

UNIT – III

Tools for Reflection

3.0 Introduction

In the previous unit we looked at planning, what planning is, the purposes of planning and the three important phases of planning. The idea was to familiarise yourselves with those details so that you could also undertake similar activities to make your teaching systematic and fruitful. In this unit our aim is to make you familiar with various tools of reflection with a view to helping you to use them when you plan and give various types of lessons, viz., grammar, vocabulary, reading, composition and speech. One of the tools that can help you reflect over your own ways of instruction and help you improve it, is journal writing. Let us now see how this can be done.

3.1 Journal Writing

Richards (1996), notes that a journal is a teacher's or a student-teacher's written responses to teaching events. In Journal writing, all the details about a completed lesson would be written. It would be a detailed account of what actually happened during the course of a lesson. Journal writing can provide you with an effective means of identifying variables that are important. It serves as a means of generating questions and hypotheses about learning processes and it enhances awareness about training / learning processes. Keeping journals serves two purposes, i.e. events and ideas that are recorded for the purpose of later reflection, the process of writing itself triggers insights about teaching.

Your journal writing will be about your routine and conscious actions in the classroom; conversations with pupils; critical incidents in a lesson; your personal lives as teachers; your belief about teaching; events outside the classroom that you think influence your teaching; your views about language teaching and learning.

You can ask yourself some reflective questions to guide your journal entries. The questions could be about the sessions, about the students and about oneself.

The following questions are sample questions that you could ask yourself in order to reflect over your own teaching:

1. What did I set out to teach?
2. Was I able to accomplish my goals?
3. What teaching materials did I use? How effective were they?
4. What techniques did I use?
5. What grouping arrangements did I use?
6. Was my lesson teacher-dominated?
7. What kind of teacher-student interaction occurred?
8. Did anything amusing or unusual occur?
9. Did I have any problems with the lesson?
10. What was the main accomplishment of the lesson?
11. Did I do anything differently than usual?
12. What kind of decision making did I employ?
13. Did I depart from my lesson plan? If so why? Did the change make things better or worse?
14. Which parts of the lesson were most successful?
15. Which parts of the lesson were least successful?

16. Would I teach the lesson differently if I taught it again?
17. Was my philosophy of teaching reflected in the lesson?
18. Did I discover anything new about my teaching?
19. What changes do I think I should make in my teaching?

Similarly, the following could serve you as sample questions to help you reflect about your students:

- 1) Did I teach all my students today?
- 2) Did students contribute actively to the lesson?
- 3) How did I respond to different students' needs?
- 4) Were students challenged by the lesson?
- 5) What do I think students really learned from the lesson?
- 6) What did they like most about the lesson?
- 7) What didn't they respond well to? etc.

In addition to asking questions of yourself about your teaching and about your students, you could ask some questions as follows to get to know yourself as a language teacher.

- 1) What is the source of my ideas about language teaching?
- 2) Where am I in my professional development?
- 3) How am I developing as a language teacher?
- 4) What are my strengths as a language teacher?
- 5) What are my limitations at present?
- 6) How can I improve my language teaching?
- 7) How can I help my students?
- 8) Are there any contradictions in my teaching?
- 9) What satisfaction does language teaching give me?

You will write journals on the completion of each lesson. The questions given above will help you in doing this. You will write all the details about the lesson completed and will go through the journals carefully. As a part of afterthoughts you could raise such issues as follows and try to find answers to them. This would provide you with better opportunities for further improvements.

❖ *Afterthoughts*

Finding suitable examples for presentation was a problem. I should have used more familiar examples like film stars, cricket players, etc.

I should have used some Gujarati for explaining a few things.

More time should have been spent for presentation.

At class IX level (Gujarati medium) communicative activities would be a problem, since the students do not have much English.

I should have completed the lesson in time, i.e., within forty minutes.

I thought I could not involve all the students. Many-a-time I involved only the first benches.

I need more competence in teaching grammar.

Your journal entry will reveal how you used your journal to describe, how you presented the teaching points, to identify some concerns you had about the lesson and to remind you of alternative procedures to use in future lessons. It would also reinforce the unique function of journal writing, viz., it enables you to examine your teaching in a way that is unavailable through other means. Just like

Journal writing, another tool that can help you reflect over your teaching is lesson report.

3.2 Lesson Report

As Richards (1996) notes, a Lesson Report is a structural inventory or list which enables teachers to describe their recollections of the main features of a lesson. The main purpose of a lesson report is to give you a quick and simple procedure for regularly monitoring what happened during a lesson. This means that you could get information regarding the duration of time spent on different stages of a lesson, the effectiveness of techniques used; etc. In that sense a lesson report is different from a lesson plan. A lesson plan describes what a teacher intends to do during a lesson, but a lesson report describes what actually happened in the lesson from the teacher's point of view.

An alternative approach to lesson reporting is simply for the teacher to spend a few minutes after the completion of a lesson. You have to use such questions as follows and find answers to them to get better insight into your teaching.

- 1) What were the main goals of the lesson?
- 2) What did the learners actually learn in the lesson?
- 3) What teaching procedures did I use?
- 4) What problems did I encounter and how did I deal with them?
- 5) What were the most effective parts of the lesson?
- 6) What were the least effective parts?

In order to make the lesson report effective, you could prepare lesson report forms. You may, for example, make a lesson report form for a grammar lesson, something similar to the following:

- 1) The main focus in today's grammar lesson was
 - a) Mechanics (e.g. punctuation and capitalization)
 - b) Rules of grammar (e.g. subject-verb agreement, use of 'be' forms)
 - c) Communicative use of grammar (e.g. correct use of the present perfect in a dialogue)
 - d) Other.
- 2) The amount of class time spent on grammar work was:
 - a) The whole class period
 - b) Almost all of the class period
 - c) Less than that (___ minutes)
- 3) I decided what grammar items to teach.
 - a) According to what was in the textbook
 - b) According to what was in the syllabus
 - c) Based on students' performance on a test
 - d) Based on students' errors in oral and written work
 - e) Other.
- 4) I taught grammar by :
 - a) Explaining grammar rules
 - b) Using visual aids
 - c) Presenting student mistake
 - d) Giving students exercises for practice from a textbook
 - e) Giving students practice exercises that I prepared

- 5) When assigning student work on grammar, I had students :
- a) Study rules of grammar
 - b) Practice exercises orally in class
 - c) Practice exercises for homework
 - d) Do exercises based on errors noted in their writing
 - e) Keep a personal record of the errors they make
 - f) Identify and correct grammar errors in writing samples
 - g) Identify and correct grammar errors in their own writing
 - h) Other.

In addition to judge the success of a lesson you could ask reflective questions such as :

- 1) What were the main goals of the lesson?
- 2) What did the learners actually learn in the lesson?
- 3) What teaching procedures did I use?
- 4) What problems did I face?
- 5) How did I deal with these problems?

As a result of such lesson reporting you would realise that it has given you more depth of understanding about your teaching. It would help you understand both your strong and weak points as a teacher. It would give you ample opportunity to improve day by day.

3.3 Audio or Video recording of lessons

Audio-visual recording are powerful instruments in the development of a teacher's self-reflective competence. The fullest account of a lesson is obtained from the actual recording of it, using an audio-cassette or video recorder. With a tape recorder or a video camera placed in a strategic place in a classroom, much of what happened in a lesson can be recorded.

One of the advantage of recording a lesson is that it allows choice of focus, it could be the teacher or a particular group of students. Another advantage is that the recording can be replayed and examined many times and the teacher can get the details of the lesson, such as the actual language used by him or her during a lesson. You could ask the following reflective questions after listening to the recording.

- 1) What was my teaching point?
- 2) Was my classroom language correct?
- 3) Did I use grammatically correct sentences?
- 4) Did I repeat certain words, phrases a number of times?
- 5) Was my pronunciation of difficult words correct?
- 6) Did I use correct intonation patterns?
- 7) Did I use more Gujarati words?
- 8) How was my body language?

❖ *Afterthoughts*

I thought I knew the correct pronunciation of words like respect (v), bear (v), wear (v), etc. I had problem with some of these words. I was not sure about different intonation patterns. I made mistakes in 'wh' questions, yes / no types questions, etc. Listening to audio-recording gave me clear picture about my strong and weak points.

Conclusion

By now you are familiar with audio-video recording, and now they could be used in your classrooms while you teach. You could listen to your own voice and could see how you teach.

3.4 Peer Observation

Like journal writing and lesson report, another tool that would help you reflect over your teaching is Peer Observation. Peer observation involves visiting a class to observe different aspects of teaching. Observation is a good tool for collecting information about teaching. Observation is viewed as a positive rather than a negative experience and the observer's function should be limited to that of gathering information. As an observer, you should not be involved in evaluating your peer's lessons. The lessons of peers could be observed with or without any structured checklists. In the checklist you have to include points such as the main stages of the lesson, focus, types of materials used, nature of language produced, treatment of learner's errors, teacher's roles, element of fun, involvement of the students, and curiosity on the part of the students. In addition to these points, you can express your views in a free manner. You could observe your peer's lesson and can find out whether warm up of a particular lesson is done properly, whether the techniques used are appropriate. You can also observe the language used by the peers, tools used for practice, drilling of words and structures, tools used for evaluation, exercises given for homework.

Lesson observation has mutual benefits; it helps the observer and the lesson giver. After the completion of the lesson you should share your points with the peer whose lesson you observed. This kind of sharing facilitates improvement in lesson giving.

❖ *Afterthoughts*

After having observed a lesson of one of your peers, you may, for example, reflect over the lesson as follows: I wanted to observe all the stages of the lesson but could note down points only about three

stages. I was slow in noting down points and I reached the class ten minutes late. The peer was not audible and hence I missed many points. Next time, I will be more serious and will go with the peer and use the entire time of forty minutes to observe the lesson. The next section of this unit deals with Action Research as a reflective tool.

3.5 Action Research

Action research is another tool that can help you reflect over your teaching and improve it. As Gregory (1998), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) note, teacher-initiated classroom investigation seeks to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning, and to bring about change in classroom practices. Action research typically involves small-scale investigative projects in the teacher's own classroom, and consists of a number of phases, which often recur in cycles. These cycles are planning, action, observation and reflection. As action research is one of the tools that helps you reflect over your own teaching and improve it, you need to know a bit more about each phase of it.

(i) *Planning*

At the planning stage, a teacher or group of teachers selects an issue or concern and that should be examined in detail. For example, a teacher may select a problem like excessive use of mother tongue for teaching English. This also involves the selection of a suitable procedure for collecting information about the topic. As a part of collecting information, recording of classroom lessons may be done. At this stage decisions regarding the method, ways of data collection, etc., will have to be taken.

(ii) *Action*

At this phase, an action plan to help bring the change in classroom behaviour will have to be developed. This means that a plan, for example, for reducing the excessive use of Gujarati will have to be developed and then this action plan should be carried out over a period of time.

(iii) *Observation*

This phase involves a detailed observation, monitoring and recording of the experiment conducted. This would enable the teacher to report the findings to others. Those involved in action research should also keep a detailed diary or journal.

(iv) *Reflection*

At the end of the action cycle, you should reflect critically on what has happened. You may ask a few questions like – (1) How effective were the changes? (2) What have been learned? (3) What are the barriers to changes? (4) How can one improve the changes one is trying to make? It is hoped, by now, you are quite comfortable with various tools of reflection. Moreover you will be in a position to use them for reflective purposes.

In the ensuing units, various aspects of instructional planning would be taken up one by one. The tools we have discussed in this unit would help you to reflect over each aspect of planning minutely. As a result, you would get more insight which would pave the way for improvement and amelioration of your competence in teaching and instruction.