

REFLECTIVE TEACHING AS ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract: Critical reflective teaching has been a goal of English teacher preparation program. Although many English educators have promoted and carried out reflective teaching in their methodology courses, success of such practice has been limited, not sufficiently reflecting what has been desired. Questions have been raised whether reflective teaching within pre-service English teacher education is a realistic aim. One argument for this has been: reflective teaching can only be learned by beginning teachers working in schools with experienced teachers who value critical reflection. This article examines 40 journals of teaching reflection produced by 40 pre-service English teachers after they completed teaching practicum in schools over a period of three months. The journals were analyzed using a theoretical model developed by Smith (2011) which encompasses different purposes with different forms of reflection: personal, interpersonal, contextual, and critical. The analysis shows that the teaching journals contained more reflection on the personal and contextual domains of teaching, indicating that the pre-service teachers were more concerned with the contextual aspects of teaching which influenced their practices in the classroom. It is recommended that a more balanced reflection be created as an alternative form of assessment in English teacher education involving personal as well as social aspects of teaching.

Keywords: reflection, assessment, teaching practicum

Reflective teaching from teaching experience is viewed as a significant component of English teacher education and it is a crucial part of English teacher training program. Teaching practice program, which is one component in teacher training program, is specially designed to provide the students with the opportunity to put into practice the theories and principles they have learned in the program as they come into contact with real classroom situations in host schools. Besides teaching activities, student teachers are involved in other professional activities in the schools such as doing administrative work during office hours, supervising students' activities, and counseling work related to (English) study problems that students at the host schools are facing. These other responsibilities are part of teacher roles in schools, and student teachers need to be exposed to such tasks which are important factors that may be useful to them as future English teachers. This is an essential training experience that can develop their pedagogical skills and may help shape their perceptions about teaching. With teaching practice, student teachers develop relationship with mentor teachers, students, and other administrative staff at the host schools; an experience that student teachers cannot have at the university.

This study explores teaching reflections that student teachers wrote at the end of their teaching practice program at some host schools. The results and information of their teaching reflections should enable teacher educators to be sensitive to problems and realities that student teachers face at host schools which may serve as inputs to develop assessment of English education program as a whole, particularly those courses related to teaching methodology. This study may also be useful to the English teachers and the management of the host schools whose tasks in teaching practicum program should involve not only developing the student teachers' teaching skills but also their soft skills that may affect teaching.

The significance of teaching practice for student teachers has been discussed extensively in many publications, among others are in Crookes (2003), Walsh & Elmslie (2005), and Simpson (2006). Teaching practice is a program when student teachers have the opportunity to link the theoretical knowledge they study and practical knowledge they encounter in the classroom with real students. Teaching real students should not be considered as a simple task; it is in reality very complex as indicated in some studies on student teachers who have completed their teaching practicum (Febriyanto, 2012; Priambodo, 2012). They investigated the teaching experiences of student teachers who had teaching practicum in some high schools in Salatiga. Their studies reveal, among

others, the problems of material selection with regard to difficulty levels, student interests, and their learning pace. These difficulties were often confounded with student motivation in learning English and classroom management.

The importance of teaching practice as a way to connect theoretical knowledge and authentic practical teaching practices have been discussed in Grandall (1994) and Johnson (1996). Other studies such as that by Hascher, Concard, and Moser (2004) reveal that teaching practice helps student teachers to acquire professional knowledge and form their perceptions as classroom teachers.

A lot of literature has also focused on the critical role of the mentor teacher at host schools to help student teachers develop their pedagogical knowledge and skills. Mentor teachers help student teachers to develop their view about teaching careers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and notice the relationship between what to teach (subject content) and how to teach it (Ball, 2000). Other research has pointed out that rapport building between student teachers and mentor teachers at schools can occur during teaching practice supervision (Beck & Kosnik, 2002), while Ferrier-Kerr (2009) states that professional development of student teachers can begin at teaching practice with the supervision of the mentor teachers at host schools. The role of schools to the success of teaching practice, the perceptions, and teaching experiences that student teachers have about teaching practice has also been discussed (Febriyanto, 2012; Priambodo, 2012). My personal interviews with student teachers reveal that the school and the mentor teachers have a key role in the model of teaching developed during the teaching practice rather than the models of teaching promoted during their study in methodology courses at the university. The same case was also revealed in Kelly's study (1993) showing that "...the majority of the conceptions of teaching developed during the practicum are based on the school's practices and procedures rather than models of teaching promoted in university or college classes" (p.197). In other words, there is a gap between what is learned at courses in classrooms and what is demanded by the reality of teaching practices at the host schools.

Teaching reflection in this study is an integral part of teaching practice completed by the end of the teaching practice program. This task is essential because it reflects an awareness of what student teachers have done as a reflection of their knowledge construction process during teaching practice. According to Mezirow (1998), critical reflection is essential especially if it involves human communication such as what happens in classroom communication be-

tween the teacher and students. Although the validity of teaching reflection by student teachers is arguable (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Calderhead, 1992), it should be thought of as an integral part of teacher education and this task should be designed under the guidance and supervision of more experienced teachers who promote reflective teaching at the host schools. In the context of language education, teaching reflection should be perceived as a way of improving teaching skills of student teachers (Barnett, 1994) because it includes planning of teaching, its implementation, and evaluation (Kolb, 1984); therefore, teaching reflection should be perceived as a personal learning process to develop professional teaching practice (Bleakley, 1999). Teaching reflection can also serve as feedback to the teaching practice program (Allan, 1991) because it describes the student teachers' perceptions about the teaching and learning in the classroom, their relationship with the students, faculty, and broader school context which may influence their practice in the classrooms.

Drawing from the literature, Smith (2011) describes four domains of critical reflection across healthcare professionals which, in my view, are relevant to language teaching. Studies on critical reflection in ELT such as reading skill (Chau & Cheng, 2012) or classroom talk (Thawaite & Rivalland, 2009) are available but their framework cannot be used to investigate teaching reflection in teaching practicum. Smith (2011) has proposed four domains of reflection as illustrated in Figure 1; those four domains are: (1) Personal domain which involves thoughts and action; (2) Interpersonal domain which involves interactions with others; (3) Contextual domain which involves concepts, theory and methods; and (4) Critical domain which involves ethical and social contexts.

In language teaching, personal domain involves one's own perception of teaching skills, judgments of teaching practice, reactions to what is happening during teaching in relation to student language or student behavior during learning. In other words, this domain describes personal reflection of teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Meanwhile, interpersonal domain describes relationship with others such as students, teachers at schools, or the school principals. The quality of relationship with others at the host schools may have an important impact to the teaching performance of student teachers. Examination of interpersonal relationship and interaction during teaching practicum may help to reveal the school norms or expectations during the practicum program. Another aspect of interpersonal domain is group dynamics such as discussion about teaching with other student teachers or the mentor teachers at the host school. Group dynamics may influence decision making in

teaching practice. Then, the third domain refers to examination of teaching concepts, theories, and methods that form or influence teaching and learning activities in the classroom. It involves reflections of professional knowledge that is realized in classroom practice. Reflection within this domain may show how methods and techniques might have been different if alternative ways had been used. This type of teaching reflection aims to show concerns about the realization of teaching skills, knowledge, and theories in classroom practice. Finally, the fourth domain describes limitations that may be placed or brought into teaching practice such as ethical, social, cultural, or political issues. These limitations may impact student teachers' teaching performance. Critical reflection may involve questions such as form of politeness, appropriateness of language behavior or academic culture that may help or hinder teaching practice

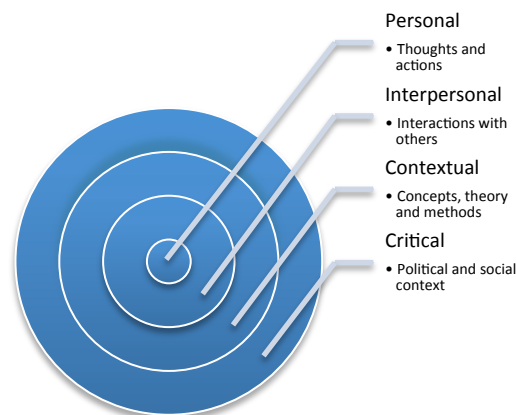


Figure 1. Domains of Critical Reflection (adapted from Smith, 2011)

As can be seen in the figure, the most inner circle is the personal domain, and the outer circles cover broader contexts. Teaching reflection may reveal any of these domains showing different dimensions of perceptions, evaluation, or judgments.

The teaching practicum at the Faculty of English Language Education program, where this study was carried out, is a required course in which the students will be able to apply their knowledge that they have learned in their courses aimed at preparing well-trained English teachers. It is a 4-credit hour

course which the students register for in the fourth year of their undergraduate study. They are required to be at the host schools, junior or senior high schools, for approximately three months under the supervision of the mentor teachers at the host schools and a lecturer from the faculty. This program is undertaken after the students have completed a certain number of methodology courses as pre-requisites for the teaching practicum program.

At the beginning of the program, the student teachers are sent to host schools in town. The schools, then, appoint an English teacher as a mentor teacher for the whole program. The first task of the student teachers in the practicum is to observe their mentor teachers teach in their classrooms at least twice and then have a discussion with the teacher after the observation. The second requirement is to do peer observation four times and then have a discussion of the lesson, and finally they start teaching on their own. Observing the teacher will give the student teachers some ideas of how to deal with the students at the school, their level, the classroom interaction and teaching tips. Peer observation can provide opportunities to student teachers to view each other's teaching in order to expose them to different teaching styles and to provide opportunities for critical reflection on their own teaching. The student teachers are assessed by their academic supervisor and the mentor teachers who serve as mentors and assessors. The schools in which the student teachers are placed are both public and private schools. The majority of the teachers in these schools are experienced teachers who have taught English for at least 10 years.

As part of the Teaching Practicum program, each student teacher should reflect on his/her own teaching skill development by keeping a teaching journal that should be written immediately after each teaching session. The journal is then consulted to the mentor teacher for individual consultation to improve the student teachers' teaching skills. The comments will also help the student teachers in re-writing the teaching journals which will be included in the teaching portfolio at the end of the program. Another important component of the student teaching experiences is a group reflection. Student teachers as a group in one host school are assigned to write a description of experiences in the respective school site. Each student teacher is expected to contribute ideas or teaching experiences to be compiled together with those of the other student teachers into one group reflection report. This Group Reflection is shared in a discussion with the mentor teachers before the official end of the program. Both individual and group reflection are expected to reflect experiences in lesson planning, material development, classroom activities, classroom assess-

ment, classroom management, and other issues in the school during the program. The reflection may also contain relevant ideas from current literature in language teaching and learning.

The Faculty of English Language Education at my university encourages improvement and evaluation of its program in order to produce desirable profile of its graduates as English language teachers as described in the Faculty Handbook. Therefore, evaluation of the implementation of the curriculum is carried out continuously in order to obtain information that is useful for the improvement of the education program. As has been pointed out above, the student teachers are required to produce teaching reflection at the completion of the teaching practicum program. Based on the theoretical framework for critical reflection proposed by Smith (2011), this study is aimed to answer the following question, "What issues did the student teachers write in their teaching reflection with respect to personal, interpersonal, contextual, and critical domain of teaching?" The aim of the study was to explore the students' teaching reflection during their teaching practicum in their respective host schools. It is hoped that the information from this study could provide the teaching practicum program with useful information which may feed into the assessment of the program.

METHOD

This study did not use the research instrument that is commonly employed in qualitative or quantitative studies such as a questionnaire or interview questions. Instead, the students were informed at the beginning of the program to study the Teaching Practicum Handbook which, among others, had the description, objective, and instructions for writing teaching reflection about 500 to 600 words long. The written reflection should contain descriptions of experiences in designing materials, lesson plans, classroom activities and class management. It should also have some description of other issues encountered during teaching practice or relevant ideas from current literature in language teaching and learning. The participants of the study were 13 male and 22 female student teachers who were taking the course in the second semester of the 2011-2012 academic year. These students conducted their teaching practicum in eight secondary schools which were selected on the basis of their availability and close distance to the university. In addition to the teaching practicum, the students

were also taking other courses at the university toward the completion of their degree program.

Nvivo software program was used to analyze qualitative data. Using the facility in Nvivo, the data (students' teaching reflection) were coded for the four domains (personal, interpersonal, contextual, critical) proposed by Smith (2011). His framework has a broad perspective of reflection which aims to guide students to think more holistically rather than to only reproduce facts or practices that happened in the classroom. The next step was to classify the coded texts which belonged to the same category. Then, the last step for the analysis was to record the important information in the student teachers' reflection in tables for interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Using the Nvivo software program, this study has identified four general domains from the teaching reflection personal (41%), interpersonal (5%), contextual (49%), and critical domains (5%). For better visual representation, the four domains in the teaching reflection are presented in Figure 2 below.

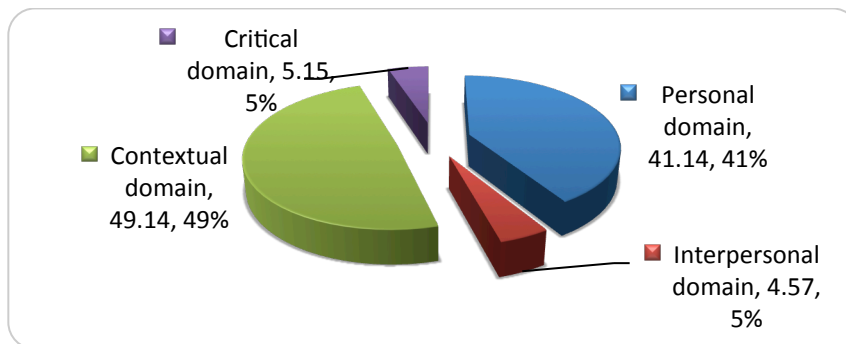


Figure 2. Four Domains in the Teaching Reflection

As can be seen in the figure, the students' teaching reflection focused more on the contextual and personal domains of teaching, while interpersonal and critical domains of teaching seemed to be less important. It appears that the students were more concerned with their judgments, reactions, and teaching behavior in relation to the teaching and learning processes in the classroom and

how the classroom contexts affected, determined, or influenced their teaching practice. The other two aspects (domains) of teaching, interpersonal and critical aspects, may not have been part of their teaching agenda at this stage of teaching experience. The following section provides a detailed description of the students' teaching reflection selected on the bases of the (relative) importance of issues in teaching and learning in the classroom. In other words, the inclusion of issues in the tables was not based on quantitative decisions.

Domains of teaching reflection

The following sections describe the student teachers' experiences and concerns during the program which are presented in tables to portray a quick picture of their reflections. Table 1 shows how the student teachers felt about teaching practice, what they learned, and what they evaluated or assessed during teaching practice. Table 1 reveals the students' judgments and perception about their teaching practice within the personal domain of teaching. As can be seen in the table, there were three themes that emerged from the personal domain of the reflection: how they feel about teaching practice, what they learn from teaching practice, and what they evaluate or assess during teaching practice. One student teacher, student A, expressed his feeling about the first day of teaching,

Many friends seem to be very calm facing their first teaching, but not for me. Today was my first day teaching the real students. I think today was the worst day that I ever had since I was welcomed by noisy students. It made me feel very nervous.

Nervousness was experienced by most student teachers due to their first day teaching assignments. However, there were students such as student B, who did not feel nervous with some experiences of public speaking, as written in one reflection,

I was teaching the seven and eight grade of junior high school on my first time teaching. I didn't feel nervous when I had to teach for the first time, maybe because I used to speak in front of many people, but I just worried about whether I can teach my students well or not. Support from teachers and friends is very helpful for me to keep confident.

The reflection of student B points to the importance of student extra-curricular programs in which they can develop their speaking skills and confidence before they are ready for teaching practicum. The students' reflections within this domain also contain evidence of soft skill development; that is learning how to respect others, as revealed in student C's reflection,

I learned to be more communicative when teaching by asking my other friends who were teaching, I learned to respect the elder [school teachers] and I learned to hold responsibility when I was teaching students.

These statements show their awareness and important issues in their experience as 'teachers'. These points were indicators of their active role in thinking about their practice and evaluating what they learned from teaching practicum. They drew on their own understanding of how it felt to be pre-service teachers undertaking teaching practicum in schools. The statements in Table 1 were proofs of their struggles with professional expectation and their affective needs at the start of teaching practicum. The statements provided evidence for specific areas in which they were experiencing gain in teaching skills.

Table 1. Personal Domain of Teaching Reflection

Personal domain	Issues identified
How they feel about teaching practice	Feel nervous on first day of teaching Become patient after teaching Become confident after teaching Feel happy working with the mentor teacher Feel worried about their ability to teach Become aware that teaching is demanding Feel doubtful whether or not they can become good teachers Feel grateful to have the experience to teach Feel the need to learn more about teaching

Personal domain	Issues identified
What they learn from teaching practice	Improvement of teaching skills Understand students' characteristics Class management Respect students, peers, and teachers at the school Appreciate improvement and cooperation with teachers Significance or importance of AVA Develop relationship with school staff Understand students' needs for learning Understand school regulations
What they evaluate or assess during teaching practice	Explanation of materials for students Their pronunciation as 'teachers' Students' pace of learning Teaching preparation Effects of teaching techniques on student learning Differences between micro teaching and real teaching Difficulties of being 'teachers' Development or progress of becoming teacher The need for conducive classroom atmosphere The significance of teacher's voice Students' attitudes in class

As displayed in Figure 1, the interpersonal domain ranked the lowest (5%), indicating infrequent contacts or interaction between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers or other school staff. Their interactions with mentor teachers were limited to discussions about teaching preparations and assessment of their teaching performance. Their infrequent contact with mentor teachers and other people at the host schools could have been due to their concern on personal issues; how they felt when teaching, what they learned, or assessment of their teaching practice. The need for positive, personal, and professional relationships with the mentor teachers and other school staff might not have been viewed as a factor that could ensure success of teaching experience. Indeed, close cooperation and good relationship with mentor teachers could play a significant role to promote their motivation as future teachers and gain professional benefits from the teaching practicum (Shohbani, 2012).

Table 2 shows the issues identified within the interpersonal domain of teaching reflection. It is interesting to discover in their teaching reflections that one student teacher considered term of address as an important means to create favorable interaction during teaching, as can be seen in the excerpt below,

For the first time before I introduced myself, the students called me *Mbak* . I did not feel comfortable to be called *Mbak* in school. So, I told them to call me *Miss* not *Mbak*, then they practiced it when they met me in the school. The way they called me also influenced the interaction between I and the students. The students and I had good interaction when they called me *Miss* because it sounds proper.

The students' first language; Javanese, could have been the reason for using the term of address to young student teachers or the students may not know the term in English.

Table 2. Interpersonal Domain of Teaching Reflection

Interpersonal domain	Issues identified
How they relate to mentor teachers and students	Reviewing teaching performance Discussing language aspects in teaching Planning classroom management Designing lesson plans Talking about terms of address used by the students

Careful examination of the students' teaching reflection reveals that most of the student teachers were happy with their teaching experience in spite of nervousness and worries they had at the beginning of teaching practicum. They devoted a lot of time to prepare lessons such as writing lesson plans, selecting appropriate audio visual aids and adapting them for different classes, and designing interactive classroom activities. Material preparations and classroom management planning appeared to be the most important aspects of their teaching practicum, which was why issues about contextual domain (Table 3) were found to be the most frequent (49%) in their reflections as displayed in Figure 1. The pedagogical role of audio visual aids, teaching materials, as well as the need to attend to students' individual differences could have been their major concern to create good teaching and practices in the classroom. This is proven

in the way they try to secure the students' attention to the lesson. Three student teachers wrote the following:

1. The students were interested if I gave them games in the lesson. It was better if I also gave them prize like candies or snacks in answering questions and also they could compete each other.
2. In the fifth teaching, I was able to handle the class. The students were enthusiastic, because I promised them to give a prize to them. They were motivated when I taught the lesson. They asked if they didn't understand. They were active in class activities.
3. The students who could answer the question got a chocolate from me. And like the previous class, the students were more enthusiastic while they played the game which had a prize.

These reflection excerpts show that prizes and chocolate were used to promote students' motivation which has an important role in learning especially to students at the beginning level whom the student teachers were assigned to teach.

Table 3. Contextual Domain of Teaching Reflection

Contextual domain	Issues identified
How concepts, theories, and methods affect teaching practice	Use of AVA to engage students, promote motivation, develop relationship. Too concerned with finishing materials at the expense of learning. Effects of student characteristics on teaching Learners' learning styles and control of behavior Use of prizes, jokes, stories, pictures to motivate students and get them interested in the lesson.

The critical domain also ranked low (5%) in the students' teaching reflections besides interpersonal domain, indicating that this domain was not (yet) a focus of the student teachers in the teaching practicum. Although the issues identified within this domain (Table 4) appear to be beyond method and can become a 'potential danger' (Freire, 1985), that is a possible source of students to lose interests and motivation to learn in class, the student teachers in this study did not seem to consider it as an important element of professional skill

and development, or they might not be aware that this domain was important in their training. According to Mauthner and Doucet (2003), critical reflection of teaching should describe explicitly any ethical or social issue that may have had an impact to classroom practices. This is an area that the student teachers in this study were lacking and, therefore, this aspect was described insufficiently by a few student teachers.

Table 4. Critical Domain of Teaching Reflection

Critical domain	Issues identified
How ethical or social issues affect teaching and learning in class	Tired students after sports activities Late students after the break Demanding assignment by the school Unfamiliar with students' L1 Cancelled classes due to death in a family

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of the current study showed that the student teachers were more concerned with their personal perceptions and judgments (personal domain) and teaching performance (contextual domain). Nevertheless, there were very few accounts that appeared in their reflections pertaining to interpersonal and critical domains.

Based on the results of this study, for assessment purposes, more attention should be given to interpersonal aspects of teaching practicum. The teaching practicum program needs to stimulate the students' awareness about the crucial role of mentor teachers, other school personnel, as well as the students at the host schools. Supervision by mentor teachers is indeed beneficial. It is an individual professional relationship in which the student teachers and mentor teachers can work together to prepare well-trained future teachers. The supervisory role of the mentor teacher can instill positive attitude to the teaching profession, which may in the short or long run lead the student teachers to choose a teaching career.

Another professional issue identified in the students' reflection was the different cultural and educational background of the mentor teachers and student teachers that often caused different expectations about teaching styles, language use, and interaction with students in the classroom. This, to a certain extent, was restraining the student teachers' practices in the classroom. The su-

pervisory role of the mentor teachers necessitates the student teachers to follow the model and teaching style suggested by the mentor teachers in spite of the different beliefs of the student teachers about teaching and learning as a result of their education at the university. This is perhaps the most difficult challenge faced by the student teachers during their practicum. A logical step toward narrowing the gap is perhaps to create the opportunity for both the mentor teachers and student teachers to frequently meet and discuss any issue related to the critical domain of teaching practicum.

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