their daily classroom teaching.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

In language teaching, attempts were made to introduce revolutionary changes through innovative strategies, but were not found to be followed in practice. Though journal writing is found with evidence to be worth emulating for language teachers professional development, it was hardly found adapted by the Indian English teachers at all levels. My attempt through this paper is to advertise the use of journal writing not only to the experienced but also to the novice teacher to make his/her classes more effective.

#### **References:**

- Akhtar Siddiqui, M. 'Faculty development for excellence in higher education'. *University News*, March 25-31, 40(12): 2002, P: 13.
- Ashutosh Biswal. 'Quality process Norms for Frontline Teacher Education: Need of the changing world'. *University News*, Feb 12-18, 45(7): 2007, p. 1.
- Bailey, K.M. 'The Use of Diary Studies in Teacher Education Programmes' in Richards, J.C., and Nunan, D.(eds.) *Second Language Teacher Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990.
- Bartlett, Leo. 'Teacher development through reflective teaching'. In *Second Language Teacher Education*. Edited by Jack, C. Richards and David Nunan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990.
- Chaudhary, U.S. 'Teacher Education and challenges of change'. *University News*, May 20-26, 40(20): 2002, p.4.

- Moore,A. *The Good Teacher: Dominant Discourses in Teaching and Teacher Education*.  
Routledge Falmer: London. 2004.
- Nunan,D. *Collaborative Language Learning and Teaching*. Cambridge University Press:  
Cambridge. 1992.
- Reagon,T. 'Educating the reflective practitioner: The contribution of philosophy of  
education'. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*. 26: 1993, pp.  
189-196.
- Richards, J.C. and Farrell, T.S.C. *Professional Development for Language Teachers:  
Strategies for Teacher Learning*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. 2005.
- Richards, J.C., and Lockhart, C. *Reflective Teaching in second language  
classrooms*. Cambridge University Press: United States of America. 1996.
- Richards, J. C., and D. Nunan. (Eds.). *Second Language Teacher Education*. Cambridge  
University Press: New York. 1990.
- Schon,D.A. *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books:  
New York. 1983.
- Schon,D.A. *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1987.
- Stenhouse, Lawrence. *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*,  
Heinemann Educational: London. 1975.
- Yadav, S.K. (2007). Professional teachers in higher education, *University News*, 45(09),  
Feb 26-March 4, P: 1-3.

Ms. D. Samrajya Lakshmi is an associate professor in a reputed engineering college. She has 18 years of experience in English language teaching. She did her M.A., M.Phil., and M.Ed. in English language. At present, she has submitted her doctoral thesis entitled 'Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching-A study in undergraduate context'. She has published and presented her papers in national and international journals and at conferences. She was trained in English Language Teaching & Linguistics from English and Foreign Language University formerly known as Central Institute of English and foreign languages.