

Teacher self-evaluation

It is natural for conscientious teachers to ask themselves whether a course was successful. Consciously or unconsciously, they probably do so during any given element of teaching. However, one is more likely to be reflective at the end of a day, or a course than during it, simply because of one's cognitive limitations—it is very hard to make a balanced judgment while in the midst of teaching, because there are too many factors to attend to simultaneously. On the other hand, once the class is over, it is also difficult to make an unbiased assessment, since the data needed to do so are absent—there is only the memory of a very complex situation, which fades quickly. Yet how can teachers plan for future classes, or find aspects of their teaching skills to improve, if they do not assess themselves? Formative self-evaluation is needed as the basis for change and development, rather than summative evaluation from outside, which is often done on the basis of a single lesson. We need to find a way for teachers to reflect on their teaching, and then go about improving it.

For present purposes we have formalized the fairly commonsense procedures that need to be undertaken under four headings: (1) focusing, (2) monitoring, (3) appraising, and (4) reacting. In the first stage, the individual using this model has to decide what the main areas of job functioning are to be, and how they are to be examined. This might mean referring to a position description, or to any previous external supervisor's evaluation of performance. Other organizational information, such as guidelines for practice or regular procedures to be followed, might be relevant. This process can obviously cover all aspects of a teacher's performance, both in class and out of class, but we will concentrate on in-class activity. In doing this first step, the teacher will decide what data to collect and how

to collect it. For self-evaluation of regular teaching, audiotape is the easiest data-collection procedure. It is a straightforward matter to bring a small tape recorder to class, place it on a table, and set it going. Quite soon, students and teacher will ignore it. More adventurous teachers may wish to explore the use of videotape, where in fact again both students and teachers will rapidly ignore the equipment. This source of data could be combined with observation by fellow teachers, and even, in some situations, written comments from students.

The second stage in most cases would be to review the tapes outside of class, and possibly to transcribe some of them, or some portions of them. Then, third, they need to be subjected to analysis, or appraisal. The teacher may decide to use one of the widely available classroom observation schemes which cover all aspects of class interaction, or simply focus on a particular element, such as use of praise. If the latter, the item or behavior focused on should presumably follow from those aspects of the individual's performance identified in the first "focusing" stage of the process.

One possible system to start from in analyzing performance could be the self-evaluation checklist with the teacher extending it to fit his/her personal teaching concerns. However, we recommend that before completing any such checklist, the teacher should first list the main objectives of a given lesson, in at least three categories: target language learning objectives (e.g., plurals of nouns, acts of apologizing), learning skills objectives (e.g., asking teacher for clarification, studying rules), and personal or social attitudes objectives (e.g., appreciating others' point of view, understanding the cultural connotations of target language use). We also note that while the checklist items concerning variety are important, other aspects of a lesson should be considered, such as clarity of teacher presentation, and appropriate sequencing of lesson activities and tasks.

Finally, if the self-evaluation process is to have an effect, the teacher must consciously decide how to react to the information — whether change is needed, and how it can be achieved. This phase is one where it may be beneficial to consult

colleagues, because options for effecting change may not always be obvious. The practitioner may also need to consider whether a change is feasible or essential, and to evaluate its likely effect on other aspects of the class or the teacher's procedures. So, if substantial change is desired, it may be useful to draw up a checklist for professional development in this area, which might set as goals the development of materials, seeking regular observation and coaching from a trusted colleague, or a determination to alter one's allocation of time outside the class to allow for a search for professional resources relevant to an identified teaching problem.

The primary reason for taking the sort of steps suggested above is to actually improve one's own practice. However, an additional incentive might come from the fact that a documented plan for self-evaluation is likely to contribute positively to any outside supervisors' evaluation.