

Trudy Smith:

Hello, welcome to this week's NextSense Institute podcast. My name's Trudy Smith and I am your host for today. Really looking forward to this discussion with my colleague in the NextSense Institute, Alison Hawkins-Bond. Can you please introduce yourself to the audience, Alison?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

Hi Trudy. And thank you for everyone who's joining us today. So I'm a teacher of the deaf, my background. I've worked for over 30 years in the UK and Australia. I can't believe it's 30 years. I've worked in hearing units and mainstream inclusive settings, preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, and I've been lucky enough to work in all settings and also with students who use sign language. Before that I've had experiences well in early intervention services, so setting up telepractice services right back in 2005 with students and families all across Australia. And more recently, I've moved to a professional experience role with Macquarie University, and I'm able to work with teachers of the deaf and teachers of students who are blind or have low vision as well as allied health professionals, as part of the masters of disability studies. And I've been lucky enough recently to keep up my experience working with primary students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Trudy Smith:

Thanks, Alison. Now I know that you've just completed some research. Can you tell us what the focus of that research was please?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

Well, with any research, I think there's always things that we know, and there's things that we want to find out. So the focus of my research was looking at reflective practice in teachers of the deaf, particularly in teachers of the deaf in Australia. So what we do know is that self-monitoring through reflecting on your teaching practices has been recommended by ESOL for mainstream teachers. And there was also a study that was done in the UK in about 10 years ago, that was suggesting in programs that train teachers of the deaf, that questioning and reflecting and thinking about our teaching practices could be one way that teachers of the deaf could take action to try and address that existing gap that we do know is there between students who are hearing and students who have a hearing loss, and the gap in their social, academic, and language outcomes. And reflective practice might be a way that teachers of the deaf could actually have a positive impact on reducing that gap.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

But yeah, so there was some things we really wanted to find out. I was really interested in looking at ... Okay, they've suggested that reflection is important for teachers of the deaf, but what actually does reflection mean, because it's not agreed. And what does it mean for teachers of the deaf and specifically, are there some barriers and constraints that actually stop us from reflecting on our teaching. And then what factors are there that actually increase teachers of the deaf reflection and how might that lead them to taking some action to make changes to their teaching?

Trudy Smith:

Okay. So let's unpack that then. So when we talk about reflection, what are we talking about?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

Well, in the literature, there's a lot of different definitions of reflections, so that can actually make it really difficult for teachers to talk about what they're doing. It can make it really difficult for universities who have got teacher education programs to actually help support teachers of the deaf to learn how to reflect. And so what I did is looked at all the literature and tried to find out what does it say in terms of reflection in general. And reflection's really about thinking about one's own practice. So you might think about it as it occurs. So while you're teaching, and Sharon called that in action, and you also might think about reviewing and evaluating and maybe analyzing situations after an experience, and he called that on action. But thinking about your teaching doesn't actually guarantee that anything's going to change. So I was really interested in looking at was there any change in teacher's actions and their beliefs, and did they transfer the knowledge and insights that they'd got from thinking about their teaching to actually making changes in their teaching, and that's the reflective practice part.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

So the reflective practice part is actually transferring the knowledge from your thinking to make some changes to what you do in your daily teaching. So what happened is that we looked at the ways that teachers of the deaf described reflection and to really understand whether there was any differences between how they described it.

Trudy Smith:

And how do they describe it?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

Well, for teachers of the deaf, there was a number of different categories that we looked at in terms of some questionnaires. So we got information from teachers of the deaf all the way across Australia, in some questionnaires and some interviews. And then what happens is I looked at those to see what were really regularly occurring themes that came up. And there was a model that we looked at called GIS reflective practice model, and he has some different categories. And one of the categories is feelings. So we wanted to understand what did teachers of the deaf feel about when they were reflecting? So some of those feelings were really positive, so they felt satisfied and happy and fortunate and confident in what they were doing in their role. And then some of those feelings were negative. So they felt really unhappy, or concerned, or not affected, or quite isolated in some cases in their role.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

And then the next area that we wanted to look at was how were they evaluating their teaching when they were reflecting? So in terms of evaluation, that really was looking at unpacking what and why, and how things were going in a lesson. So teachers of the deaf reported that they informally made judgements about what was happening either during the lesson. So that could

be by on observation or responses of the students, or they might do it after the lesson. So they might look back on what was successful and then what needed attention.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

So when they moved past that evaluation stage to really analyze what was happening, some of the words that commonly came up was thinking about what was happening, to consider what they observed, or to review maybe programs and things that they'd put in place. And it was really exciting for me to see, okay, was this thinking actually leading to some kind of change in their teaching practices, and teachers of the deaf were coming to conclusions and questioning their practice in terms of what they needed to improve, what they needed to change or what adjustments they might make to their teaching.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

And out of the 22 participants that we had in the questionnaires, 19 of them made multiple references to focusing their reflection on their students and also on making improvements to their teaching. So that was really a really exciting outcome because in the literature, that clear link between reflective thinking and taking action, isn't always a guarantee and isn't always certain, but in teachers of the deaf, based on this sample, it is definitely linked.

Trudy Smith:

Interesting. Philosophically, why do you think reflection's so important for teachers of the deaf?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

Well, that was actually a question that we asked specifically, Trudy. So that's a really good point because we have read in the literature that it's important, but what is it specifically for us as teachers of the deaf that make it important? And it came down to the fact that our area of work is really unique. So the students that we work with are really unique. The settings that we work with are always changing. So there's not only the broader changes that are happening in education, but we as teachers of the deaf had to deal with changes in the technology that's available, so that keeps advancing and we have to keep on top of those changes. Communication approaches, they're adapting all the time as we get new knowledge and information. Each child's context is changing, so they might be in a mainstream, they might be moving out of specialist small placements into mainstream, so that's changing.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

And it was felt that for teachers of the deaf, reflection is really vital to what we do in our role, because we're having to adapt all the time to better meet the specific needs of the students that we work with. And as all of us would know, there's no one size fits all. It's not that we can pick up a lesson plan or a program that's been used for other students and just teach that the next lesson or the next year to a similar age group, because there is such a varied range in our students with late diagnosis, maybe the fact that they might have additional needs as well. So because of those differences in the students, us needing to have variations in the programs to meet their individual needs, to give individual responses to students. We have to constantly monitor their progress so that we can support them in new ways. And that means that we have

to stay really up to date and make sure that we are not using ineffective and out of date practices.

Trudy Smith:

Sure. Given the nature of the work of teachers of the deaf, I'm sure you must have found some barriers that actually inhibit teachers of the deaf from reflecting on their teaching practice?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

Yeah. In the literature, there's lots of information from English as a second, English as a foreign language teachers. They'd looked at what factors were barriers to them reflecting on their practice, but there was actually no research available for what teachers of the deaf, specifically teachers of the deaf who are in schools and in the role, find the barriers to reflecting. And so we looked at all the different information that was provided and there came out as two main categories that actually were barriers to teachers of the deaf reflecting. And some of you who might have come to the Itinerant Teachers of the Deaf conference a few years ago that we had in Sydney, we started to talk about what is it that stops us from reflecting. And one of the main things is time, which I'm sure won't be a surprise.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

So teachers are telling us that there's not enough time to reflect. I'm really busy when I'm traveling between different classrooms. When I'm traveling between different schools or I go and see families in their homes, I might have lots of paperwork that I'm having to fill in for programs or monitoring progress or assessments. And just the daily demands of teaching means that the time is really limited for teachers of the deaf to reflect. So that was a real barrier that stopped them. And the other area that came up was the difficulty with collaborating with colleagues. Teachers talked about there's, there's not enough relief time. There's not enough non-contact time. If there is relief time, if I'm in a school with other teachers of the deaf, I don't get that relief time at the same time as them. So I can't collaborate then.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

I might be in a team that's spread over a really large geographical area. So that makes it really difficult for me to collaborate with colleagues. Or if I go to meetings, if I'm working in a mainstream school, a lot of those meetings talk about things that are not specific to students who are deaf and hard of hearing. So they've been talking about feeling quite isolated from their colleagues and not being able to have that contact either with other teachers of the deaf, or with other allied health professionals.

Trudy Smith:

Yeah. Interesting. So on the flip side, what were the factors that increased teachers of the deaf likelihood to engage in reflective teaching practices?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

This was a really interesting point because there was a huge amount of data to look through. And interestingly, what I was able to find out was that the factors which actually constrained teachers of the deaf from reflecting had a commonality with the factors that actually increased or

enabled them to reflect. So we found out that time was actually an enabler to reflecting. So teachers who were able to set up a routine time to reflect, found that really effective. So they might allocate time after a lesson to reflect on what had happened and try and make some notes so that they could remember that for next time. So that's called reflection on action, or they might reflect before they were planning a lesson. So that's called reflection for action. So they were thinking ahead, based on what had happened in the previous lesson, okay, what worked, what do I need to change?

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

The other factor which helped increase their reflection was to seek out a colleague that they could actually reflect with. So this is called a critical friend. So not as in criticizing, but actually somebody that can question and ask you what you are doing. And it could be a teacher of the deaf, or it could be another allied health professional, or even if you are working in a class with language models or teaching assistants, so somebody that could actually ask you why you are using certain approaches. And then that critical friend was really helpful in talking through, okay, what worked and what didn't work. And more importantly, why that didn't work.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

So it's really important to think through why something was effective or not effective, and then to have a think about what needs to change and what alternatives you might have that you could do either in a similar situation next time, or with that student or those group of students in the future. Those kind of questions are things you can ask yourself, but it's really helpful to have a colleague or somebody else that you can mirror off and go through those questions together.

Trudy Smith:

Sure. As with all research, I'm sure that you found some surprises in the results.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

There was. And the biggest surprise was the difference between the questionnaire results and what we found out in the interviews. So in the questionnaire results, we asked teachers to think back on a time when they had reflected on their practice. And what we found out was that the teachers all talked about reflecting after the lesson, reflecting before they were planning the next lesson, but there was only one teacher out of all 22 of them who actually made any mention of reflecting on their practice during the lesson or the session that they were teaching.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

This was really interesting because if I talk to people incidentally, they would say, yeah, yeah, I'm always reflecting on what's happening in my lessons. And when we talked to the teachers in the interviews, they were able to give us numerous examples of when they reflected whilst they were teaching. So it seems that maybe we're not so conscious of what happens whilst we're teaching. And perhaps we need a person to talk through that and bring out some of those ideas of what happened. The teachers in the interviews shared some really great strategies of how they reflect in the lesson. And so I would love to come back and share another time what some of those strategies were that really helped them reflect.

Trudy Smith:

And we will definitely be bringing you back to find out some more of those. This has been such a really interesting introduction to your research, and we will be unpacking a lot more of it, but thank you for doing this work, Alison. I think this is important questions that we should be asking about, professional practice of teachers, in particular teachers of the deaf. So thank you for doing this work and thank you for being with me today.

Alison Hawkins-Bond:

And thanks, Trudy, for inviting me, because I'd just like to say that we are breaking ground here in information that we are finding out about teachers of the deaf reflective practice that I think will be relevant for colleagues overseas as well as throughout Australia and perhaps even not specifically just teachers of the deaf. So I'd really like to thank those who participated in my study, particularly those from South Australia and Western Australia, which was the focus of this group. And we worked with a range of different services, including telephone, speech, and hearing. So I really hope that what I've shared today is a true reflection of the insights that those teachers wanted to share with other amazing professionals that we're a part of. So thank you.

Trudy Smith:

Thank you. Thank you everyone for being with us. And we look forward to joining us next time. Take care.