

Chekhratova O. A.

PhD (Pedagogy),

Senior Lecturer of the Department of Pedagogy, Foreign Philology and

Translation

Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics

Kharkiv, Ukraine

REFLECTIVE INTERVIEWS AS A MEANS OF FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY AT PEDAGOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Training future specialists in an era of a student-centered approach, educators seek the methods and tools to make the teaching and learning process not only more efficient but also beneficial and interactive. What is more, in the modern reality of distance learning, education institutions have to implement innovative means to get feedback from their students in order to vary and develop their educational potential.

One of the primary tasks of higher education institutions is to develop students' learner autonomy thus providing them with the tools and strategies to develop their professional competencies, hard and soft skills, enhance the awareness of their personal and professional needs. An autonomous student will be able to implement the skills and knowledge gained at the university in their life-long learning: setting aims and finding the motivation to achieve them, developing skills of analysis and reflection necessary for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning [8, c. 210].

One of the means of ensuring learner autonomy is the reflection which serves as the impetus for the mechanisms of correction and self-correction [1, c. 112]. It will empower a learner's ability to critically analyze the educational process and to justify the choices and decisions made during studying.

Most scholars emphasize developing reflective skills vis writing, e.g. reflective essay, reflective journals, blogs, self-reports, language portfolio, etc. [2–4, 6, 9] but in a foreign language classroom there are other powerful tools for developing students'

reflection and communicative skills simultaneously, e.g. reflective discussions and interviews.

Having completed problem-solving tasks, students can be engaged in a reflective discussion to develop their skills of differentiating the factors of success and failure, self-assessment and self-correction, critical judgements, and adequate self-esteem [1, c. 146]. Having chosen a personal educational pathway, students are encouraged to participate in reflective interviews. If learners are equipped with theoretical knowledge on the question of autonomy and are eager to develop the skill, reflective interviews will assist their in-depth analysis of educational problems and will help find the approaches to ensure quality work [7, c. 3].

Teachers in the modern system of education require practical reflective skills to manifest their students' critical thinking and deep learning, flexibility in finding solutions to various challenges, readiness to open dialogue, and collaboration and personal responsibility for the decisions [4, c. 118].

To achieve this, higher education institutions should facilitate students' reflection during interviews in order to interconnect the educational, social, and personal impact of the teaching and learning process [5, c. 2].

To hold a successful reflective interview a facilitator has to ensure the following 4 steps [5]: give time to think, develop a relationship of trust, invite reflection, support the identification of solutions. It should be noted that some of the steps above cannot be achieved during one lesson/session. A mentor has to work hard to gain trust from the students, make them feel free and confident in the presence of a senior, be ready to open up and honestly confess to their educational problems and concerns.

To prepare for a reflective interview, we encourage an educator to consider the following issues (adapted from [7, c. 112]): What is the reason for conducting an interview (the end of a course, getting feedback on the assignment, preparatory discussion, course/topic issues, etc.)? Who would eagerly/reluctantly participate in an interview? Why/why not? What can be done to encourage students to take part in the activity? What are the criteria for question selection? Who is responsible for it? How many participants should be involved? Is it a group or an individual interview? What

background information do you need to conduct the interviews (age, academic achievements, test results/results of the previous reflective interview)? Will the interview be recorded? If so, how? What is the reason for recording it? Will the participants be able to reflect on their answers after some time?

In fostering learner autonomy reflective interviews become a powerful educational tool, and a facilitator, having answered the above-mentioned questions, can work out an action plan for the whole course, for a module, or a topic. Both teachers and students have to be prepared for reflective interviews as they are expected to trust and assist each other in order to resolve educational problems.

Preparing for the first reflective interview in a course at a pedagogical institution it is vital to keep in mind that future educators need to understand the purpose and peculiarities of developing learner autonomy, thus, a reflective interview will explain the essence of learner autonomy in the educational process, its characteristics, and factors. Students are expected to take part in determining why fostering learner autonomy is important for their future profession. It is appropriate to analyze some of the questions below:

1) What happens when a teacher does not possess the skills of learner autonomy and/or never implies the principles of it? (An expected answer: Students are not given the right to choose, and even if they are willing to be active participants in planning, assessing, and monitoring, they have no opportunity thus may lose study motivations).

2) What happens when a teacher does not have the skills of learner autonomy but requires it from the class? (An expected answer: Even if a teacher invites students to make choices about, for example, the content of the task, preference will be given to the options offered by the teacher, since the students' arguments may not be taken into account which may lead to decrease in motivation.)

3) What happens when a teacher actively uses reflection in their own professional activity? (An expected answer: A teacher performs a detailed analysis of the conducted classes and their relationships with students, can find drawbacks in the work, in the organization of the educational process; the results of such an analysis

can be beneficial for creating a favorable studying environment in the classroom, will work for increasing the efficiency of the classes).

4) What is the impact of planning and goal setting in the professional activities of a teacher? (An expected answer: A teacher who pays enough attention to planning will use their own potential and the potential of the students to the fullest; a teacher who, in defining goals, relies not only on their own pedagogical experience but also on the requests of the students, will be able to interest and motivate the learner to study).

5) Does implementing the principles of learner autonomy affect the increase in academic performance? (An expected answer: Applying the principles of learner autonomy can increase the level of internal motivation; the use of tasks that have been offered/prepared by students will ensure the learners' interest and will focus on their wishes; all of those things can contribute to increasing the level of students' academic performance).

During a reflective interview it is vital to familiarize students with the components of learner autonomy as the basis for further successful professional career development. In this way, the learners will work out the means of choosing studying strategies, the criteria for determining the level of learner autonomy, and the reasons for applying various techniques in a classroom.

It is suggested to discuss the learners' educational problems during individual reflective interviews and to resolve the following issues while working with a group: identify the group's goal for a course and let each learner set their own targets; choose the sequence of tasks depending on the topic/goal/the wishes; adapt the content of the educational material, add learners' own tasks; find ways to increase motivation and encourage students; analyze the issues related to the organization of the educational process.

The idea of using reflective interviewing offers a chance to support the participants of teaching and learning on the way of searching for the means of improving their mutual work. Nevertheless, conducting such interviews demands much reflection from a facilitator thus they have to practice self-analysis and self-

correction. We urge educators of all levels of education to consider implementing reflective interviews in their professional practice in order to prepare the learners for lifelong learning.

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