

STUDENT TEACHER'S REFLECTIVE SKILL: PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING PRACTICE IN ESL CLASSROOMS IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN BATAM

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Abstract

Reflection is an important component of the teaching profession. It is the process of looking at information or events, evaluating them, and using the results to change or enhance future events. As teachers engage in reflection, they become more critical about their own teaching practices, consequently, they become more effective.

This Phenomenology study explored the reflective skill of a student teacher during teaching practice in an ESL class in one of the primary schools in Batam. It was also aimed to see the impact of her reflective skill for her teaching practices. Instruments for data collection included reflection journal reviews and an interview. The study concluded that she reflected well on the students' understanding of the material, consequently improving her teaching strategies. However, she did not reflect on how she handled her students' 'negative behaviour'.

Keywords: analysis, description, reflection, future impact

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice for student teachers is an opportunity to have practical experience with students in an actual school. The student teacher need to be much more involved and reflective during the teaching practice. [3]. Reference [4] gives the explanation that reflective thinking during teaching practice will allow the student teacher to identify problems from a (student 's do you mean pupil) point of view and plan new ways of teaching based on their understanding of the problem rather than always falling back on tradition. It can be concluded that the reflective thinking on the experiences they have during the teaching practice will help them grow as a professional teacher in the years ahead.

Writing a reflective journal is a tool to help make reflective thinking happen. It can be a part of portfolio or it can stand alone as a formative assessment for practicum. Due to the importance of the reflective journal, the quality of the journal needs to be a priority. It should contain not only the description of what has happened during the classes but more importantly questioning about good and bad things during the teaching practice, and to think of possible solutions to fix the bad ones. However, it was found that the journal described what was experienced without any critical evaluation of those experiences. Research has shown that a percentage of journals had poor quality writing. The journals just have objective writing with no depth or richness. It is just mechanical [9]. Thus, reflective thinking skill is required by each of the student teachers as they are going through their reflective journal writing.

This paper explored a student teacher's reflection skill by reviewing her reflective teaching journal while teaching in ESL classroom in a primary school in Batam. The reflection journal was a part of portfolio assessment. This phenomenology study focused on exploring her reflection skill on her language teaching practices experienced. The exploration of her reflection skill would automatically depict the impact of her reflection skill on her teaching practices. She was also interviewed to support her journal review.

2. REFLECTION

2.1. Definition

John Dewey believed that reflective thinking frees people from routine activity and tradition and helps them to act in deliberate and intentional ways [4]. In an education context, George Posner explained that reflective thinking allows a teacher to examine critically all teaching and learning practices including goals, methods, problems and solutions [4]. Teachers are considered to be reflective as they show they know what they are doing and they understand the reason to decide to do it, and then review the effect of what was done (8). In the same essence, reference [1] defined reflection as the process of looking at information, critiquing it, and then using the results to change or enhance future events. Teachers overtly or intuitively do reflection consistently on their own practice and on the achievements of their students [1]. It can be summarised that reflection is recalling all experiences and events, making judgment which ones are considered as good and bad or as strengths or weaknesses, and finding solutions to maximize the strengths.

Reflection is one pedagogical competence that a teacher must do [7]. Teachers have their unique and dynamic classrooms since each student in the classrooms has different characteristics, ability, social, economic, emotional and cultural background. All teachers should be required to reflect on his/her teaching practices to accommodate students' differences to help make learning happen. It is the key for teachers to make change in their classrooms in order to make sense of how those differences are accommodated [1].

2.2. Stages of Reflection

Reference (1) described three stages of reflection;

2.2.1. Adescription

It emphasizes facts happening in the classroom which includes: who, what, when, where, and how. This component provides the foundation of the next stages of the reflection. Posner [4] explains that the difficulty doing this part is when a student teacher thinks that a lesson seems unproblematic or even uneventful. Thus he added that observation skill was needed where the creation of insight out of what might seem to be routine and reveal possible alternatives beliefs, values, and practice. It was also suggested that all events need to be described but it is difficult to analyse or think deeply about all our experiences. Therefore, he also suggested that we focus on one or two events that are significant. A significant event can be considered if what happened bothers us, excites us, causes us to rethink our initial ideas (e.g., our perspective, goals, or plan), or convinces us that our initial ideas were valid. Therefore, events that reflect our success and failure are included as significant events [4].

2.2.2. Analysis

It means to break the whole apart and look for the patterns. The patterns can be looked at in terms of strengths and weaknesses during the events, which in this context are teaching practices in the classrooms. In this part, student teachers need to be honest about their strengths and weaknesses in order to be able to write critical reflection. Reference [4] wrote that an analysis includes an interpretation, feelings and thoughts of an event, the reason to think that an event is significant, and lessons learnt from that event. For student teacher context, this can be worked out with the help of the teacher mentor who is considered as the experiencing one in teaching practice. Thus the humbleness of the student teacher to welcome the teacher mentors' feedback is required. Being defensive could close the possible solutions.

3. Future impact

This consists of the implications for the future based on the two previous stages. Reference [4] included this part in the analysis stage which was to identify problems that emerge and plan to follow up.

2.3 Advantage and disadvantage

Many journals based on research wrote the advantages of having students write reflective journals;

1. To enhance problem-solving skills and to enhance professional practice [2]

Class rooms are places where events are due to the students understanding, attitudes and teachers' teaching practices. The events will reflect teachers' strength and weaknesses then lead to making solutions. Those processes will possibly happen only if they spend time reflecting on their work.

2. As a means of assessment in formal education [2]. Teaching practice is one of the requirements for those who are taking a teacher education program. Writing a reflective teaching journal is an effective way to

give information to themselves about their own progress in teaching practices which is considered as formative assessment.

3. To promote the demonstration of skills development and produce professional demands [6]. As the student teachers critically think their own teaching practices, they are stimulated to think of ways or strategies for positive changes which promote their teaching skills development.

Despite of the advantages offered by writing reflective journal, it has some disadvantages as below;

1. The tendency to use the journal as a means of attacking others. It may possibly happen if there is lack of clear structure and purpose [9]
2. Evaluating journals is time consuming, complicated and daunting because it involves a wide range of concepts, issues, and perspectives [9].

3. DISCUSSION

Teaching reflection consists of three components: description, analysis, and strategy. This study reviews the student's journal reflection to see skills on those three vital components of teaching reflection over her three times teaching practices. Interview was also done to support findings on her journal reflection review.

1. On Thursday, September 20th, 2012

This journal reflection was mostly about the problems the student teacher found in her classroom.

Description

" Only some students who actively participated answered the questions (Pascal, Raymin, Juan, Valensia). After that, I asked the students the meaning of "character" and it was less than 6 students who tried to answer it. I asked the students one by one. I asked Jocelyn and she answered "I don't know". Desmond and Tio also did the same thing. During the test, some of the students looked confused to do the test. I explained how to make it in front of the class. I only gave 10 minutes for the test because it was only 4 questions. There were 3 students who haven't finished it."

She wrote every learning activity she implemented during the lesson and how her students' responded toward those activities in detail which included the number of the students with certain responses and their names as well. This part describes clearly her students' understanding toward the lesson just delivered. At first, the problem seemed that most of her students did not participate in answering her question. Only a few students answered. She then changed the whole class question to individual questions then she got to know that the problem was that most of her students did not understand the material. It was also clearly proved by her observation of the students' facial expression which were "confused" when doing the test. She was good at this part because she had good observation skill toward the students' responses. She was also able to make sure of the student's problem by varying to whom the questions were asked. It also shows that she was able to remember the responses of every student.

Based on the interview, she explained that she had experienced two practicums before having internship which required her to observe her teacher mentors. She used the observation question guidelines worksheets that were provided. She was expected to do a week of observation both in her first and second practicum. She was also expected to do three weeks observation before practising teaching in her internship in order to be able to recognize her students she was going to teach in terms of their potential, characteristics, prior knowledge and difficulties. The interview also gave the information that the teacher mentors shared the characteristics of their classes and certain students' characteristics that helped her to identify problems in her classes. Due to her remembrance of her students' responses, she said that she directly took time to write a note about what had happened during the class and who had been involved.

Analysis

"I feel quite struggle with the students in 2A because it seems like some of the students find hard to understand the material. There are some students who understand the topic, but most of them didn't understand it yet. However, I could not repeat the same material again because the material has to keep going. And if I teach the same topic again later, the students who already understand will be bored because they already understand it."

In this part, she shows her feeling toward the fact of her students' understanding. However she did not write her strength and weakness toward her teaching methods and techniques during the class that is supposed to be the analysis part. She just repeated the information that she had written on the description part. However she did explain her teaching method and techniques in the description part and it implicitly showed her effort to get her students to understand the lesson. Additional information was added due to the result of their quiz. It showed that the scores were significantly different from each other. Four students got satisfactory scores, eleven got extremely low scores and three got almost a passing score. She expressed her dilemma toward the situation. One solution that she needed to do in terms of her eleven students was to repeat explaining the material. But that solution would not help her four students who got a satisfactory score.

The interview with her mentor informed that the analysis part was slightly difficult for her. She tended to write about the strengths and weaknesses in terms of her students' understanding rather than her own and her weakness in delivering the lessons. However her awareness about her students' condition drove her to change her teaching strategies.

Future Impact

"Actually, I want to try divide them into 2 or 3 group according to their ability so that I can support the lower students better and provide those who already understand with more challenge so that they will not get bored. I think I can not treat the students in this class same one to another because the students are different in their readiness in learning English".

In this part it clearly showed her future teaching plans based on her description and analysis. She planned to implement differentiated instruction due to the different readiness of her students in understanding the concepts in English. Based on the interview, she explained that this was the most difficult part in writing the journal reflection since it needed some ideas about solutions to fix the problem. Reference [4] explained that the purpose of writing a journal is to deepen the quality of learning in the form of critical thinking and to enhance problem solving skill. She said that her experience of her two previous practicums in an International school in language classes did help her to plan solutions for her problems at her classes. Her previous courses also helped her to get ways fixing the problem. Her two previous practicums did help her a lot since she learnt contextually instead of theoretically.

2. Wednesday, September 26 th, 2012

The reflection she wrote on Wednesday, September 26th, 2012 was about the implementation of a learning strategy which was differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is a learning strategy to accommodate students with different readiness, interest and learning profile [10]. She chose differentiated instruction after she had reflected on her students' understanding toward the lesson she had delivered on Thursday, September 20th ,2012. She identified her students having different readiness to move to the next lesson.

Description Skill

"I divided the students into 2 groups based on the test result that I got from last lesson. The students in group 1 had better grade on previous test than the rest students. The students in group 2 had lower grade and they're quite slow in receiving the material.In group 2, I re-explained about setting using a puppet... Then in group 1, I told the students that they will make a story from story machine....."

This part shows steps of Differentiated instruction she had implemented. She had divided her students into two groups based on their readiness to have the lesson on that day. The instrument used to know the students' grades was the test result. She wrote the name of the students in each group. The first stage was she explained the material to the students all together. The next stage, when the student used the information they had got, the activities were differentiated. Those who were grouped as "more readiness" students were challenged with different worksheets. While those with "less readiness ones", she re-explained the material using puppets. Questions were asked to each of the students to make sure that they had understood the material. Then they did the worksheet. This part was basically showing the change in learning activities she made due to her identification of her students' difficulty in understanding the concept "setting" that she has been reflecting on in her journal.

Analysis Skill

“Overall from today’s lesson, the lesson ran really well. I talked to my teacher mentor about my lesson and she said it worked very well with the students. However, my teacher mentor said it would be better if I didn’t focus in only 1 station. I should supervise and guide all students in every station because sometimes, the students didn’t know what to do clearly. They didn’t really get the instruction. I also thought the same because I just let the students did the task by themselves when I was working with the other group and I could not monitor them”.

She reflected on the strength and weakness of the lesson delivery. She used her own observation to reflect her strength. The steps of the activities ran as planned. She also did this part by using the suggestion from her teacher mentor. Her teacher mentor helped her to see the positive side and things to improve. Reference [5] explained that observation is needed to collect data about personal teaching performance of a teacher in order to improve her/his teaching. The observer has to be free from a judgmental stance instead of telling patterns of the teachers and the students’ responses and together they discuss which things drive which response of the students. Even if a teacher does not have someone to observe her, she can get a video to get more detail about her own classes. Her teacher mentor suggested that she needed to give her attention to all of her students in each station in turn instead of focusing only in one station. It was found that the students were still confused with the instructions in each station. She agreed with her teacher mentor’s opinion. Her teacher mentor’s advice helped her to be aware of what she did not observe during the class. She focused on the implementation of the steps as planned.

Future Impact

“I should supervise all students in every station. I asked my teacher mentor to teach them one more time and I want to try to supervise each one of them in every station and don’t just focus in one station”.

In this part she emphasised things she would change in the next meeting based on what was evaluated as strength and weakness in the analysis. Regarding positive responses, emotional engagement and more understanding of her students by using differentiated instructions, and she planned to keep doing differentiated instructions. Considering the weakness, she planned to supervise all the students in every station to make sure that they understood instruction in each station. As well she would get her teacher mentor to re-explain the concept to the less ready group.

3. Thursday, September 27th, 2012

This reflection was about the change she has made due to her reflection on Wednesday, September 26th, 2012.

Description Skill

“.... Then, divided the students into 2 groups – same with the group before.I monitor the students during the activity and didn’t only focus in one station. I could monitor the student and helped them when they didn’t understand about the activity. Sometimes, I helped some students in group 2 to do the workbook because some of them still confused to do the tasks.”

She wrote what she had implemented and it was not as detailed as the day before since she basically did the same thing. In her writing, she focused on relating the changes she had made which was not to focus on one group only but instead monitoring all the students. However she did not write the change due to her teacher mentor who did re-explaining to the “less ready” students.

Analysis Skill

“.....Overall from today lesson, I feel better because I could monitor each student and see how they worked on the activities and their understanding for this topic. I could see the understanding of each student when they’re doing the activity. The students also worked better because they have done this on previous meeting and they started to understand the flow of the activity.”

She wrote of her positive feeling because she did as she had planned in order to improve the implementation of differentiated instructions which was to monitor all the students. She found that as she monitored all the students, they started to understand the flow of the activity and that each activity helped them to understand the concept. It shows that each technique improved in implementing the instructions and this helped the understanding of the students. Writing the journal reflection helped her to be aware of everything to be improved.

Future Impact Skill

"I talked and discussed with my teacher mentor about my lesson. She gave some inputs to me. She said it would be better if there were a lot of facilities that could support this activity. This activity also needs extra preparation and she appreciated what I've done. It helps the students to learn from different kind of activities and it has effect to their memory. Overall, I'm glad for today lesson. i hope the students really understand about this topic."

Her teacher mentor helped her to do this part that completed facilitation needed to support these learning activities. However she did not write the detailed facilities for what activities.

4. CONCLUSION

A teacher or student teacher can benefit by writing a journal. The student teacher did this when she was doing her teaching practicum. She kept detailed comments about what she observed in the class room and she used a strategy to enable her to improve her teaching.

Her success in writing her journal reflection helped her to analyse which parts of her teaching were considered as good and what needed to be improved. Her teacher mentor's feedback helped her to see techniques she needed to improve to help her students to understand the concepts. She needed to be open toward her teacher mentor's feedback while at the same time be honest about her weaknesses.

Her analysis of her strengths and weaknesses helped her to change for the future. Her knowledge about teaching methods based on her two previous practicum and coursework she has had, and her teacher mentor's input enriched her ideas to future changes. She focused on her students' understanding to improve her teaching strategies.

APPENDIX

The Student teacher's reflection journal

1. On Thursday, September 20th, 2012

Description skill

"At first, I reviewed about character that we've learnt it in previous meeting. I told a story about "Bawang Putih dan Bawang Merah" and then asked the students the characters from that story. Only some students who actively participated answered the questions (Pascal, Raymin, Juan, Valensia). After that, I asked the students the meaning of "character" and it was less than 6 students who tried to answer it. I asked the students one by one. I asked Jocelyn and she answered "I don't know". Desmond and Tio also did the same thing. Well, they have learnt it in last meeting and before starting the lesson today, I just reviewed again to the students. After that, I wrote "person, animal, and play" on the white board as key words for the definition of character. Then, I asked the students to repeat the definition after me (character is persons or animals who play in a story). I asked the students to repeat it several times. After that, I gave a test to them to know their understanding about the material. They should be able to do the test because we've already learnt the character for two meeting (including this meeting). During the test, some of the students looked confused to do the test. I explained how to make it in front of the class. I only gave 10 minutes for the test because it was only 4 questions. There were 3 students who haven't finished it."

Analysis Skill

"I feel quite struggle with the students in 2A because it seems like some of the students find hard to understand the material. I've taught the material for two times and I felt I taught it clear enough. I repeated it for several times, I asked the students one by one, I gave pictures of characters, I told some stories, but still only few who could understand it. From the test result that I got, it was only 4 students who passed the "KKM". Besides that, the difference of the grade from one student to another student was varying. There were 2 students who got 100; 1 student who got 87.5; 1 student who got 75; 3 students who got 50; 3 students who got 37.5; 3 students who got 25; 3 students who got 12.5; and 2 students who got 0 (1 student was absent). There are some students who understand the topic, but most of them didn't understand it yet. However, I could not repeat the same material again because the material has to keep going. And if I teach the same topic again later, the students who already understand will be bored because they already understand it."

Future Impact

“Actually, I want to try divide them into 2 or 3 group according to their ability so that I can support the lower students better and provide those who already understand with more challenge so that they will not get bored. I think I can not treat the students in this class same one to another because the students are different in their readiness in learning English. I should put more attention to those who find hard in understanding this concept. However, I feel quite worry for the time because I’m sure it will take a long time and later the time will not be enough for the students to learn. Well, I’ll try to do something that really work for the students and can help them understand this material.”

2. Wednesday, September 26th, 2012

Description Skill

After lunch, it was my turn to teach in 2A. At first, I asked the students about setting. The students didn’t know what setting is. Then, I put some words that have relation with setting on the board (Place, where, story). Then, I explained about setting to the students. Then I showed some examples of setting such as “beach, school, room, etc” and the pictures of it. I asked the students to give some examples of setting. The students could give some examples of setting (church, market, mall, etc). Then, the students were told some stories and asked to determine the setting of the story. Some students could determine it but some of the still confused with it. I tried to ask more to those who still confused and explained it to them. However, I have to continue the lesson because the time was limited. And then I divided the students into 2 groups. In group 1 there were Raymin, Valencia, Pascal, Juand, Margaret, Weliana, Resin, Desmonds, and Mary. In group 2 there were Pheobe, Feby, Ester, Chasly, Hiskia, Dimas, Joe, Beatrice, Tio, and Jocelyn. I divided the students to their group based on the test result that I got from last lesson. The students in group 1 had better grade on previous test than the rest students. The students in group 2 had lower grade and they’re quite slow in receiving the material. I’ve prepared 3 activities for today’s lesson. I hope the activities could help the students to understand more about setting because they could learn more about it from different kind of activities. Before doing the activities, I explained what they would do. I told them that they would have special mission and would do 3 missions today. The students were enthusiastic. They would get a mission card and after they finished each mission, they would be given a stamp as a sign that they have finished the mission. First, I called the name of group 2 and asked them to sit at the back of the classroom. The group 1 sat on their chair – I Know it station. Then I explained to group 1 that they would do a worksheet. After they finished it, they put the worksheet on my desk and move to “Read me” station. There, they were asked to read a story book and answer some questions from the paper that I’ve prepared there. They could learn about the elements of the story from story book. I’ve prepared a simple worksheet that contains some questions that they need to answer based on the book story. Then, I moved to group 2 – I Get More station. In group 2, I asked the students one more time about the meaning of setting. Then, I re-explained about setting using a puppet. I told a story using the puppet and asked the students the setting of the story. Some of the students could answer it but some of them still confused with it. Then, I explained one more time. I asked the students one by one about the meaning of setting. After that, I asked the students to give some examples of setting. They students were able to give example of the settings. I gave some more stories to them and asked the students to determine the setting of the story. They could determine it well. Then, I asked the students to move to “I know it” station. So, group 2 start working with the worksheet and I worked with group 1. Before, I explained what they need to do after finishing the worksheet to group 2. Then in group 1, I told the students that they will make a story from story machine. There were 2 containers, one contains name of characters, and the other contains about setting. The students were asked to take one paper from each container and made a story from the papers that they got orally. The students were enthusiastic and enjoyed the activity. They could do the activity and made the story from the story machine. Then, after the students finished making the story, I asked them to sit on their chair and also asked group 2 to sit down on their chair. I asked them again about setting. The students could explain it. They looked enthusiastic and actively participated.

Analysis Skill

Overall from today’s lesson, the lesson ran really well. The students also liked the mission card. I talked to Ms. Laura about my lesson and she said it worked very well with the students. I discussed my lesson with her and she liked what I’ve done today. The students could understand the concept of setting and they really enjoyed the activity. The students showed positive respond during the lesson and actively

participated. Besides that, the students could do some different activities in one topic and it made them learn more about the topic. However, Ms. Laura said it would be better if I didn't focus in only 1 station. I should supervise and guide all students in every station because sometimes, the students didn't know what to do clearly. They didn't really get the instruction. I also thought the same because I just let the students did the task by themselves when I was working with the other group and I could not monitor them.

Future Impact

I should supervise all students in every station. I asked Ms. Laura to teach them one more time and I want to try to supervise each one of them in every station and don't just focus in one station. From the test result, the students already understand the concept of setting. Only few of them who still not really get it clear. I think it will be better if I can supervise the students in every station when they were doing the task. For tomorrow, I hope I can run my lesson well and the students really understand about the concept of setting.

3. Thursday, September 27th, 2012

Description Skill

At 8.30am, I started my lesson in 2A. First, I asked the students about setting to review their understanding about setting. The students were actively participated to answer the question. I asked the student who seemed still confused about setting to see did they really understand the material or not. From last lesson result, some of the students still quite confused with the concept. I explained about the setting again to the students. I gave some examples of setting. Then, I told some stories and asked the students to answer it. I chose mostly those who still didn't really understand so that they could try over and over again. Then, I asked the students about some examples of setting and all students could give examples of setting.

Then, I divided the students into 2 groups – same with the group before. I prepared 4 stations for this lesson. I explained what they would do today. The students were really enthusiastic. For group 1 in the first 15 minutes, they would do the worksheet. I explained what they need to do and how to make the worksheet. After they finished it, the student were asked to move to “I get more” station and made a story from the story machine. This time, I asked the students to write their story on their note book. For group 2, the students were asked to do workbook in “Work on me” station. There were some tasks that related with elements of story and what they've learnt in this unit. Those who have finished could move to read me station. Actually, read me station was prepared for only those students who could finish it fast. So it didn't really matter if the students didn't go to that station. I monitor the students during the activity and didn't only focus in one station. I could monitor the student and helped them when they didn't understand about the activity. Sometimes, I helped some students in group 2 to do the workbook because some of them still confused to do the tasks.”

Analysis Skill

Overall, the students could do each activity well. In “I know it” station (worksheet), I just monitored the students. The students in group one could finish the worksheet fast. They really like the story machine activity. In group 2, the students could finish the workbook well. They also liked reading the book. They enjoyed the activities. All students really could do the activities well. After 15 minutes, the students were asked to change the activities. I didn't expect group 2 to do the “I get more” station. The group 2 could finish the worksheet. I asked those who finished the worksheet fast to read a story book again. The group 1 also could do the workbook and read the story book well. Those who haven't finished the story from story machine could continue to finish it. After finishing all activities, I asked the students to sit on their chair and reviewed about what've learnt today. The students really respond positively and actively participated. They could define setting and give examples of setting. All of them actively participated.

Overall from today lesson, I feel better because I could monitor each student and see how they worked on the activities and their understanding for this topic. I could see the understanding of each student when they're doing the activity. The students also worked better because they have done this on previous meeting and they started to understand the flow of the activity. The students also actively participated in all activities. In questioning part, they gave their ideas about setting. The students seemed already understood about this concept.

Future Impact Skill

I talked and discussed with Ms. Laura about my lesson. She gave some inputs to me. She said it would be better if there were a lot of facilities that could support this activity. This activity also needs extra preparation and she appreciated what I've done. It helps the students to learn from different kind of activities and it has effect to their memory. Overall, I'm glad for today lesson. i hope the students really understand about this topic.

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