

2 Fostering professional development in post-lesson discussions: Perceptions of teachers and supervisors

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims

This study sets out to investigate how regional supervisors of English (RSEs), working in an Omani context, help English teachers develop professionally. The focus is on their work in schools, in particular in conducting post-lesson discussions (PLDs). I am interested in the practices of RSEs as well as in both their perceptions and those of the teachers they supervise.

1.2 Background

RSEs have wide and varied developmental and administrative roles. Duties include visiting teachers in schools, observing classes, conducting PLDs, writing reports on lessons observed, conducting workshops and running in-service teacher training courses.

1.3 Rationale

Last year, I was a newly promoted RSE and found myself in a dilemma, supervising a large number of teachers who I did not see very often, due to workload and lack of time. I was concerned about the professional development of these teachers I was supervising and how I could best support them. Meanwhile, I saw my colleagues rushing around to visit their schools like me, but always wondered about the way they were carrying out their work. Were they succeeding in ways in which I felt I was failing? How could I improve? This concern prompted me to learn more and conduct research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As Roberts (1998) argues, teacher education involves learning from others, as we

interact with their knowledge, ideas and thoughts during the learning process. Social constructivist teacher education, as Roberts explains, places an emphasis on the learners and the way they understand the knowledge they are being exposed to. It values their prior knowledge and past personal experiences as well as the social context in which learning takes place. I support this view, and furthermore believe deeply that the teacher education process should be socially fair, and therefore conducted in a way not harmful to learners, socially, physically or emotionally.

As well as being social, education is also about personal change, as Taylor (2003) points out. Besides addressing subject and pedagogical knowledge, teacher education should consider personal beliefs. I firmly believe that teacher learning occurs best when teachers become aware of their practices, when they develop abilities to question their classroom routines and unconscious decision-making. Self-awareness enables teachers to understand their beliefs and attitudes and reflect upon these. Thus, my view of teacher learning is mainly based on the concept of growth in reflective practice. However, to become reflective, teachers need support in developing the ability to reflect critically. This can be done in various ways: such as by explaining the benefits of keeping a journal to promote reflective thinking (Richards, 1998, Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). One-to-one post-lesson discussions (PLDs) can also help teachers become more reflective. PLDs are particularly useful, as they can explore aspects of practice in detail, making use of recent concrete experience.

PLDs are usually held after supervisors have visited teachers in their schools and observed them teaching their own classes. Approaches used in conducting PLDs range from the directive to the non-directive and collaborative (Freeman, 1990), but it is not my intention to discuss these in details. Rather, I shall confine myself to the supervisors' socially fair role in helping teachers review their practice critically. In this regard, I believe that supervisors should do the following:

- Cater for human and learning needs

According to Glasser (1998), humans have five basic needs. These are for survival, love and belonging, freedom, power and fun. In the context of PLDs, these needs can be met in various ways. For example, survival needs can be fulfilled when teachers feel comfortable and secure in a private place. The need for belonging and love can be met through a caring manner and acceptance. The need for freedom can be met by giving teachers plenty of opportunities to say what they want about their lessons. As for providing fun, PLDs should be relaxed and informed by a sense of humour. Teachers can be given power by letting them make decisions about their learners.

- Dig deeper

Gebhard & Oprandy (1999) advocate an exploratory approach to help teachers gain greater self-awareness of beliefs and practices. Similarly, Malderez (2004b) advocates the concept of "getting out before putting in". If teachers are allowed opportunities to articulate their views, this will help them understand their own personal theories and hidden beliefs, and the PLD can do this.

- Question teachers' personal views critically

We should listen actively and carefully to teachers' explanations of classroom decisions (Randall & Thornton, 2001). While actions may be based on intuition, (Claxton, 1997), they do not occur without a reason. Ideas resulting in reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) may originate from various sources, such as teachers' 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975) or their understandings of how to behave in different situations, gained from experience. By understanding the reasons that stand behind teachers' decisions and by getting these out, intuitions and unconscious classroom routines can be brought to consciousness, which can lead to professional development (PD). We can support teachers by helping them notice their actions and behaviour in class, by acting as a mirror to help teachers review their practice from different perspectives and by using questions that require deeper thinking (Malderez & Bodóczyk, 1999).

- Bridge the gap between theory and practice

We need to help teachers see the link between public theories, gained from external sources like books, and personal theories, constructed over time from everyday practice. This can be done by helping teachers examine their practice and reflect deeply on it, by modelling reflective practice as well as by encouraging practitioner research (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Malderez & Bodóczyk, 1999).

Recent approaches to professional development have emphasized the inner. Self-learning (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997), self-reflection (Head & Taylor, 1997) and self-directed professional development (Clark, 1992, Ur, 1996) have one word in common: "self". These approaches suggest that PD can only happen if it starts from one's own practice. So, PD does not come from top to bottom, i.e. from theories, research and books, though these play a crucial role. It is a process that begins when professionals need to know their practice, analyse it and reflect on it thoroughly, critically and thoughtfully in order to become aware. Awareness of practice includes awareness of knowledge, teaching and learning skills, as well as attitudes and personal qualities that facilitate reflection. Becoming a reflective practitioner involves developing competencies in these areas (Malderez & Bodóczyk, 1999).

Engaging in reflective practice involves examining this practice objectively and analytically with a view to understanding it, but it is difficult to reach this point alone (Malderez & Bodóczyk, 1999). Supervisors can provide developmental support through scaffolding in a social constructivist way, through encouraging teachers to review and articulate their practical experiences. For this, they require knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualities of their own. Knowledge required of supervisors includes, besides subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of teachers, their personalities and stage of development, the contexts they work in and their teaching cultures, whether collaborative or not (Hargreaves, 1992).

Skills supervisors require for PLDs include observational and interpersonal skills. Regarding observational skills, O'Donoghue (1997) argues for the use of high-level inference skills, in assessing, for example, how a teacher responds to classroom incidents while considering the complex needs of the learning situation. For, if supervisors use only low-level inference skills, in focusing on board layout or elicitation techniques, O'Donoghue argues convincingly, they can have a checklist

in their minds, and lessons will be treated as discrete units rather than wholes.

Regarding interpersonal skills, supervisors need to act as mirrors, helping teachers review their practice from other perspectives, such as the learners' point of view, and reflect on what they see (Malderez & Bodóczyk, 1999). Furthermore, they need to be able to structure the discourse, moving from a focus on the teacher's behaviour to a higher order linking of theory to practice (Randall, 2004). Managing a PLD requires various skills, Randall argues, including those in counselling.

In terms of personal attitudes and qualities, supervisors can support teachers by being confidential, sympathetic, respectful and collaborative. Furthermore, they can model different kinds of behaviour, such as their commitment to work and PD, and their willingness to reflect and share (Malderez & Bodóczyk, 1999).

In an Omani context, there is limited research into how supervisors support PD through the PLD. This is the focus of my research and I now describe the methodology I have used to research this.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My research questions are as follows:

1. What do RSEs focus on in their PLDs?
2. What seem to be the reasons for this focus?
3. To what extent are RSEs aware of teachers' PD?
4. To what extent are RSEs aware of the need for their own PD?

I decided to collect qualitative data from RSEs and teachers to answer these questions. However, when I considered how to research, I realized my options were limited as I was in Leeds while my proposed subjects were in Oman. To collect data from RSEs, I decided to use semi-structured interviews through synchronous computer mediated communication (CMC) and specifically hotmail & yahoo messenger. Simpson (2002) argues that an advantage of using CMC for interviews is that messaging provides an effective medium for exchanges between distant participants. Furthermore, as the communication is written, transcription is not required. During the data collection process, I discovered, too, that CMC interviews seem to encourage freedom in the expression of opinions and feelings, helped by unique features, such as emotional faces.

Unfortunately, though, there are some disadvantages with this means of collecting data, too; for example, technological complications, such as disconnection or delays related to the network. Furthermore, participants can become self-conscious about their spelling, although misspellings, abbreviations and unpunctuated turns are normal features of CMC (Simpson, 2002). The last disadvantage is relative speed of the participants, some faster or slower in typing, which can lead to overlapping turns and lack of conventional adjacency pairs.

To elicit teachers' views, I decided to use open-ended questionnaires. An advantage is that these can provide focused descriptive responses. A danger of using questionnaires can be resulting superficial data, if participants do not take them seriously or give dishonest responses (Robson, 1993). Yet, due to the circumstances in which I was conducting the research, I felt I had no option but to use questionnaires.

My proposed subjects were both the RSEs in my region and teachers studying for BA TESOL degrees (in Cohort 4 of the Leeds programme). I chose these teachers as I had easy access to them through a regional tutor in Oman. This was an important consideration, as I am fully aware of the easy loss of questionnaires. As this tutor was my former tutor on the BA course, I did not hesitate to contact him and he agreed to help. The Cohort 4 teachers taught in a variety of schools, at different levels and in different systems with different curricula. They also had a variety of different RSEs. The RSEs in my region ranged from very experienced to new and supervised a mixture of schools.

I designed the questionnaire carefully, assuring anonymity and asking teachers to base their answers on the most recent visit from their RSE, as this might still be fresh in their minds. After piloting the questionnaire in Leeds, I sent it to Oman via e-mail and it was distributed to 45 teachers. 27 questionnaires were returned.

Collecting data through CMC interviews was not as easy, because of the time needed to liaise with RSEs via e-mail to fix a day and time that would be fine for both of us. At the beginning, seven RSEs offered their help. However, I only managed to interview four, and used one of these interviews for piloting, which helped reduce ambiguity in the questions. Prior to the interviews, I identified ways of probing and prompting (Robson, 1993), while retaining flexibility.

After collecting data, I had 27 questionnaires and 3 CMC interviews to analyse. I then used different analytical methods, according to the nature of the data. The 27 questionnaires were analysed through a technique that involved coding and then categorizing the responses to each question, as suggested by Robson (1993). The 3 CMC interviews were analysed as case studies using grounded theory. I felt this was appropriate, as there were a limited number of interviewees and I felt I could best understand them on an individual basis.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Questionnaire data

I focus first on answers from the questionnaires completed by the 27 teachers.

4.1.1 Issues teachers perceive their RSEs usually discuss with them during PLDs

Drawing on my knowledge of teaching, learning and supervision, and my understanding of cultural and contextual factors, I categorised responses into four groups. According to the teachers, RSEs discussed: Lesson planning and preparation, teaching techniques and strategies, the learners and reflection.

Regarding the last of these, it seems there were two contrasting ways in which reflection was referred to. In one sense, it appears RSEs help teachers reflect on their lessons developmentally by asking them about their feelings, how the lesson went and what they had learned, in the process coaching them to become reflective practitioners. In another sense, reflection was referred to in terms of judging the lesson through discussing positive and negative points. The teachers do not specify,

though, exactly who makes the judgement. If the teachers themselves were given responsibility for this, then the purpose might have been developmental. Alternatively, RSEs would have been making judgements; possibly while thinking they were helping teachers reflect without being aware that they were not.

The coverage of the four categories in the teachers' responses is illustrated in the following table.

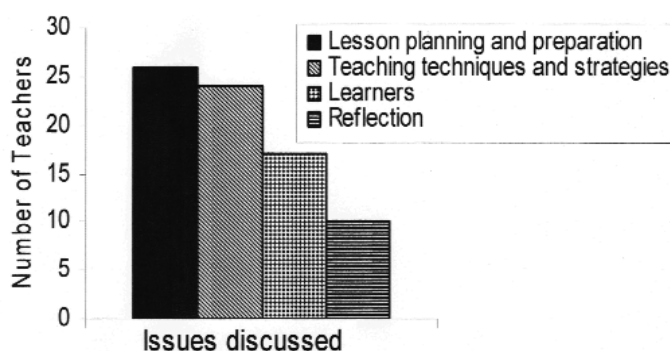


Figure 1 : Issues discussed by RSEs with teachers during PLDs

It seems clear that, of 27 teachers, 26 reported that their RSEs focused on issues related to the first category, lesson planning and preparation; while 24 reported that they discussed issues related to teaching techniques and strategies. Only 10 of 27 mentioned reflection, in either sense referred to above.

Based on these findings, I can conclude that teachers perceive their RSEs to focus mainly on classroom behaviour. This might suggest that RSEs are less concerned with underlying theories guiding practice. Clearly, though, a minority report their RSEs do show interest in their personal theories by, for example, probing for the reasons behind classroom decisions.

4.1.2 Issues teachers find useful

Asked to consider what they found useful in PLDs, the vast majority of the 27 teachers identified issues related to their classroom practice, such as lesson planning and preparation. For example, one teacher found the focus on “fulfilling the aims of the lesson useful, because it helps you feel you have achieved something you planned for”. Teaching strategies and techniques also featured prominently. For example, one teacher reported: “It is very important for the teacher to realise the advantages of groupwork and pairwork for the pupils, especially for the weak pupils”. Others focused on issues related to their learners. For example, one said: “How to check pupils’ understanding because some pupils answered the questions, by labelling the pictures, without being able to read. So, my inspector advised me to ask them: ‘How did you know?’ to check their understanding”. Reflection and the PLD itself were cited by a few teachers. One reported: “It gave me the opportunity to think about the way I teach and reflect on the level of my pupils”, while another

declared: "I got better ideas from my inspector to improve my lesson".

4.1.3 Issues teachers find less useful

8 teachers did not answer this question and left it blank, while another 4 said that everything was useful. However, the rest mentioned various issues. Some disagreed with advice to follow the teacher's book procedures. Others raised issues to do with continuous assessment, remedial work, marking and using L1.

Based on the teachers' responses, I think they were influenced by various individual factors in identifying what they found least useful. Some seemed unconvinced by the supervisors' advice, for example, about preparing a detailed lesson plan. Others considered ideas impractical, could not see how they were beneficial or felt they added little and would have liked further input to enrich their knowledge.

4.1.4 Teachers' suggestions for what their RSEs could do differently to help their professional learning (teachers' needs and expectations)

Asked what they thought their RSEs might have done differently during feedback sessions to support learning and PD, teachers responded according to personal insights, needs and expectations. I shall group their comments under actions they think their RSEs should take to support them and personal qualities they think RSEs should possess. I shall not take it for granted that RSEs are not engaging in the actions mentioned by teachers, or do not possess the personal qualities teachers are looking for. Rather, I take their comments as expressions of ideals.

- **Actions required of RSEs**

Teachers are looking for someone who visits them regularly, notifies them about school visits and conducts a pre-lesson discussion before seeing them teaching. They want someone who focuses not only on what they do inside the classroom but who rather notices the kind of activities they do in school in general and for their learners in particular. Moreover, teachers want an RSE who starts the PLD with positive comments, helps them solve problems in the classroom and the school and conducts workshops to support PD. Also, teachers require a knowledgeable person, who uses the library and reads, attends workshops and conferences, uses the Internet to update knowledge and puts this knowledge to work.

- **The personal qualities teachers want their RSEs to possess**

Teachers want an open-minded RSE, who approaches the visit in a positive, co-operative and helpful way. They want someone who is friendly, flexible and encouraging, a good listener who allows them opportunities to express themselves freely. They need a thoughtful, self-confident and educated person, who cares about their need to learn and develop professionally and shows this care explicitly.

4.2 Interview data

As mentioned earlier, I will present my interview analysis in the form of individual case studies. I asked the 3 RSEs about school visits and observing

teachers, what teachers' PD meant to them and their role in supporting this, as well as their awareness of their own PD. After presenting views and opinions, I shall make comparisons across cases.

4.2.1 Interviewee 'A'

According to 'A', his priority is being available for teachers in schools. Regarding schools visits and his presence, he says, "My teachers & SETs need my support. They need to feel that I am with them and not just coming once a month to check."

'A' perceives that talking to his teachers and spending time with them, explaining issues they are not quite sure about (e.g.; the purposes of different activities), helps them do their job better and helps him understand them more, particularly with regard to their teaching principles. It gives him an opportunity, too, to exchange ideas and share knowledge and experiences with his teachers. From his perspective, sharing is crucial. He uses the pronoun "we" more than once in the interview and, while discussing skills' development, mentions sharing explicitly: "instead of me giving them ideas every time, they will be more independent. Next time they will be willing to look for themselves, try to reflect, and my role will be to share that experience with them". This also suggests that teacher autonomy is crucial to him, and indeed, he mentions the Chinese proverb of teaching a man to fish. He also seems to view experiential learning (Dewey, 1938, cited in Head & Taylor, 1997) as significant for both himself and his teachers.

To 'A' the emotional side of learning is important, as is clear from his use of the words "encourage" and "help" and his desire to put his teachers at ease academically and emotionally by providing them with books and articles to read, by asking them to visit other schools and by encouraging them to attend workshops, meetings and conferences. He also values reflection, by which he means allowing opportunities for self-disclosure in the context of involving teachers in their own PD.

'A' shares his work with colleagues and seems aware of the importance of continuing to develop professionally. He reads at home and assured me: "I need to read more because the more I read the more ideas I get and the more support I can give my teachers. I also need to attend more educational conferences."

4.2.2 Interviewee 'B'

'B' also sees visiting schools as his main job. However, he sees this work in terms of inspection, which he defines as observing to "find out the good and weak points in the lesson and advise the teacher". Through this focus on teachers' observable behaviour, he identifies types of remedial work needed, which he then addresses through various means. He suggests readings, encourages discussions with colleagues and supplies materials for self-development. This suggests he sees sharing and searching as important devices for solving problems.

'B' does not regard himself as an educator, which would involve him in more research. Rather, he sees his work in terms of inspection and the completion of a certain number of visits to teachers. This work is increasingly shared with SETs, but

he considers some SETs too lenient, focused on getting “the cooperation of the teacher”.

‘B’ regards continuing PD important, through reading and attending seminars and workshops. He also believes that a friendly, supportive and encouraging environment is conducive to this.

4.2.3 Interviewee ‘C’

According to ‘C’, school visits and classroom observations are complementary actions to training. “In workshops we give ideas and methods”, she reports, “and in schools we see the application”. She believes that training, based on needs, should equip teachers with new ideas about what to teach and useful skills to facilitate their work. Teachers then need support in their schools, and she would like more time to follow up their progress. School visits provide opportunities to discuss teachers’ practices with them. “I help them analyse their lessons and reflect upon them,” she reports.

The concept of ‘help’ is central to her work in supporting teachers. She also encourages SETs to work co-operatively with each other as a team, share ideas and gain help from experienced people, such as university lecturers, authors and teacher educators.

‘C’ appears aware of the need to develop herself professionally: “I need courses related to my job, further studies, and I need to do researches and case studies”, she reports. She mentions that she is currently researching the case of a struggling teacher, but needs more time to be able to work on it properly. Like ‘B’, she feels she is intrinsically motivated. However, she reports, support and recognition would raise her self-esteem to help her achieve more.

4.2.4 Summary

I now summarise these findings in Table 1, below

Table 1. Similarities and differences in the views of the three supervisors

Issues	Similarities	Differences
School visits	All 3 agree on their importance	A= talks to teachers, sits with them, explains various issues, is available. B= sees what teachers lack and identifies remedial work. C= follows teachers and sees the application of different ideas and methods given in training sessions.
Observations	A + C agree on sitting with the teachers, talking to them and helping them develop as reflective practitioners.	A focuses more on understanding teachers' principles and giving them skills to become independent and autonomous. B focuses more on identifying the good and weak points of the lesson and advising the teacher. C focuses on helping teachers analyse their lessons and reflect upon them.
Supporting teachers' PD	All 3 agree on the importance of sharing with others i.e. visiting other schools, observing teachers and attending seminars & workshops. A + B agree on providing teachers with books and articles to read. A + C are more concerned about the emotional importance of supporting learning, i.e. on encouraging and helping teachers.	A sees it through experiential learning, reflection and self-disclosure. B sees it through inspection. C sees it through training & doing research.
Awareness of own PD	All 3 appear to be aware of the importance of PD and agree on the necessity of updating themselves to be able to help teachers. All 3 agree they face challenges in finding time and carrying out plans.	B + C both mention that motivation is crucial.

Clearly, this analysis shows some discrepancies, for example in the kinds of issues RSEs focus on in the PLD and issues related to PD. In the next section, I will discuss these in more detail, while referring to the research questions.

5 DISCUSSION

Drawing on my knowledge of the context, I shall discuss the research questions in sequence, considering both teachers' and RSEs' views. As they are linked, I shall discuss questions one and two together.

5.1 Research Questions 1 & 2: What do RSEs focus on in their PLDs? What seem to be the reasons for this focus?

5.1.1 Teachers' views

Teachers' perceptions are that RSEs focus mainly on their classroom behaviour, in terms of planning and preparation of lessons, techniques and strategies, as well as issues related to learners. This focus can be attributed to three possible reasons. Firstly, it could be the result of an accumulative contextual understanding of what should happen in the PLD. Secondly, it might relate to teachers' perceptions of their practical needs. Thirdly, it might suggest that teachers are unaware of the learning process; of the stages their RSEs are taking them through, of the way they are being encouraged to articulate the principles underlying their practice and reflect.

However, I personally think this third possibility least likely, as the need to reflect is emphasised in workshops and encouraged through the inclusion of reflection sections in the official lesson planning sheets they use. Accordingly, I believe that teachers are aware of what reflection is.

5.1.2 RSEs' views

When we turn to the RSEs' views, we see that all three consider teachers' classroom behaviour important too. However, 'A' and 'C' also seem concerned with underlying teaching principles, sharing knowledge and helping teachers analyse and reflect on practice. This might suggest that both the lower-order and higher-order processes (Randall, 2004) are being employed in PLD sessions by these two RSEs. One of these RSEs was a recent graduate, while the other was interested in research.

'B', on the other hand, who indicated that he would have liked more in-service PD, was concerned with the good and weak points of the lesson observed, from the perspective of inspection. I believe he may, therefore, have made greater use of lower-level inference skills (O'Donoghue, 1997) and confined himself more to one-way interaction (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). He may have been influenced by the nature of the schools he was supervising, in which maintaining discipline was particularly important.

5.1.3 Conclusion

To conclude, clearly RSEs do make use of lower-level inference skills in PLDs while focusing on teachers' behaviour. There may be various external reasons for this, including the need to fulfil policy decisions. Furthermore, contextual factors might influence supervisory behaviour. Many teachers find it difficult to cover the curriculum, and perhaps RSEs focus on lesson planning and preparation in response to this.

Internal reasons could include lack of awareness of higher-level inference skills and of the importance of focusing on these to support teachers' PD (Randall, 2004). Reactions to contextual factors, such as perceptions of dangerous teaching (Malderez, 2004a), might also trigger a focus on classroom behaviour during PLDs. However, I think this less likely with my sample group, as 27 teachers from different schools with different RSEs were surveyed. These teachers were BA students, required to do practitioner research for assignments, and thus conscious of their practice.

To summarize, there may be a gap, in RSEs' work, between theory and practice. For, although teachers perceived RSEs to be mostly concerned with teaching behaviour, two of the three RSEs clearly had other objectives. Perhaps, while RSEs realize they need to make teachers' assumptions explicit to them during the PLD, they are not aware of how to do this in practice.

5.2 Research Question 3: To what extent are RSEs' aware of their teachers' needs for PD?

I have argued, above, that becoming reflective is central to the process of developing professionally, while competencies needed to support reflection can be gained with the help of scaffolding (Malderez, 2004a). In this light, I consider the views of teachers and RSEs regarding teachers' PD.

5.2.1 Teachers' views

Few of the 27 teachers surveyed see reflection as the most important issue discussed in PLDs, which could be attributed to two main causes. Firstly, most teachers may be concerned with more immediate problems. Secondly, reflection may not have been focused on by RSEs in relation to teaching practice, as results of the questionnaire suggest. Prompted by this hypothesis, I double-checked the questionnaires and discovered that teachers who identified reflection as an issue discussed with them in PLDs and teachers who chose reflection as the most useful issue discussed were the same. This might suggest that once teachers are helped to reflect on their lessons consciously and this issue is brought up explicitly, they come to see it as useful and notice it.

Regarding issues discussed in PLDs which teachers found less useful, for reasons offered such as the impracticality of the advice in relation to the teacher's perception of the problem, there seems to be a gap in understanding between teacher and RSE. This suggests that RSEs could focus more on developing understandings of issues essential for learning and PD.

5.2.2 *RSEs' views*

All three RSEs expressed a commitment to supporting PD, by, for example, supplying materials such as books and articles to read ('A' & 'B') or by supporting the emotional side of learning ('A' & 'C'). For these two supervisors ('A' & 'C'), reflection is clearly a powerful tool boosting PD, essential for helping resolve problems or conducting research. 'B', though, on the contrary, appears more concerned with changing teachers' classroom behaviour than with reflection, supporting PD through providing remedial work.

5.2.3 *Conclusion*

As I interviewed only three RSEs, it is difficult to generalise. However, clearly there is some awareness amongst RSEs of the importance of enhancing teachers' PD through encouraging reflection. However, there is also evidence, in the teachers' identification of classroom behaviour issues as the most useful points of discussion, that teachers might not be aware of the importance of reflection in their own PD. This might suggest that RSEs could do more to model reflective practice during PLDs. If RSEs incorporated this modelling into their practice, this in turn could help them support teacher autonomy and experiential learning more effectively. Such a development would reduce the demands made on their time, as teachers and SETs would then be more autonomous. In short, there might be a gap between RSEs' theories and practices they could address.

5.3 **Research Question 4: To what extent are RSEs aware of the need for their own PD?**

It is apparent that all three RSEs recognise the value of updating themselves professionally by reading the current literature on teaching and learning as well as by attending and participating in events like workshops, seminars and conferences to get new ideas. RSEs 'B' & 'C' mention the importance of creating a friendly, encouraging and motivating environment if we want practitioners to develop professionally.

However, an analysis of the three RSEs' perspectives on their own PD reveals a 'top-down' rather than a self-directed, 'bottom-up' approach (Malderez, 2004a). The latter would start with them reflecting on their practice analytically and objectively and then referring to the literature.

Furthermore, there are some surprising inconsistencies in these RSEs' views. For example, 'B' discusses the value of a supportive motivating environment to encourage PD, but does not appear to create such an environment for his teachers. Though 'A' and 'C' seem to believe in the role of reflection on practice to support PD, neither relates reflection to their own behaviour or their own PD.

This suggests a need for further training, which could raise awareness of these issues and invite more searching reflection. For, as well as examining their prior knowledge and experiences, practitioners need to reflect on their attitudes and personal qualities, as Calderhead & Shorrock (1997) argue. Such training could help 'B', for example, realize that he views teachers' practice from only one angle,

judging that it is good or bad and assuming that he is right. Being more self-aware would help him.

Although my analysis is based on the views of only three RSEs, I can still raise issues from this small body of data, as Silverman (2000) argues while discussing how we can treat case studies. Clearly, the three RSEs showed uneven understandings of their own developmental needs. This finding suggests training in being more reflective in their own practice would help them.

5.4 Summary

Two important issues that emerge from this discussion are as follows: Firstly, educating teachers is like teaching, as McGrath (1997) argues, so not just imparting knowledge and skills, but involving attitudes, personal qualities and beliefs. Secondly, gaps between theory and practice in supervisory practices need to be closed. I will discuss these points at greater length in the next section.

6 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Various implications stem from the above findings, with regard to raising awareness of PD and encouraging reflective practice. I summarize these implications below.

Firstly, RSEs could engage in dialogic report writing, inviting comments from teachers after the PLD and incorporating these into the report writing process. Secondly, RSEs could engage in journal writing (Richards, 1998), sharing journal entries with colleagues to encourage deep analysis. Thirdly, occasional in-service training could be held for RSEs, based on pre-negotiated needs (Cook, 1993). These sessions could include pre-session questionnaires (Brown, 2004) and consciousness-raising activities to help practitioners explore their personal theories and beliefs (Borg, 1999). Fourthly, RSEs could join online associations to share ideas. Furthermore, they could conduct practitioner research. In addition, a professional development plan, as recommended by Clark (1992), could be developed and followed. Indeed, I have tried this myself, through exploring hidden beliefs, identifying goals, re-examining the familiar and recording the learning experience.

The above implications need to be set, though, within the limitations of my study. These relate partly to its small-scale nature, earlier discussed. My methodology, too, may have influenced the validity of the results. I chose not to ask RSEs directly about the way they conduct PLDs, preferring to infer this from their responses to related questions. Though I piloted the questionnaire, I regret now not asking the teachers 'why?' after the first question. This would have elicited their perceptions of why certain issues were discussed.

Clearly, further research is needed into how awareness of PD can be raised in my context and reflective practice encouraged. This will support growth. From conducting the research, I have learned the following: My understandings of how to stimulate PD through PLDs were quite vague before. I used to think I needed to help teachers reflect on what went right or wrong with their practice focusing on knowledge and skills only. Thus, I never thought of the role played by the teachers' personal qualities, beliefs and assumptions in affecting their practice. I was neither

helping my teachers question their personal qualities nor modelling reflective practice for them, because I lacked awareness myself. However, the process of doing this research helped me explore my practice. It brought my tacit personal qualities and beliefs to the surface and helped me analyse them critically. This will empower me to help others in the future.

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