3 How Senior English Teachers support teachers in reflecting on their lessons during post-lesson discussions

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims

This study explores how Senior English Teachers (SETs) support teachers in reflecting on their lessons during post-lesson discussions (PLDs). It examines how these PLDs are structured, what types of questions are asked and the extent to which this structure and these questions seem to lead to reflective responses. It examines the issues focused on in PLDs and considers how this focus is established.

1.2 Background

In the Omani educational system, SETs have an increasingly important role in monitoring and developing the performance of teachers inside and outside the classroom. As Al-Lamki (2002) argues, they are well placed to offer individualized and continuous support. Indeed, developing a reflective teaching culture is one of the main duties of SETs specified in the Ministry of Education guidelines (ELCD, 2001).

1.3 Rationale

As a novice SET, I am concerned with fostering reflective thinking during PLDs. Through investigating current practices, I hope to learn from colleagues' work in this little-researched field.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Central to the process of being a confident, competent, and creative teacher is the ability to reflect constructively and critically on teaching intentions, the means used to achieve them and outcomes (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Reflection is closely linked to teachers' professional development, as well as morale, confidence, and professional autonomy (Brookfield, 1995). Therefore, the notion of 'reflection', first

highlighted as important by Dewey (1933), has emerged as a guiding principle in many teacher education programs during the last two decades (Korthagen, 2001).

However, reflection, in the sense of reflection on-action (Schön, 1983), is a challenging activity that involves stepping back from experience (Moon & Boullon, 1997), thinking objectively and analytically, and trying to interpret practice from different perspectives in order to understand it. Teacher educators can help by 'holding up the mirror' for teachers to see their lessons clearly (Malderez & Bodòczky, 1999).

Research evidence suggests that reflection raises teachers' awareness of teaching, enables deeper understanding, and triggers positive changes in practice (Liou, 2001). A study by Mok (1994), cited in Borg (2006, p. 104), found that, after finishing their practicum during which they were encouraged to reflect, (inexperienced) teachers "were able to think about instructional decision-making in a much broader manner than they had previously been able to".

However, developing reflective skills is often regarded as challenging (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993), with reflection viewed by many as complex and esoteric (Hatton & Smith, 1995). McNamara (1990) suggests adopting a collaborative approach to developing reflective skills, with teachers working together as 'critical friends', while Schön (1983) highlights the importance of space and time in facilitating critical reflection; hence, he suggests reducing workloads.

Reflection operates at different levels. Van Manen (1977) identifies three; at the first, technical rationality, the focus is on teaching behaviour and skills. At a deeper conceptual level (level two), teachers analyse reasons for actions taken, focusing on theory behind classroom practices and considering methodology in relation to students' needs. Finally, at level three (the deepest level; critical reflection) teachers justify their work in relation to the broader context of society. When teachers reflect at level three, they focus on the moral, ethical, and socio-political issues associated with their practice, looking at outside forces in order to gain greater self-understanding. Levels two and three relate, to some extent, to 'critical reflection', as defined by Ho & Richards (1993), who contrast this with 'descriptive reflection', akin to level one.

These criteria are most frequently applied to teachers' reflective discourse during post-lesson discussions (PLDs). Yet, pre-lesson discussions, focused on objectives, can be used to help teachers reflect more deeply, too. Ensuing observations can be focused on specifics, as Marriott (2001) explains, rather than generally on the lesson as a whole. Different topics can be the focus of PLDs, e.g.; lesson planning and preparation, teaching techniques, the learners and reflection (Al-Zedjali, 2004).

PLDs are frequently held immediately after the lesson, as the lesson is still fresh in the minds of both teacher and teacher educator (Handal & Lauvas, 1987; Brinko, 1993). As Marriott (2001, p. 63) claims: "Even with notes, it is easy to lose track of key points"; therefore, she strongly advocates that the discussion should be held within 24 hours.

However, PLDs can be held later in order to give the teacher and teacher educator time to reflect on the lesson before they meet (Al-Zedjali, 2003). Hopkins (1993) criticises rushed PLDs, and a study by Williams and Watson (2004), which compares levels of reflective analysis in delayed PLDs and those held immediately

afterwards, shows some evidence of higher levels of reflective analysis in delayed discussions. Nonetheless, there is also a danger of lesson details being forgotten if the discussion is delayed too long (Glavaski, 2001; Head & Taylor, 1997).

PLDs are often structured in a certain way. Building on the work of Sheal (1989), Glavaski (2001) identifies four main stages: climate setting, reflecting, learning, and planning. I describe these as follows: Firstly, while climate setting, the mentor tries to establish a comfortable atmosphere (Al-Zedjali, 2003), showing interest and encouraging the teacher in a positive way (Al-Zedjali, 2005a, 2005b). Ideally the PLD will be held in a comfortable and quiet place, according to Ministry guidelines (ELCD, 1997). In my school, such meetings usually take place in the headmistress's office.

During the reflecting stage, the teacher is given time to reflect upon the observed lesson from their own perspective (ELCD, 1997). The mentor can therefore start this stage of the discussion by asking open questions, such as: "what do you think of the lesson? How happy were you with how it went?" (Marriott, 2001, p. 64). It is important to listen very carefully (Malderez & Wedell, 2007) and consider the teacher's views, which are usually a good starting point for the discussion (ELCD, 1997; Marriott, 2001). Regarding careful listening, Randall & Thornton (2001) suggest two kinds: effective attending (the use of gestures and eye contact) and active listening (responses to both the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the teacher). Both kinds of listening help establish an appropriate relationship, based on trust and collaboration (Edge, 1992), which involves the mentor psychologically, socially and emotionally in the process (Egan, 1994).

In the learning stage, a non-directive approach is often used to help teachers compare classroom events with goals (Freeman, 1990). This is facilitated with the help of supportive language and skilful questions (Al-Zedjali, 2003). Woodward (1989, p. 21) recommends the use of expressions such as "I noticed that" or "another time you could choose to", which encourage critical analysis and a consideration of alternative ways of teaching. Regarding questions, Bartlett (1990) suggests the use of WH open questions to support the process of critical reflection, and Marriott (2001, p. 64) lists a number of these, which she believes help the teacher reflect, for example: "How much did you achieve of what you expected to? What do you think worked best and why? What might you do differently the next time?" Kullman (1998) advocates using a variety of questioning techniques to lead the teacher to reflect, for example, asking probing questions which follow up on initial questions; not asking closed questions that require only a 'yes/no' answer; and when asking open questions allowing the teacher time and space to respond.

Regarding the planning stage, Randall & Thornton (2001) argue that this takes place when both mentor and teacher agree to transfer what has been discussed to future action. At this stage, therefore, new targets, plans or suggestions are made and agreed upon (Al-Zedjali, 2003). For the PLD to be successful, these suggestions should be clearly thought through, so that implications can be acted upon. They should be specific and expressed in words which help the teacher put them into practice, achievable, realistic and time-bound (Randall & Thornton, 2001). Woodward (1992) recommends the following ideas to consider when concluding the PLD:

- Ask the teacher to remember one good thing about her lesson.
- Ask the teacher to say one thing she will be working on next time.
- Encourage the teacher, if the lesson has not gone well, to think of it as just 'one bad lesson' which the pupils will already have forgotten.
- Finish off with a friendly, supportive, encouraging or upbeat remark.

Findings of a study which examined successful and unsuccessful PLDs (in general education) concluded: Successful PLDs provided opportunities for teachers to talk about their work in a non-threatening context, where 'risk is tolerated, suggestions are offered in a positive manner, and mutual goals are emphasized" through "more collaborative, non-evaluative, and reflective" discussions. In contrast, findings revealed that less successful PLDs were characterized by both lack of agreement and lack of shared understandings of teaching and learning. In such PLDs, the mentors' authority and situational control strategies seemed to inhibit the exchange of viable ideas and teachers were more resistant in such discussions (Blasé & Blasé, 1995, p. 68).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To investigate how Omani Senior English Teachers (SETs) support teachers as they reflect upon their lessons during PLDs, I developed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do SETs structure their PLDs according to climate-setting, reflecting, learning and planning stages?
2. What kinds of questions do SETs ask teachers in PLDs? To what extent do these questions lead to reflective responses? What issues do SETs discuss in PLDs? What are the reasons behind their choice of issues?
3. When do SETs conduct PLDs (immediately afterwards or later)? What seems to be the reason for this?
4. To what extent do SETs negotiate with teachers the focus of the observation and PLD in the pre-observation stage?

When choosing participants for this study, I focused on Basic Education schools (cycle one) in the Muscat region, of the type I work in myself. The participants were six Omani females: three SETs and three teachers (i.e. one SET and one teacher per school). They were all females because my focus was on cycle one schools (for Grades 1-4), and such schools are mainly staffed by females. The teachers ranged in terms of experience and qualifications, as did the SETs (see details for the latter group below):

SETs	Teaching experience	Years of working as SET	Qualifications
A	13	5 years	Diploma plus BA from the University of Leeds.
B	10	2 years	BA from Sultan Qaboos University.
C	15	7 years	Diploma plus BA from the University of Leeds.

In conducting the research I followed certain ethical procedures. Firstly, I sought informed consent (Cohen et al., 2000) and made sure my research would not cause harm (Swetnam, 2000; Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). Anonymity and privacy were requested and guaranteed, with real names replaced by letters (as in the table, above).

Qualitative methodology seemed appropriate to investigate the characteristics of PLDs and the nature of the talk that occurs between SETs and teachers in such discussions. Specifically, through using audio recordings and interviews, I felt I could collect qualitative data relevant to my research questions. Using the two methods together, I could triangulate SETs' thoughts and actions.

Collecting data was not unproblematic, though. As I was unable to return to Oman myself, a colleague arranged for PLDs to be recorded and I decided to use an MP3 recorder for this. Recordings could be sent by e-mail or MSN messenger and then stored easily on my computer, which would facilitate transcription. The SETs were shown how to use the MP3 and agreed to record normal PLDs, conducted without anyone other than the teacher present.

The recordings were then e-mailed to me and I listened to and transcribed the discussions, numbering SETs' and teachers' turns. To ensure confidentiality, I used letters (A, B & C) rather than names. Unfortunately, PLD C was recorded with the headteacher in attendance. All PLDs lasted between 15 and 22 minutes (see the table below:

The PLDs	Length of each
A	15:50 minutes
B	17:58 minutes
C	21:8 minutes

I conducted the interviews with SETs A, B and C as planned, using MSN messenger, following Al-Zedjali (2004) (in this volume). Before starting, I conducted pilot interviews with two Omani colleagues in Leeds, through which I learned I needed to allow more thinking time. The interviews took about 30 minutes each. Details follow:

Interviews with SETs	Time of interviews	Number of words
A	41 minutes	1, 224
B	29 minutes	916
C	33 minutes	770

I observed the following procedures in analysing the data:

1. As suggested by Walford (2001), I read the transcripts many times (using a hard copy) to familiarise myself with the data.
2. I analysed the transcripts in terms of three main topics: the stages, questions/responses, and content (issues), in order to answer my research questions.
3. I gave each topic a different colour in the transcripts; for example, I coloured the SETs' questions red and the teachers' responses blue.

4. As Radnor (1994) recommends, I circled the quotes I decided would help me answer my research questions.
5. I then dealt with each of the three topics separately using different processes to analyse data, for example, analysing SETs' questions quantitatively (counting and classifying them to produce charts) and qualitatively (analysing their effects on the quality of teachers' responses).

I followed a similar procedure in analysing the interviews.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Staging of PLDs

I will first analyse the PLDs for their stages, to examine evidence of climate setting, reflecting, learning, and planning (Glavaski, 2001). This addresses my first research question.

In PLD A, SETA started by saying, "First of all, I want to thank you for your lesson, for your preparation book…and…I want to thank you also for using groups; thank you" (turn 1). She was creating a positive atmosphere here; climate-setting (Sheal, 1989, Glavaski, 2001).

Then, SETA suggested: "Now, let us move to your lesson, what do you think about your lesson?" (end of turn 1), moving on to the reflecting stage. Accordingly (in turn 2), the teacher started to reflect by saying "I think at the beginning it was good, but at the end I think I couldn't keep children up with me". The teacher then continued to reflect until turn (8) when she said, "…I mean some children were confused, they didn't know was it 'n' with 'o' or…". While the teacher reflected, SETA showed she was listening by using fillers; "yeah" (turns 5 & 7). These invited TA to continue.

Next, SETA asked questions, eliciting reflections and comments: the learning stage. For example, in turn (15) SETA asked: "what are two things in your lesson that were very good and you were happy about?" The teacher responded: "the reading part". Then she continued, in turn (20): "I was very happy about their reading. I thought they needed more time but they finished fast…they were moving their mouths, even the weak children they were trying to read…"

Later, in turn (79), SETA asked, "…how you are going to teach this lesson next time, what are you going to avoid and what are you going to do?" Here, it seems that SETA was moving to the planning stage. The teacher replied: "when I ask some questions, I am going to clarify what I am going to say and I am not going to focus only on weak children…and I am going to control my voice too" (turn 80).

Then, SETA praised the teacher again in concluding the discussion. Throughout the PLD, which was structured in the way Glavaski (2001) recommends, she did not use any directive language.

PLD B started in a similar way, with SETB praising and complimenting the teacher; climate setting: "it was an excellent lesson, I liked it. I like the way you are calm in the class…" (turn 1). After that, she initiated a reflecting stage, although it appears that TB only made general descriptive comments (turns 2-10), evaluating

the children positively and describing her lesson as a new one. Thus, while she was reflecting, she was not doing so critically.

Despite this, SETB next moved on to a learning stage, eliciting the teacher's comments. This prompted the teacher to think more deeply and provide alternatives. There was then a planning stage, initiated in turn 104 when SETB asked, "What are the points that you want to carry from this discussion for the next time?" TB replied: "I will find out ideas about practising reading numbers, getting pupils exposed more to using pair-work, another point is to make children concentrate more on group-work" (turn 105).

Finally, SETB ended the PLD in a positive way. Her language was supportive and facilitative throughout, as recommended by Woodward (1989). In conclusion, it appears SETB also organizes PLDs in the way suggested by Glavaski (2001).

SETC, however, started by saying "Ok, first of all, I want you to talk exactly and specifically about the main aims of your lessons" (turn 1). There was thus no climate setting. Then, SETC used a question-answer pattern, sometimes basing questions on the teacher's last answers. However, the teacher was given insufficient time to review, recall and reflect upon her lesson from her own perspective, and the PLD did not possess a reflecting stage.

PLD C also lacked a specific planning stage. However, during the discussion, SETC set a few targets, which TC agreed to follow. For example (in turn 152), SETC said, "…so next time you should confirm and get more sure that the pupils have achieved their aims, ok?", and the teacher replied, "Ok" (turn 153).

SETC ended the PLD on a positive note, like SETs A and B. However, throughout she used lots of directive language, including "you should" phrases (turns, 51, 55, 122 & 152).

In conclusion, PLD C was structured differently from PLDs A & B. Rather than following stages recommended by Glavaski (2001), it was mainly based on a question-answer format.

4.2 Types of questions SETs ask and teachers' responses

I analysed the transcripts of the PLDs quantitatively to identify the types of questions the SETs asked. Results are presented in Figure 1, below.

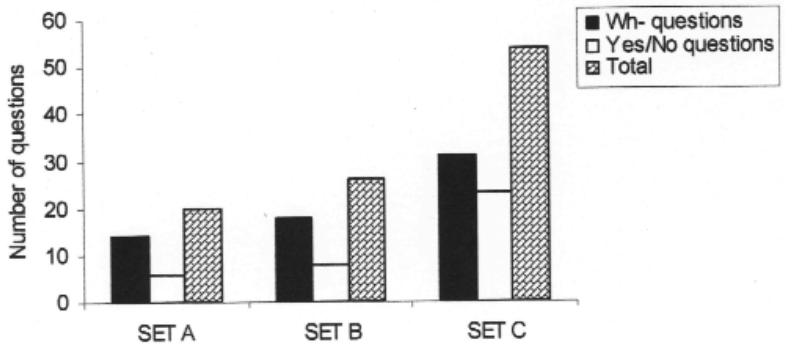

Figure 1: The types of questions asked by the SETs

According to Figure 1, all three SETs asked both WH and yes/no questions, though there were more of the former. Interestingly, SETC asked many more questions than SETs A and B.

I also analysed the kinds of WH questions SETs asked. See Figure 2, below:

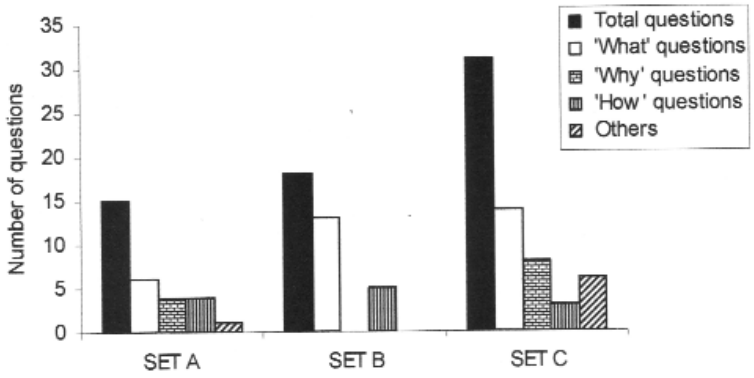

Figure 2: The types of Wh- questions asked by the SETs

As Figure 2 shows, the three SETs asked a variety of WH open questions; 'what', 'why', 'how' and others (e.g. 'which'). The most common were 'what' questions.
To see the effect of these WH questions on the teachers' reflective responses, I conducted qualitative analysis, drawing on Ho and Richards' (1993) distinction between descriptive and critical reflection (above).

4.2.1 SETA's questions and TA's responses

As shown in Figure 2 above, SETA asked a variety of WH open questions, e.g.; "why do you think that?" in turn 3, which encouraged the teacher to reflect. Indeed, TA then reviewed the teaching event, identified a problem and suggested why this happened. Next, SETA asked: "How are you going to help them?" (turn 11), which encouraged TA to think of a solution: "tomorrow", she started, "I am going to…", making a future action plan. Briefly, based on Ho and Richards' (1993) model, I would say that TA's responses included some features of critical reflection.

4.2.2 SETB's questions and TB's responses

As the figure shows, SETB used 'what' and 'how' WH questions. These could prompt reflection. For example, in turn 72, she asked, "what can you do next time to make the children concentrate on reading the words? How can you make them pay more attention?" It seems she asked these questions to encourage TB to think of effective alternative ways to capture the children's attention during a reading activity. She managed to do this, as TB suggested two alternatives.

A later question seemed to explore the teacher's understanding of the purpose behind the teacher's book steps, while another prompted the teacher to describe her reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983); "I thought that maybe children were confused … I decided to stop the children and draw their attention and make sure that they were able to do it…" There is some evidence that TB's responses included features of critical reflection.

4.2.3 *SETC's questions and TC's responses*

As mentioned earlier, PLD C was mainly organised through question and answers. In the first turns (7-21), TC tried to recall the steps of the lesson under the pressure of SETC's questions: e.g., 'what are they?, what else?, what is after that?, were there any examples before that?, were you the model?'

However, SETC also asked a number of WH questions, which I would describe as skilful questions that could support reflective thinking. However, TC's responses were predominantly short. For example, in turn 39, when SETC asked, "What is the benefit of the listening?", TC's answer was only two words "the language" (turn 40).

Later, SETC appeared dissatisfied with the short answers she was receiving and switched to directive language: "…you should give more practice, and you yourself should be aware of the correct pronunciation of that task…your voice should be very clear…and you yourself should make sure that you replace that task…" (turn 51).

In brief, unlike Ts A and B, it appears that TC's responses did not include any feature of critical reflection, although SETC asked WH open questions and used a wide range of prompts. To sum up, while all three SETs asked WH open questions, not all these questions led to reflective responses.

4.3 Issues SETs discuss in PLDs

Through analysing the PLDs, I identified a range of issues discussed and divided these into three categories (table 1, below), drawing on Al-Zedjali (2004) as well as on my own experience of the Omani teaching and learning context.

Table 1: Issues discussed in the PLDs

The lesson	Teacher's teaching	The pupils
This includes recalling the aims of the lesson, following the teacher's book steps (or instructions), timing (i.e. finishing steps on time), discussing the activities, including those that did or did not go well, relating to various skills, e.g. listening techniques.	This includes classroom management and control, including using a scoring chart and the teacher's voice, different materials (flashcards, word cards and realia), using L1 and L2, modelling, giving examples and instructions, and using children's books.	This includes controlling the children's performance, checking their understanding of the lesson and participation, discussing the children's levels, and how to improve performance (e.g. using remedial plans and assessment).

PLD A included issues from all three categories. Initially, it focused on issues relating to the lesson, for example, reflecting on the activities that the teacher liked and did not like (turns 15-40). Secondly, it dealt with issues relating to the teacher's teaching techniques including classroom control, e.g. the different purposes of using a 'scoring chart' in the classroom (turns 41-42), and using the teacher's voice effectively (turns 67-76). Finally, issues relating to the pupils, their learning, levels

and participation were also discussed (e.g. turns 45-66).

PLD B also included issues from all three categories; focusing, for example, on the aims and steps of the lesson and following the teacher's book instructions; teaching techniques, including using L1 and L2, word cards and the scoring chart. Finally, it raised issues relating to the pupils, e.g. their levels.

PLD C included only two of the above categories. It included issues relating to the lesson, for example, aims and steps, following the teacher's book instructions, and discussing activities the teacher liked/did not like. Secondly, it addressed issues relating to teaching techniques including the teacher's voice, instructions, examples, and modelling.

In the interviews, I asked the SETs about the issues they discuss in PLDs in general, aiming to discover their rationale for choosing different issues. SETA answered:

> This depends on the teacher, for example, the shy teacher who lacks confidence and language, I discuss with her the steps of the lesson and also we usually talk about the timing. And the teacher who is very confident - I don't ask her about each step, I just ask her to tell me three things that went very well, three things that didn't work very well… (turn 51).

Interestingly, although the issues SETA mentions here are mainly related to the lesson, she differentiates between teachers, depending on their abilities, personalities and confidence.

SETB reported: "usually we discuss issues like class discipline, techniques in teaching reading … and I always ask about the things that teachers like about their lessons". When I asked her why, she replied: "to motivate the teacher… because some teachers feel that SETs or supervisors are picking up mistakes. So I do this for motivation." But she added: "I also discuss the things that did not work well, to help the teacher learn from her mistakes, and avoid doing this in the future" (turns 40-44). So, it appears SETB considers teachers' motivation and learning as suitable issues to discuss in PLDs.

Finally, SETC recounted: "I discuss the aims of the lesson, to see if the teacher is aware of the aims, and we discuss the achievement of these aims. We also discuss the steps of the lesson. If the teacher is not able to [tell me], I lead her to remember". When asked why she chooses these issues SETC reported: "because these things will help me to see the ability of the teacher to talk about her lesson…and also to develop some skills in the teacher, for example, diagnosing problems and how she plans for future lessons" (turns 33-37). Interestingly, SETC is concerned with developing teachers' reflective skills in PLDs, e.g., raising awareness, diagnosing problems and planning for the future.

The findings of this section, then, reveal that, when discussing particular issues, all three SETs consider teachers. It appears they choose according to teachers' abilities, confidence and motivation, and considering their professional development.

4.4 When PLDs are conducted

All three PLDs were conducted immediately after the observed lessons. This was not due to the research, since all three told me they always conduct PLDs immediately afterwards.

SETA reported otherwise she would forget things and the teacher would "forget her lesson also" (turn 24). Similarly, SETB reported that she always planned her visits so that both she and the observed teacher were free in the following period. If she delayed the discussion for a day or two, the teacher would not be able to recall all the details. SETC declared a similar strategy, saying if she delayed the discussion she herself would forget key information.

4.5 Negotiating a focus for the observation in the pre-observation stage

From the answers to my questions, it appears that two of the SETs (A & C) only occasionally conduct pre-observation discussions. They do not view this stage as vital, since their only concern is to know which class, lesson, and unit to observe. They do not negotiate what to focus on, as they merely conduct general observations. In contrast, SETB sometimes focuses her observations, negotiating this beforehand with the teacher.

5 DISCUSSION

I will now discuss findings, organising this section around research questions and referring back to the literature.

5.1 To what extent do SETs structure their PLDs according to climate-setting, reflecting, learning and planning stages?

As earlier discussed, the PLDs of both SETs A & B were structured in the way recommended by Glavaski (2001). However, in PLD C, there was a lack of climate setting, which is unfortunate as teachers have needs for belonging and love (Glasser, 1998). These needs can be met if teachers are thanked in a friendly way, praised for their good teaching (Stoller, 1996) and listened to. This makes them feel cared for and consequently motivated to learn from the following discussion. PLD C lacked this climate setting element.

PLD C also lacked a reflecting stage that would have allowed TC to think about her perceptions of the lesson as a whole. Nor was TC provided with the opportunity to outline her plans for future teaching, which is unfortunate. As Willerman et al. (1991) argue, teachers should be given responsibility for suggesting alternative teaching behaviour.

Finally, it is worth noting that unlike SETs A & B, SETC used directive language. Possibly, SETC lacks awareness of either her own language or of the value of facilitative language. Likewise, she is possibly unaware of how incorporating stages such as climate setting can help.

5.2 What kind of questions do SETs ask in PLDs? To what extent do these questions lead to reflective responses?

Findings reveal that all three SETs asked more WH open questions than yes/no questions during the recorded PLDs. The use of WH open questions has been variously recommended (Sheal, 1989; Marriott, 2001), as these can facilitate the process of critical refection (Bartlett, 1990). In other words, they help teachers analyse and reflect deeply upon their lessons (Malderez & Bodòczky, 1999).

However, findings show variations in teachers' responses (and levels of reflection). While TA's & TB's responses included features of 'critical reflection' (Ho & Richards, 1993), with problems and reasons for these identified, alternative solutions considered and plans made, TC's responses did not include deep analysis. She did not reflect critically; her responses appeared to be mainly short descriptive answers.

Regarding TA's and TB's reflective responses, it could be that these were influenced by the WH open questions and prompts SETs A and B used. The use of skilful WH open questions and a wide range of prompts can help teachers become self-evaluative and critically reflective, as Harrison et al. (2005) and Zeichner & Liston (1985) claim. Secondly, the staging of these two PLDs may have been crucial in helping these teachers reflect upon their lessons; firstly from their own perspectives (the reflecting stage) and then from different perspectives (the learning stage). A logical PLD structure develops exploratory thinking and raises self-awareness (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). Furthermore, the facilitative and supportive language SETs A and B used may also have helped, raising consciousness (Malderez & Bodòczky, 1999). Finally, these PLDs were characterized, too, by a non-threatening environment. This can foster in-depth reflection (Farrell, 1998). 'Why' questions can be seen as threatening (Stoller, 1996) and it is interesting SETB asked none of these.

Regarding TC's responses, these may have been affected by the lack of a logical PLD structure, especially as the reflecting stage was missing. Teachers need the opportunity to examine their practice critically and uncover their beliefs, as Borg (2003) argues. Furthermore, SETC's directive language may have affected the teacher's motivation to reflect critically on the lesson. Another explanation is the headmistress's attendance; maybe TC felt too shy to discuss her lesson in front of the headteacher, especially the negative points. A confidential climate is crucial for self-disclosure (Pozzo, 1997) and over-anxiety can impede deep critical reflection (Francis, 1995). There was also a lack of the collaboration and constructed knowledge that Chalies et al. (2004) argue is important in PLD C, which might also explain TC's descriptive responses. Finally, reflection is a challenging activity, requiring a high level of metacognitive skills (Hatton & Smith, 1995), and it may be that TC found it hard to reflect critically or lacked awareness in how to do this.

5.3 What issues do SETs discuss in PLDs? What are the reasons behind their choice of issues?

Findings reveal that the SETs discussed a variety of issues related to three

categories: the lesson, teaching techniques, and pupils. Choice of issues related very much to SETs' perceptions of individual differences between teachers. This is unsurprising. As Pajak (2001) argues, we need to consider the levels of confidence, competence, commitment and conceptual thinking of individual teachers, so that we can cater for their individual learning needs. Furthermore, teachers' motivation is a basic element of effective reflection (Guskey & Huberman, 1995) and it is interesting that SETB considers teachers' motivation important. Her efforts seemed to support this in PLD B. However, while SETC aims to develop reflective skills, her efforts in PLD C were not very successful, as they did not lead to critical reflection. It is possible she is unaware how to develop these skills.

5.4 When do SETs conduct PLDs (immediately afterwards or later)? What seems to be the reason for this?

Findings reveal that all three SETs conduct PLDs immediately after the observed lesson, primarily to avoid the forgetting of details. However, SETB also said: "it is supposed to be after the lesson" (turn 18), which prompted me to check the Ministry Guidelines (ELCD, 1997), where I could find no evidence of advice regarding this. Perhaps, these SETs see conducting PLDs as a duty to fulfil quickly, since they also have to write observation reports. Perhaps, this routine has developed over time or is based on unconscious beliefs about teaching and learning (Brown, 2004). However, I would suggest that if they tried to give teachers more time to think deeply about their observed lessons, these SETs might see a difference in the quality of teachers' reflections. Though there are different approaches, I believe, with Boud et al. (1985, p. 26), that delayed PLDs are important in "strengthening the link between the learning experience and the reflective activity which follows it".

5.5 To what extent do SETs negotiate with teachers the focus of the observation and PLD in the pre-observation stage?

As we have seen, SETs A and C regard the pre-observation stage simply as an opportunity to identify the class to be observed and the unit/lesson of the course book to be taught. In contrast, SETB sometimes conducts focused observations, she reports, although PLD B was based on a general observation. Focused observations can help teachers concentrate on particular aspects of their work (Glavaski, 2001) and reflect more deeply (Kullman, 1998). Perhaps, SETs A and C lack awareness of the value of focused observations.

6 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Implications

There are various implications arising from the study. Firstly, the importance of the pre-observation discussion should be brought to SETs' attention. This could be done by involving them in short practical courses, which also drew attention to the value of having a specific observation focus. Establishing this would involve the teacher in determining what to focus on, so the SET could play the role of data-

collector and helper during the observation itself (Wilkin, 1992). Furthermore, research evidence suggesting that delaying PLDs encourages a higher level of reflective analysis (Williams & Watson, 2004) could be brought to SETs' attention. While experimenting with delayed PLDs, they could try a technique suggested by Woodward (2004) called "thirty things I did": Teachers are asked to sit down somewhere quietly after the lesson and write down thirty things, of any type and in any order, about the lesson. These points then inform the PLD. By asking the same question of all thirty items (e.g. what would have happened if you hadn't done this?) the activity becomes non-judgmental.

SETs need to be cautious about using directive phrases (as SETC did), as these do not facilitate the reflective process (Woodward, 1989), and awareness-raising in this regard would help. They also need support in staging PLDs, so that these include climate setting (to motivate) and reflecting and learning stages to provide real opportunities to reflect and learn (Glavaski, 2001). Furthermore, TC's mainly short, superficial and descriptive statements illustrate a need to help teachers reflect deeply. SETs could model the reflective process.

6.2 Limitations

The findings reported above need to be seen in the context of the following limitations. Firstly, this was a very small-scale study; only involving three teachers and three SETs and findings cannot be generalised to other teachers, SETs or contexts. Additionally, the quantity of data analysed was also limited; one recorded PLD per SET, so that findings cannot be generalised even with the same SETs; as they might conduct PLDs differently with different teachers (as claimed in the interviews).

Furthermore, there were also limitations of the method, though I agree with Al-Zedjali (2004) that MSN interviews seem to allow people to express their feelings freely. Regarding my analysis of the PLDs, I relied on audio-recordings, which do not capture the non-verbal messages sent, a disadvantage of this method acknowledged by Mishler (1986). Video recordings can catch non-verbal communication (Cohen et al, 2000), but are harder to set up and might distract the participants.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

Though this was a limited study, it has raised issues related to improving the level of reflection during PLDs that could be further researched. Firstly, a large-scale study could investigate differences in levels of reflection between PLDs held immediately afterwards or delayed. Delayed PLDs could also be subject to more scrutiny, with comparisons between them made. The effects of pre- on post-observation discussions could also be investigated, as could the effects of agreeing a specific observation focus in advance. The challenges SETs face in helping teachers develop as reflective practitioners would be another useful research focus.

6.4 Conclusion

As a novice SET, I learned that some Omani colleagues help teachers reflect by

staging PLDs in a logical way, creating a positive climate and giving the teacher adequate time to reflect upon their lessons from their own perspectives, while using a range of WH open questions, prompts, and supportive language. This gave me a better understanding of my own role as SET in approaching such discussions.

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