

LEARNING TO TEACH THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract: *The paper explores how student teachers learn to be reflective classroom practitioners by understanding the meaning they attach to the term 'reflective practice', and subsequently how they put that meaning into practice in a teacher education programme. The two dimensions of reflective practice being investigated are: student teachers' interpretation of reflective practice, and their individual experience of being a reflective practitioner based on this unique understanding. In teaching, the reflective practitioner model encourages student teachers to integrate themselves in the real world of practice by being aware of and reflecting on their own values, beliefs, thoughts and actions in making classroom decisions, and in engaging and dealing with the complexities that the real world of classroom poses rather than applying the educational knowledge and theories they learned unquestionably. Although there are well-established literature that supports the rationale for the reflective practitioner model in teacher education, there are also debates about the lack of understanding of this notion which affects how student teachers engage in reflective practice. Interview data suggest that student teachers' perceived importance of reflective practice is influenced by the varied opportunities provided to them. Their experience in making situational judgements and depth of reflection are manifested as a result of critical interaction with various stakeholders. The understanding of reflective practice is important for educators and curriculum designers in general to develop effective reflective practitioners in a teacher education programme.*

Keywords: *Reflective Practice, Reflective Practitioners, Reflection, Teacher Education*

Introduction

In principle, teaching is simple. A teacher acquires sufficient knowledge about a topic and conveys the information to a group of students. In practice, teaching is anything but simple. Even the most experienced teachers are constantly challenged with the dilemmas of teaching. Oftentimes, this is due to the conflicting differences between what the teachers were taught to do during teacher training and what they experience in the real world of practice.

In universities where teachers are trained, problems are managed through implementing research-based theories and techniques. However, in the real practice of teaching, problems are usually messy, confusing and incapable of technical solution. Schön (1983) describes this real world setting as the “swampy lowlands” where the greatest human concern lies, compared to the irony of the situation in the “high grounds” (the universities where practitioners are trained) where the contexts are relatively insignificant. The practitioner is confronted with a choice: Shall one remain on the high ground where relatively unimportant problems can be solved with reference to theories and according to standards of rigor, or shall one descend to the swamp of important problems where one cannot be rigorous in any describable way?

Student teachers are often confronted with this predicament when they begin to engage in professional practice through practicum. This is when they experience the complex interplay of theories and practice. The tension between theoretical knowledge and practice exists due to the conflict of personal values, goals, intentions and interests in dealing with the multitude of variables in teaching. Thus the deliberation involved in making the “right” decision is mostly subjective and personal. Loughran (1996: 3) argues that understanding the relationship between teaching and learning may influence practice, and the more deliberately a teacher considers his or her actions the more difficult it is to be sure that there is one right approach to teaching, or teaching about teaching. This process of examining oneself is an essential part of reflective practice. It involves a critical inquiry into one’s beliefs, values, thoughts and experiences. It helps the practitioner to identify and learn about who they are in the context of what they do or intend to do, consequently bridges the gap between learning (what they know) and practice (how they do it).

Many teacher education curriculums are developed based on the reflective practitioner model. The reflective practitioner model encourages student teachers to integrate themselves in the real world of practice by being aware of and reflecting on their own values, beliefs, thoughts and actions in making classroom decisions, and in engaging and dealing with the complexities that the real world of classroom poses rather than applying the educational knowledge and theories they learned unquestionably. Johns (2017) described reflective practice as an opportunity created to learn through experience to reveal the very depth of professional artistry as education must now radically shift to ways of learning and knowing that value and nurture the intuitive rather than skid along the technical surface of things. Yet, he cautions that if we are not aware, reflective practice can skid along the surface of things.

Extensive studies on reflective practice in teacher education indicate that it improves pedagogical practices (Christie & Menter, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Johns, 2017; Tryggvason, 2009). Nevertheless, there are still controversy with regards to its interpretation among practitioners. In general, there appears to be a lack of conceptual clarity on the meaning of reflective practice in teacher education (Johnson, 1994; Lee, 2002; Pedro, 2005; Sparks-Langer, 1992; Zeichner & Liston, 1987), thus making it a problematic and puzzling concept. The interpretation of reflective practice and what outcomes should follow critically influence a student teacher’s experience in becoming a reflective practitioner. Several studies have concluded that, due to the lack of understanding of reflective practice, student teachers are unable to move beyond superficial teaching toward using more sophisticated skills to promote effective learning within the learning environment (Goh & Wong, 2014; Too, 2013; Yee, Tina & Abdullah, 2017). As such, the two dimensions of reflective practice being investigated are: student teachers’ interpretation of reflective practice, and their individual experience of being a reflective practitioner based on this unique understanding. By providing the accounts of the participants’ interpretation and experience in reflective practice, we hope that this study will

improve the way teacher educators facilitate reflective practice and advance the development of teacher education curriculum in general.

Before introducing the study and discussing the main findings, the relevant literature on reflective practice in teacher education are reviewed.

Reflective Practice in Teacher Education in Malaysia

The approaches to teacher education in Malaysia appear to shift from the technical-rational model to the reflective practitioner model, mirroring the practices in Western countries (Goh & Blake, 2015; Lee, 2004). In the reflective practitioner model, student teachers should be provided with opportunities to observe experienced teachers teaching and be involved in a wide range of school activities to understand teaching itself, and reflect critically on their practice. This is commonly achieved through teaching practicum where, similar to fieldwork experiences, student teachers observe and participate in the teaching and learning process where they assume the role of experienced classroom teachers. This practical element is pivotal in any teacher education programme as it a platform upon which student teachers develop and hone their reflective practice skills.

Despite the shift towards the reflective practitioner model there appears to be some limitations with regards to the implementation of reflective practice in teacher education. As an important avenue for reflective practice, teacher education programmes in Malaysia appear to have a limited practical component in comparison to top-performing education systems (“Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025,” 2013). In the practical component or otherwise known as practicum or teaching practice, student teachers can practice their skills in schools under the guidance and supervision of an experienced teacher. According to the programme structure recommended in the Education Programme Standards (EPS), only 7-12% of the credit hours in the bachelor’s degree programme are allocated for professional practice (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2014). According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025, top-performing teacher education programmes at the National Institute of Education in Singapore and the Melbourne Graduate School of Education in Australia allocate around 40% of the course time to this component (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). These numbers suggest that there is a lack of opportunities to critically and continuously engage in reflective practice through teaching practicum in the course of a teacher education programme in Malaysia.

Griffiths (2000) argues that, although there is a general assumption that reflection is a valuable process because it brings about changes in teachers' professional practice, it is often taken for granted rather than made explicit. In this regard, several research (Afonso, 2001; Britzman, 1986; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Mitchell & Weber, 1996; Shannon & Crawford, 1998) have suggested that, despite an appreciation of the potential value of reflective practice, many student teachers choose not to reflect on their practice constructively and critically, preferring to fall back on preconceived understandings of how they and their pupils should conduct themselves in the classroom.

The central goal of reflective practice in teacher education is to allow student teachers’ to reason about why they employ certain instructional strategies and how they can improve their teaching to have a positive effect on students. Therefore, it is recommended that student teachers engage in reflective activities not only to better learn new ideas but also to sustain professional growth after leaving the program (Lee, 2005). Even though a teacher education curriculum is underpinned by the reflective practitioner model, there seems to be an underlying

assumption that student teachers will automatically reflect on their practices. Reflective practice is a skill that needs to be acquired by learning and not by automatic occurrence. Yang (2009) argues that critical reflection does not come naturally to most teachers. Therefore, appropriate opportunities for reflection should be provided to student teachers to develop reflective skills. Critical reflection needs to be a central part of student teacher's early classroom experience, in order to ensure that practice produces new learning rather than merely confirming existing understandings and position(ing)s.

A study by Lee (2002) on the understandings of reflection held by teacher educators, mentor teachers and student teachers in a teacher training college in Malaysia suggests that there is a lack of conceptual clarity on the meaning of reflective practice. As a result, meanings of reflection that were developed and used by supervisors and student teachers were "layman views of reflective practice" (p. 210). These layman views of reflective practice were limited to the student teachers' focus on technical concerns in their classroom teaching. This overemphasis on teaching problems and issues hindered student teachers from deliberating on other aspects of teaching with their supervisors. (Lee, 2004). In light of this issue, Johnson (1994, p.441) have suggested that student teacher's prior beliefs and dispositions should be worked upon before they have had "a chance to crystallize through the process of teaching experience".

The concerns raised from the review of literature on reflective practice in teacher education in Malaysia suggest a more detailed inquiry into the interpretation of reflective practice among student teachers, and their experiences in being a reflective practitioner. Reflective practice theories are referred to guide this study and used as a lens to interpret the data.

Theories in Reflective Practice

Reflective practice theories are derived from the seminal writings of Schön's (1983) and the work of Rodgers (2002), both of whose thinking is strongly influenced by Dewey (1933), the originator of the concept of reflective practice. The perspectives of reflective practice in this study are twofold: (1) the interpretation of reflective practice, and (2) the experience of reflective practice based on this unique understanding. These perspectives are derived from the notion that student teachers' experiences in reflective practice are influenced by the individual meaning they attach to it.

With regards to the interpretation of reflective practice, Rodgers (2002) have described four problems associated with the lack of clear understanding of reflection. Firstly, it is unclear how systematic reflection is different from other types of thought. For example, if a teacher wants to inquire about her practice, what should she do first? Secondly, what qualifies as evidence of reflection? As reflection is a skill that is vaguely defined (Rodgers, 2002), it raises questions like what reflection looks like and what are the criteria that guide its assessment. Thirdly, without a clear picture of what reflection is and how it looks like, it is difficult to talk about it. Rodgers (2002) claims that practitioners often find themselves using terms that are common but hold different meanings or are different but have overlapping meanings such as reflection, inquiry, critical thinking and metacognition. Finally, without a clear sense of reflection, it is difficult to study the effects of reflective practice in teacher education on student teachers' practice and their students' learning.

Using the theoretical underpinnings of Dewey's (1933) reflective thinking framework in relation to its significance within initial teacher education, Rodgers (2002) identified four principles of meaningful reflection, which she contended, clarifies reflective strategies:

1. Reflection as Connection: Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas.
2. Reflection as Systematic & Disciplined: Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific enquiry.
3. Reflection as Social Pedagogy: Meaningful reflection needs to happen in a community, in conversation and interaction with others.
4. Reflection as an Attitude towards Change: Reflection is not only cognitive but affective, involving attitudes such as openness, curiosity, and a readiness to reconsider long-held ideas about oneself and the world. It requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.

Schön (1983) built on Dewey's work and linked reflection more solidly to professional development and professional practice. Schön claims that by using reflection, practitioners can make explicit, hidden (tacit) knowledge; the practical knowledge of action that is central to the work of practitioners. He coins the term 'reflective practicum' as the framework for students learning by doing with the assistance of professionals as coaches. This term is directed against 'technical-rationality' as the grounding of professional knowledge. In the context of teacher education, Schön's theoretical position guides the notion that student teachers learn to teach by teaching, by examining how teachers interact with their experiences in order to learn from them. His theory extends from distinguishing two very different forms of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action; one on intuitive decisions and the other on retrospective thinking.

The distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action "separates thinking during practice from thinking after or before" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, p. 294). The concept "reflection-in-action" is invoked to refer to the active and non-propositional processes by which new knowing-in-action is developed (Munby, 1989). Reflection-in-action, which can be described as 'thinking on our feet', involves looking to our experiences, connecting with our feelings, and attending to our theories in use during practice. It entails building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding. "Reflection-on-action" refers to the retrospective thinking on practice - of our actions and why we acted as we did, and so on. In so doing we develop sets of questions and ideas about our activities and practice. This helps practitioners build upon previous experiences and scenarios.

These works of Rodgers (2002) and Schön (1983) will be referred to to offer ways of looking at and examining reflective practice and the practice of reflective teaching among student teachers.

Methodology

Five student teachers were interviewed to examine their understanding of and experience in reflective practice in their initial teacher education experience. The participants in this study are in their second or third year who have had at least two semesters of clinical experience in teaching. These opportunities allow students to make sense of who they are as a teacher and to reflect on themselves as they experience teaching.

The primary data collection method is through semi-structured interviews in which a series of questions were developed to elicit responses from the participants. These interviews were conducted in informal one-on-one sessions with individual student teachers using open-ended questions. The interview is guided by these questions:

1. What does “reflective practice” mean to you?
2. What are the opportunities provided to you in relation to “reflective practice” in this programme?
3. What are your experiences in being a “reflective practitioner”?
4. What are the factors that affects/influences your experiences?
5. Do you think that this notion of “reflective practice” is important? Why or why not?

The responses to those questions were analysed in which the contextual data are put into themes and categories.

Findings

The Student Teachers’ Interpretation of Reflective Practice

From the interviews conducted, it was inferred by the student teachers that their understanding of reflective practice is centred around two themes, which are Retrospective and Introspective.

Category 1a: Retrospective Notion of Reflective Practice

This category represents views where the student teachers’ recall past situation or experience of teaching and placements in schools, in which they learnt from. For example, ST4 referred to reflective practice as “an opportunity to think back about a matter or subject and see how much I am able to recall the information.” (ST4). While ST4 focused on recalling experiences and information, ST2 on the other hand indicated that reflection is focusing on skills. He mentioned, “A time to reflect on my skills” (ST2)”. Both these responses seemed to be only skewed to the retrospective theme, where reflective practice is perceived as recalling past experiences and skills gained. However, these are good evidence that the student teachers are finding a balance between practice with the theories they acquired, consequently involve recalling past information, and reflect on the skills gained for their practice.

Category 1b: Retro-Introspective Notion of Reflective Practice

This category presents a more wholesome view on reflective practice, where respondents related their past experiences, examine themselves from those experience and identify areas that they can improve on in the future. ST1, for example, quoted as saying:

“Reflective practice is a practice that helps me to improve on my own teaching practice through experience and reflection. This includes reviewing the lesson that I have carried out, self-assess the effectiveness of my own teaching and then consider the teaching methods that should be reused as well as new teaching strategies that should be incorporate to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.” (ST1)

ST1 inferred that she bridges what she had learnt from her past experience with what she is practicing and how else can she improve her lessons in the future. Introspection of her capabilities in discovering more effective pedagogical skills seemed to be the focus on what she intend to improve on. Her retro-introspective view of reflective practice is also supported by ST3, where she concurs that “*Reflective practice means studying about a particular topic with the aim of reflecting back to improve your own practice in the future*”. While different words were used to articulate what the notion of reflective practice is to her, a dichotomy of being retrospective and self-examine was obvious in ST4’s understanding of reflective practice. ST5 too provided a similar notion, with the following response:

“Reviewing significant events of the day and thinking about why I made certain decisions, how I reacted, putting myself in the shoes of students or other teachers,

what I've learnt and what steps can be taken to improve the situation next time"
(ST5)

The response given by ST5 too, reflects well what reflective practice is according to Johns (2017), where he described the process of self-assessment including one's thoughts and actions. With such reflective inquiry into oneself, ST5 regarded that she will then make a more informed judgement about how to react and improve certain situations in the future.

In conclusion, there are two ways of how reflective practice is being perceived by the student teachers, in which both themes highlighted that the student teachers bring to their awareness the experiences and skills they had during their school placements, as well as the knowledge they gained from their teaching preparatory program. With these experiences then, student teachers become introspective of themselves and are able to engage in a cyclical process of self-improvement towards becoming reflective teachers.

The Opportunities for Reflective Practice

Given that experience plays a crucial part in developing practitioners who are reflective, it is essential that the student teachers are provided with much opportunities for them to reflect. This subheading presents findings on the right circumstances given to student teachers which allow them to be reflective of their practice.

Category 2a: School Placement

Respondents inferred that the school placements that they have experienced played a crucial role in providing them opportunities to gain the theory-enriched practical knowledge. ST1 in particular, had cited the experience of being placed in various schools through the expansive practicum model, where she had "to observe how each school functions as a whole, to observe how professional teachers teach...which include the teaching strategies that they use, the ways feedback is given, the types of assessment and the behavioural management strategies they apply to keep the classroom in order... and to plan lessons together with them" (ST1). ST2 and ST5 too concurred with ST1 that the placement in schools were the main factor which provided opportunities for them to reflect on their practice. One of such experience is when they were placed as interns in high schools in Japan. Where they had a chance to look into how they are able integrate their understanding of 'self' into the real world practice. This is evident by the following excerpt from the interviews:

"It is through these experiences in schools that I was able to reflect on my observation, to examine and question my own teaching practice. This had helped me to deepen my knowledge on teaching, expand my teaching skills and incorporate new ways of teaching into my practice."(ST1)

Besides being placed in schools, one of the opportunities which the respondents referred as helpful in helping them to be more reflective is the Action research module. Being a final-year module, student teachers are to carry out a classroom-scale research and make empirical judgement about their teaching. ST3 made a reference to how this opportunity allowed her to be more critical about her potential.

"The subject action research provides reflective practice as we get to reflect on a specific intervention, and carry out in an actual school setting to experiment the effectiveness of it."
(ST3)

Category 2b: Taught modules

Consistent with the learning outcomes of this teacher preparatory program, one of the respondents highlighted how learning took form in a reflective way for her too because she saw the modules taken up by her as opportunities for her to reflect on what has been learnt, and how can she apply those theories in her practice or in the future. She mentioned,

“Most of the modules that I have taken in this programme gave me the opportunity to reflect about what was taught. Some were in written form while others required me to present my reflections verbally. These reflections surely forced me to think thoroughly about a matter which lead me to greater and deeper understanding.”(ST4)

All in all, all the respondents had identified that the modules and school placements have enabled them the capacity to reflect, learn and relearn about themselves. By leveraging on the platforms like school experience, research-informed teaching and theoretical modules on education, the data inferred that the student teachers has been able to be more critical and reflective about themselves, building a more concrete image of ‘self’ as future teachers.

The Development of Reflective Practitioner

The third question sought to find out how the journey has been for the student teachers in developing themselves as reflective practitioners. The respondents described incidents, strategies as well as struggles that they have to go through to be more reflective about their practice. The categories here are in reference to the agents which was mentioned by the respondents as helpful in the development of oneself in becoming more reflective.

Category 3a: Teacher Educator

ST1 in sharing her experience, highlighted how she waded the habit of merely describing experiences to be a person who is more reflective. Much of such assistance were offered by her lecturers.

“My experiences in being a reflective practitioner was not easy. It took me a while to truly understand what reflection means and how to be a reflective practitioner...[sic] Initially I thought that reflection is all about describing what I have observed in the school. However, after completing a few school placements and professional practice papers, and after getting feedback from my lecturers, I started to understand how reflection should be done. To be a reflective practitioner, I have to think about how I feel after the teaching experience, I have to evaluate and analyze my teaching experience and finally come to a conclusion by thinking about how can I make my teaching more effective.”(ST1)

ST1’s response is consistent with what has been proposed by Cheng et al. (2010, in Higgs 2013) in encouraging guided experience-based practice for the student teachers by teacher educators. While developing reflective thinking can be a challenge for those who are inexperienced, the provision of practicum enabled the student teachers to bridge their learnt theory to their practice.

Category 3b: Mentor Teachers

Other responses quoted the support and supervision by other experienced teacher as crucial in developing themselves as reflective practitioners. The experienced teacher who are normally assigned to them as mentors, provided motivation, strategies and the dialogic conversations between theories and practice that they needed. These teachers also demonstrated the different ways of how teaching can be done differently and introduced a different paradigms to how

teaching was normally perceived by them. Citing ST5, *“I’ve had to interview other teachers and see that they don’t hold the same principles that I had been taught in classes.”*. ST2 concurred that mentors plays an important role by mentioning *“The best opportunity provided was ALT (Assistant Language Teacher Program) in Japan, where I got to teach & not shadow a teacher under the supervision of a mentor.”*

Category 3c: Critical Events

ST5, learning from her capacity of being a reflective practitioner, came to realised that critical incidents made her noticed that she has to take down notes now and then during school placements so that she can ponder on when she has more time to reflect. One of such example was articulated in her response, as followed.

“When I have had to make notes on the spot about things that stand out to me. This is so I don’t forget about it later. For example, the way the teacher responded to a student’s behaviour at a certain moment.” (ST5)

The experience of developing the capacity of reflective practitioner also involved one of them making scheduled interventions on issues they identified in class. ST5 described such event:

“I looked at at-risk students in the class and experimented with certain interventions for a week. Then I’d try different things and record his/her responses weekly. The student refused to participate in classes and would voluntarily ignore everything in class. Interventions included giving encouragement, acting as a friend, providing stationery that was missing.” (ST5)

From the responses, it was evident that the experiences of developing reflective thinking about their practice were not as instantaneous as they thought it may be. Few of them saw that the agents like their mentor, lecturers, strategies and the critical events during their school placements as an essential part of that development. ST4 summed these experiences up by iterating on how the growth process has been a great learning curve for her, as followed.

“I truly enjoy the experience in being a reflective practitioner as it helps me not take things for granted. As I look back, I learn, improve and progress. I believe that by being a reflective practitioner, I have gained a tremendous amount of benefits such as wanting to know reasons, finding out ways to correct previous mistakes and motivate myself in achieving greater success.” (ST4)

Factors Influencing Experiences

Given that the opportunities offered to the student teachers are favorable in developing their capacity for reflective learning and thinking, it is also paramount to understand the factors influencing their experience for such growth to happen. Question 4 was asked to probe deeper the different variables which have affected the student teachers experience in becoming a reflective practitioners.

Category 4a: Time

One common factor that was brought up by the respondents was the duration of school placement. All the respondents raised up the issue of how time and consequently, space had been rather limited and restricted for them to get sufficient information for in-depth reflection to take place. One of the respondents claimed that:

“Very often, I was placed in a school for a maximum of 1 to 2 weeks, which I think it is insufficient for me to understand the school, and to collect whatever information that I need to collect. This will affect my reflection as well because when I have insufficient experience, I am unable to reflect in depth. I personally

think that I need at least 3 to 4 weeks to gain sufficient teaching experience.”
(ST1).

This response is congruent with what was mentioned by ST5 too about the same factor: *“(More) time (will provide) more space for me to reflect different ways-interviewing, comparing student, comparing teachers and get a more thorough understanding. If time is too short, my reflections would be rather shallow because they were mostly made from assumption.”*(ST5). The student teachers’ predicament about having ample time to gain data and make well-informed justification is understandable as in-depth reflection demands strong case of reasoning. As Lee (2000) has put forth, reflective practice is a learnt behavior that requires time and practice to develop and improve, as it involve a cyclical process of constant self-improvement.

Category 4b: Stakeholders

It is also interesting to note that much of the factors that influence the student teacher’s reflective practice centred around the notion of other stakeholders, like their mentors and students. For example, ST1 quoted in saying

“The main factor that influences my experiences is my mentor that is assigned to me. I personally would hope for a mentor that gives me opportunities to plan lesson and conduct lesson myself rather than wanting me to observe lessons all the time. I understand that everything starts from observation, but for myself, I learn better when I do it myself. In addition, I appreciate mentors who take time to give me feedback and advice, this way, I can use his/her comments as a guide to reflect on my experience.”(ST1).

The style of mentoring also was brought up by ST5 where she agreed that such variation does change the way she views various occasions in and beyond the classrooms. This is because *“mentors come from different cultural backgrounds, have different philosophies, and so have different pedagogical styles. Some teachers were more hyped up, some were mellow, some were very authoritative.”* (ST5)

On discussing how student’s ability influence the depth of their reflection, ST5 regarded that *“most reflections seemed to be influenced by students’ proficiency in English. I’d say certain things and they wouldn’t understand and so they would display behaviour that could be representative of their response to the content of my instruction/question, or their lack of the language.”* (ST5)

From the responses, student teachers do identify the need for more time to engage with parts of the school support system, as well as interact effectively with the key stakeholders, namely mentor teachers and students for in-depth reflection to take place. Such understanding is also derived with them identifying these stakeholders as a manifestation of how they perceive themselves as reflective practitioners. Feedback and input from ‘the others’, in this case, mentors and students, provide significant impact on the way they make sense of themselves and their practice.

The Perceived-Importance of Being A Reflective Practitioner

The requirement of being a reflective practitioner in this teacher preparatory program is embedded in various assignments given to the students, in which they need to submit either verbal or written form of their reflections on modules they learnt or from their school-placement experience. It is also important to see if these explicit act of getting the student

teachers to reflect deeply about their practice results in an implicit understanding of its importance as future practitioners. The final research question intended to probe on this deeper, by looking at the perceived-importance of being reflective in their practice as student teachers. In a consensus, all respondents mentioned that being reflective is important and described how have such skill develop them as a better teacher thus far. The two categories gained from analysis of the data, which are Prescience and Professional development.

Category 5a: Prescience

This category describes understanding which looks at reflective practice as an important skill that they need to develop for event that they anticipate will happen in the future, and in this case, being a teacher.

In ST1's response, she mentioned

“Definitely yes. [sic] It will help me to improve the kind of education I will provide to my students. I would say, there is no point experiencing something if we don't reflect and learn from that experience. A teacher who never bother to reflect on his/her own teaching practice will forever be at the same stage, without improving and moving forward.” (ST1)

What has been explained by ST1 above showed that the act of being reflective mould the characterization of a teacher that she will be in the future. This is also consistent with what ST3 brought to the fore, saying *“it deepens our understanding and gives us a better picture of how to handle different situations in the future.”*

Category 5b: Professional Development

Another notion about the importance of being reflective is that it brings about the continuous improvement of oneself, where the student teacher rethinks about the philosophy and values that she holds. Understandably, such beliefs and values changes over time as growth takes place, hence, taking time to reflect constantly is viewed as an important thing to do on a daily or weekly basis. This is supported by ST5, as followed.

“It helps to end the day/week with reflection because it is a chance to think through certain events, instead of letting it slip away. It reinforces the theories and strategies and principles we've learnt in classes. I also find like to read back on my reflections a year ago and see how much or how little I have improved since then. It allowed me to think about my philosophy and beliefs of education.” (ST5)

ST4 also cited as saying how reflective practice aids in continuous self-betterment.

“Yes, it is definitely important. This is because, it helps an individual to think back about an information, improve and to continue learning for self-improvement.” (ST4)

ST1 was in a consensus with both ST5 and ST4 by mentioning how the skill of being reflective will benefit her professional growth:

“Especially in the field of education, we as educators, ought to improve ourselves constantly. One way to do so is through reflective practice that helps us to change the way we usually perceive teaching and our role as a teacher. I felt that reflection helps me to develop continual changes in my knowledge, skills and attitudes towards teaching. This had and it will continue to benefit my professional growth as a teacher.”

The perceived understanding on reflective practice as valuable infer that the student teachers saw the purpose of developing such skill prepares them to be better teachers. They understood

that reflective practice is not just about skills acquisition or learning theories, but essentially is centred on the constructive reflection of their personal experience on learning how to teach.

Discussion on findings

These findings have led to a model of reflective practice for teacher educators and student teachers which are threefold: (1) The role of reflective practice among student teachers, (2) Guided opportunities for reflective practice, and 3) Depth of reflection.

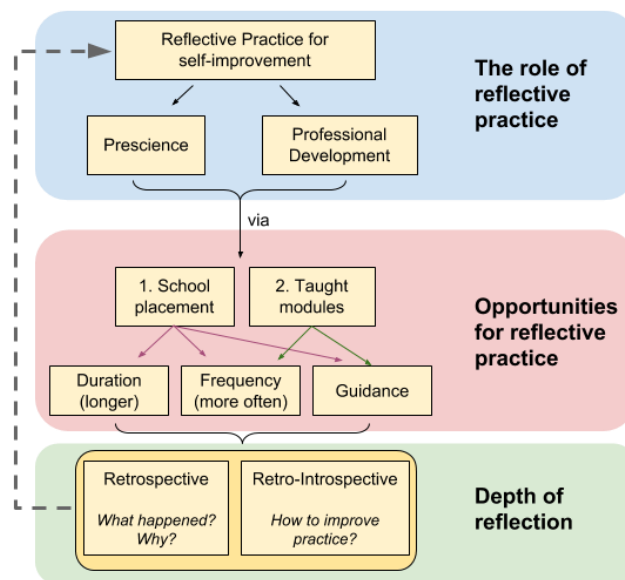


Figure 1: Model of Reflective Practice for Student Teachers

In this model of reflective practice, it begins with an awareness of what reflective practice is and how it plays a role among student teachers. Acknowledgement of the importance of reflective practice includes how it helps inform future decision making in the classroom and how it contributes to the development of teacher professionalism. This role is driven by opportunities in and out of the classroom. School placement plays a crucial part in providing student teachers with opportunities of real world classroom engagements with unanticipated problems that challenges their personal views, theories and beliefs in teaching. Also, taught modules in teacher education programme are platforms where student teachers are provided with hypothetical scenarios to discuss theories of pedagogical practices and research-based solutions. These two opportunities, provided with optimised duration, frequency and guidance (of lecturers and school mentors) are factors that influence the content and depth of reflection. Questions that prompt reflection should center around issues in the classroom with the analysis of what and why it happened, along with what student teachers would do with the aim of improving one's practice.

Conclusion

This study presents the way reflective practice is interpreted and experienced by the student teachers in this teacher education programme. Given the situational nature of teaching that requires the ability to make good situational judgment if teachers are to be responsive to the learning environment, what Schön (1987) calls having the capacity for 'reflective rationality' in contrast to 'technical rationality', it is interesting to note that such notion of the 'reflective practitioner' is reflected in the way the student teachers perceived reflective practice. The

interrelationships of categories and the model (Figure 1) offers a different perspective which frames how student teachers experienced reflective practice, and consequently interpret the experience of being a reflective practitioner. There is little doubt that the different form of reflective assignments have benefitted the student teachers individually and collectively, especially through their school placements. The findings from this study can inform teacher educators to create and facilitate better opportunities for reflective practice. Perhaps opportunities for reflective practice could include peer and mentor assessment as these input provide meaningful impact on how student teachers develop their sense of self when making pedagogical decisions in their practice.

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