

Training EFL Teacher Trainees through Reflective Learning

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Abstract

Reflection is regarded as an important aspect of and widely used in teacher training. According to Korthagen (1993), reflection in teaching basically refers to teachers learning to subject their own beliefs about teaching and learning to critical analysis. With this reflective stance, teachers thus take more responsibility for their actions. At KMUTT, MA students in ELT have been required to do teaching practicum at nearby schools for one semester. After teaching each session, the students have to write a journal reporting what happened in class, and then meet with their supervisors to discuss their teaching performance. This approach – writing reflective journals and discussing teaching performance – encourages students to be critical of their performance and learn to seek ways to solve problems by themselves. This study aims to report how students reflect on their teaching and analyse levels of reflection, based on Gibb (1988) and Farrell (1999). In addition, we also propose useful teaching strategies adopted by the students. It is expected that the study will shed some light on professional development for novice teachers.

1. Introduction

This study has its own origin in observations of two teacher trainees (hereinafter students) in a Teaching Techniques in Practice course when we worked as teacher trainers (hereinafter teachers or supervisors) at KMUTT. From the course description, this course is “an in-depth study of the application of ELT teaching methods by means of an extended period of closely-supervised teaching”. The students are assessed based on two aspects: teaching performance and professional performance. Marks for the former are derived largely from observations of classroom teaching. Marks for the latter, however, are derived from supervisions and other areas of performance which include, for example, awareness of teaching, response to feedback, and efforts to implement change. Previous studies suggested that writing journals allowed students to have freedom of thought and expression (Hiemstra, 2001), created good relationship between teachers and students (Spalding and Wilson 2002), and provided an opportunity for critical reflection to

occur (Lauterbach and Hentz, 2005). In order for us to help students develop and evaluate their teaching, we asked students to write journals to report what happened in class and how they felt about their teaching. We hope that through writing students could develop critical reflection which is important for the successful completion of this course. This study, therefore, aims to find out how students reflect on their teaching and to analyse the level of reflection.

2. Literature review

2.1 What is reflection?

In the past ten years, the terms 'reflection' and 'critical reflection' have increasingly appeared in descriptions of approaches to teacher education (Hatton & Smith, 1995). According to Richards (1991), reflection or critical reflection "refers to an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response to past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action". In addition, Bartlett (1990: cited in Richards, 1991) states that "becoming a reflective teacher involves moving beyond a primary concern with instructional techniques and "how to" questions and asking "what" and "why" questions that regard instructions and managerial techniques not as ends in themselves, but as part of broader educational purposes." From the above definitions, in summary, we can state that reflection includes the ability to be self-aware, to analyze experiences and evaluate their meaning, and to plan further action based on self-analysis.

2.2 Reflective teaching

We can say that reflective teaching means looking at what teachers do in the classroom, thinking about why teachers do it, and thinking about if it works. This process can be called self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in the classroom, and by analysing and evaluating this information, we identify and explore our own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in our teaching. Reflective teaching is therefore a means of professional development which begins in our classroom. There are several ways by which we can reflect on our teaching such as using diaries or journals, self-observation, and peer-observation.

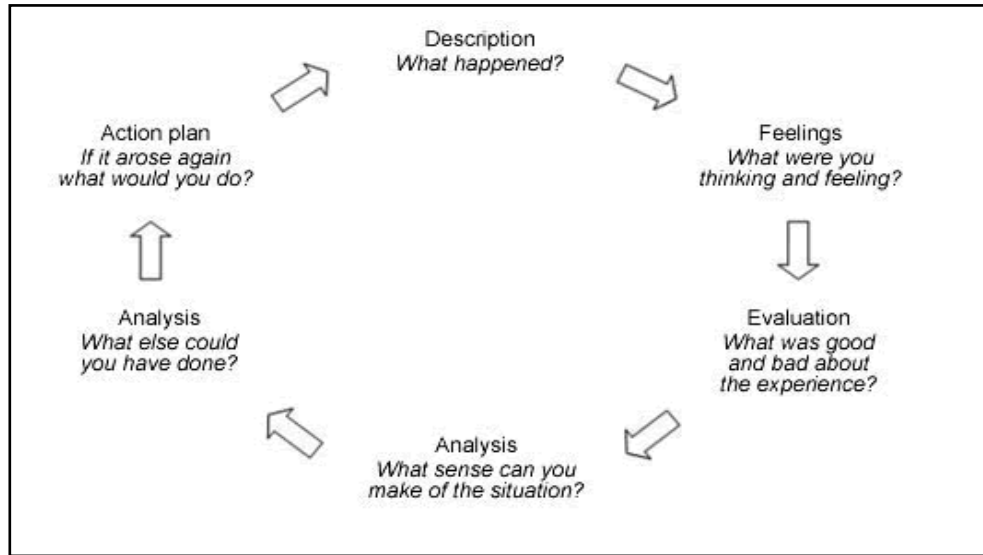


Figure 1: Reflective cycle model by Gibbs (1988)

According to Figure 1, it can be seen that the reflective cycle model by Gibbs (1998) consists of 6 phases. Firstly, the Description step refers to describing events or learning processes in the past. Secondly, in the Feelings or attitudes stage, students show their attitudes and personal feelings towards the experience or event which they have encountered. At the Evaluation stage, students assess the experiences and events and make judgments. For the Analysis aspect, it is divided into two sub-stages. For the first one, students have to explain and discuss what they have learned from the situation and should be able to provide reasons for what caused problems and successes in the classroom. Then, students try to find out or suggest more solutions that they could have implemented in that particular situation. For our study, we will call this stage as 'Giving Suggested Solution'. Finally, they have to set a plan of what they can do if they have to deal with this type of situation in the future.

Farrell (1999, p.171) adapted the levels of reflection which were used for teachers. Farrell sought to promote reflective practice for English language instructors who work as ESL teachers in Korea by using group discussion as a tool. He tried to investigate what the teachers' levels of reflection were while they were discussing in groups by using the adapted levels of reflection from Ho and Richards (1993). The levels of reflection consist of two aspects: descriptive and critical. The differences between the two levels are that, for the Descriptive level, the teachers reported only the theory or fact, while the Critical reflection level showed the teachers thinking

and giving supporting reasons for each point clearly. The researchers think that the levels of reflection proposed by Farrell (1999) are useful and can be used for this study as shown below.

Table 1: Levels of reflection by Farrell (1999)

	Descriptive	Critical reflection
1. Theories of teaching (a) Theories/beliefs about teaching and learning (b) Applying theories to classroom practice	A belief conviction An expert's view How a theory was applied	A justification A personal opinion Contradictions between theory and practice How theories changed
2. Approaches and methods	Approaches and methods in teaching The content of the lesson The learners The school context	The teacher's knowledge: pedagogical and experiential
3. Evaluating teaching	Solutions to problems by seeking solutions from experts	Evaluating lessons: positive/negative - diagnosing problems; students; class - interaction; teacher's problems Solutions to problems Alternative ways of presenting a lesson Deciding on a plan
4. Questions and teaching	Asking for advice	Asking for reasons
5. Self-awareness	Perceptions of self as teacher: style and comments on language proficiency	Recognition of personal growth Setting personal goals

3. Research methodology

3.1 Purposes of the study

The research questions of this study are:

1. How do teacher trainees reflect on their teaching performance?
2. Which levels of reflection do their reflective journals belong to?

3.2 Subjects

The main subjects involved in this study were two second-year MA students who had to do teaching practicum at a school in the university area. They were novice teachers who lacked teaching experience. They co-taught Mattayom 2 students for one semester. The class size was quite large with 56 students. The teaching periods were 100 minutes (50/period). The subjects would do the lesson plan together but they took turns weekly to teach the students. While one subject was teaching, the other would observe. During a semester, the supervisors observed their teaching 5-6 times per teacher. After finishing each teaching session, the teacher trainees had to write and submit journals to the supervisors before having supervision. For each supervision session, the subjects reported the challenges they had encountered and the success they had achieved, and the supervisors would give comments and suggestions based on the issues raised.

3.3 Instruments

The research instrument used in this study is a coding form for reflection which the researchers designed to categorize the levels of reflections.

3.4 Data collection

The subjects were asked to submit their journals every week of teaching. The supervisors – as the researchers of this study – collected every journal entry. However, since the supervisors did not observe their teaching every week, the reflection entries chosen for this study would only be for the weeks that the supervisors observed the class. The schedule of observation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Observation schedule

Teacher A	Topic	Teacher B	Topic
31-05-10	• Ordinal number	31-05-10	• Ordinal number
14-06-10	• Using Wh-questions • Vocabulary-vacation	21-06-10	• Affirmative and negative sentences • Telling time
28-06-10	• Reading – scanning technique	5-07-10	• Subject-verb agreement

16-08-10	- Countable/uncountable nouns - Some and any	23-08-10	- Reading – scanning technique - Forms of nouns, adjectives and adverbs
06-09-10	- Adverbs of frequency - Present simple tense	13-09-10	- Describing a person - Using adjectives

4. Data analysis

Since the data obtained is qualitative, the students' reflections were grouped by identifying keywords and the content which were relevant to the five categories of reflections as mentioned earlier by Gibb (1988) and Farrell (1999).

Table 3 below shows how the students' reflections were identified and grouped into each phase of reflections. It is noted that in this study we have added one more aspect of reflection into the cycle i.e. awareness of teaching.

Table 3: Levels of reflections modified from Gibb (1988) and Farrell (1999)

Farrell (1999)	Gibb (1988)	Definition and key words
Description	Description	<i>Definition:</i> Describing theory applied, teaching situations, approaches and methods used in teaching, content of lesson, learners, classroom context, problems and solution. <i>Key words:</i> verbs that describe what teachers did in a classroom.
Critical reflection	Attitudes	<i>Definition:</i> Expressing one's personal feelings towards his/her teaching. <i>Key words:</i> adjectives or verbs that describe feelings e.g. worry, confident, complicated.
	Evaluation	<i>Definition:</i> Assessing teaching experiences and events and making judgments on his/her own teaching. <i>Key words:</i> adjectives that describe the challenges or success in teaching e.g. effective, fun, well.
	Analysis-1	<i>Definition:</i> Explaining and discussing what he/she has learned from the situation and being able to provide reasons that cause problems and successes in his/her teaching. <i>Key words:</i> some conjunctions and verbs which state problems and show reasons e.g. because, due to, found.

	Analysis-2 (Giving suggested solution)	<i>Definition:</i> Suggesting possible solutions that they could have applied in that particular situation. <i>Key words:</i> verbs showing what he/she should/could have done but did not, e.g. would be better if ..., should have not forgotten, should have prepared.
	Action plan	<i>Definition:</i> Setting a plan of what they can do if they have to deal with that type of situation in the future. <i>Key words:</i> some modal verbs or adverbs of time e.g. must, should, may, next week, in the future, next time.
	Awareness of teaching	<i>Definition:</i> Showing or having more consciousness in his/her teaching. <i>Key words:</i> specific verbs and modal verbs that show that he/she has learned or is aware of his/her own teaching e.g. learn, should, may.

5. Results

5.1 Reflections of the subjects in each aspect

Before presenting the data, it is important to briefly describe how the teacher trainees approached their reflections. As presented in Table 4, Teacher 1 wrote approximately 700 words per entry while Teacher 2 wrote approximately 600 per entry. We found that Teacher 1 usually started her reflection by discussing the overall teaching of that particular session, then reporting briefly about what she did in the class, stating whether or not what she did was considered problematic or successful, analyzing what could have been the reasons why such things have occurred, stating what she thought a teacher should do to improve, and stating actions she would plan to use for the next teaching session. On the other hand, Teacher 2 normally approached her reflections by reporting everything that happened in the classroom in chronological order. Moreover, it is found that more than half of what Teacher 2 wrote in each entry was only descriptive information of what went on in the classroom.

Table 4: The number of words written in each journal entry

No.	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
1	738	461
2	787	810
3	686	605
4	602	567

5	722	636
Total	3535	3079
Average	707	616

Table 5: Topics and occurrences of reflections in each aspect

Teaching	Aspects	Description		Attitude		Evaluation		Analysis 1		Analysis 2		Action plan		Awareness	
		T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
1st	TM	√						√				√			
	EPI	√	√							√	√				
	L1/2	√		√				√							
	CM	√		√		√									
	TT	√	√			√				√	√	√		√	
	VA		√								√				
	CI	√				√		√		√					
	UN														
Occur-cen	-	6	3	2	0	3	0	3	0	3	3	2	0	1	0
2nd	TM	√						√				√		√	
	EPI	√						√						√	
	L1/2	√	√	√				√	√	√					
	CM		√						√		√				
	TT	√	√		√	√	√							√	
	VA														
	CI														
	UN														
Occur-cen	-	4	3	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	0	3	0
3rd	TM	√						√							
	EPI	√	√								√			√	
	L1/2	√						√		√		√			
	CM		√		√				√		√		√		√
	TT	√	√			√	√			√				√	
	VA	√						√						√	
	CI														
	UN	√						√		√				√	
Occur-cen	-	6	3	0	1	1	1	4	1	3	2	1	1	4	1
4th	TM														
	EPI	√						√		√					

	L1/2	√						√						√	
	CM		√								√				
	TT	√	√					√		√	√				√
	VA														
	CI														
	UN	√				√		√						√	
Occuren-ces	-	4	2	0	0	1	0	4	0	2	2	0	0	2	1
5th	TM														
	EPI	√						√		√				√	
	L1/2	√	√											√	
	CM	√	√			√		√			√			√	√
	TT		√		√										√
	VA														
	CI														
UN															
Occurrences	-	2	3	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	3	2
Total		23	14	3	3	7	2	16	3	10	9	4	1	13	4
		37		6		9		19		19		5		17	

Notes: TM = Time management, EPI = Giving explanation & instruction, L1/2 = Using L1 & L2, CM = Classroom management, TT = Teaching techniques, VA = Using visual aids, CI = Classroom interaction, UN= Using notes

To support the findings above, here are the extracts of the subjects' reflections in each aspect.

- Description**

Giving instruction – Teacher 1's third teaching

"I started asking students to look at the question and then gave them instruction. I forgot to give them an example before letting them read at the beginning. I found that some of them need an example so I decided to show it to the class."

Teaching technique – Teacher 2's fourth teaching

"To practice subject and verb agreement, the teacher let students practice group by group and gave them some points for correct answers."

- Feelings or attitudes**

Using L1 and L2 –Teacher 1's first teaching

"I worried about the mistake when I used L2 with students which made me feel nervous"

Teaching technique – Teacher 2's second teaching

"I felt my teaching is quite smooth and I can manage everything in time as planned."

- **Evaluation**

Classroom management – Teacher 1's fourth teaching

"I think the technique quite work in the way that the students pay more attention to the teaching. Even some tried to copy from the board, they didn't talk to each other."

Teaching technique – Teacher 2's third teaching

"I think asking student question is a good way to elicit vocabulary about activities from students. But teacher only got two or three answers from students."

- **Analysis -1**

Time management – Teacher 1's second teaching

"Yes, I planned too much activities, I focus too much on completion, so I forgot the objectives of teaching."

Classroom management – Teacher 2's fourth teaching

"It's my mistake to let the classroom noisy like that and I should try to stop it but I didn't."

- **Analysis -2 (Giving suggested solution)**

Giving explanation & instruction – Teacher 1's fifth teaching

"If I taught students again, I would give them another example to make clearer instruction."

Classroom activities – Teacher 2's fifth teaching

"It would be better if the teacher choose some students or volunteers to practice using language points studied in the classroom."

- **Action plan**

Time management – Teacher 1's second teaching

"Yes, We must plan lesson in 80 minutes to solve this problem."

Classroom management - Teacher 2's fourth teaching

"I have to adjust my personality to be a bit more aggressive and I have to use teacher's authority to stop them when the classroom is very noisy.

- **Awareness**

Time management – Teacher 1's second teaching

"Competition can make a good classroom atmosphere especially students' attention. Teacher should be aware what the objective of the activity was."

Classroom management - Teacher 2's fifth teaching

"Classroom management is quite one of important factors that can help student learn effectively. (Teacher 2 gave a definition of classroom management from Richards, 1990)"

5.2 Levels of reflections

As can be seen from Table 6 below, the tick (✓) indicates the level of reflection of each teaching aspect by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2. The numbers 1 to 5 indicate the number of entries that were analyzed, that is, number one means the first teaching and number five means the fifth (last) teaching. It is seen that every teaching aspect must have a description but not every descriptive aspect needs to have a critical reflection. The aspects of critical reflections also vary depending on the teacher trainee and the teaching aspect being talked about. It was found that Teacher 1 discussed all the eight identified teaching aspects, but Teacher 2 discussed only the first six aspects. Although both of their journals cover every aspect of critical reflection, the depth of their critical reflection is worth further discussion.

One striking observation that we could draw from the data to gauge the criticality of the reflection reveals that Teacher 2 seemed to focus only on two aspects i.e. *description* and *analysis-2*. For example, in Extract 1, we can see that Teacher 2 described the situation in the classroom when she used the– asking and answering questions activity. The activity was not run smoothly because the students used Thai when talking to their partners. Thus, in this journal, she proposed a way to solve this problem i.e. she should read the questions first and make sure that students understand every question.

Extract 1: Teacher 2's first teaching

"The next part was about asking and answering questions according to the questions given in the paper. The teachers demonstrated how to ask and

answer questions as a short conversation first and then ask them to look at questions on the paper and let them do asking and answering questions with their peers. But the problems found in this activity was that some of them talked with their partners in Thai to get the answers or even look at their partners' answers from previous activity. Also some students didn't understand the meaning of the questions. To solve this problem, the teacher should read all those questions along with the students to make sure that they all understand the meaning of given questions before letting them performing themselves."

Table 6: Levels of reflections

Teaching aspect	No	Description		Critical Reflection											
		Description		Attitudes		Evaluation		Analyses (1)		Analyses (2)		Action plan		Awareness	
		T1	T2	T1	T1	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Time management	1	✓						✓				✓			
	2	✓						✓				✓		✓	
	3	✓						✓							
	4														
	5														
Giving explanation + instruction	1	✓	✓							✓	✓				
	2	✓						✓						✓	
	3	✓	✓								✓			✓	
	4	✓						✓		✓					
	5	✓						✓		✓				✓	
Use of L1 and L2	1	✓		✓				✓							
	2	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓					
	3	✓						✓		✓		✓			
	4	✓						✓						✓	
	5	✓	✓											✓	
Classroom management (Monitoring class)	1	✓		✓		✓									
	2		✓						✓		✓				
	3		✓		✓				✓		✓		✓		✓
	4		✓								✓				
	5	✓	✓			✓		✓			✓			✓	✓
Teaching techniques	1	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
	2	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓							✓	

(grammar, reading, speaking, reading)	3	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓				✓	
	4	✓	✓					✓		✓	✓				✓
	5		✓		✓										✓
Using visual aids (Whiteboard, PPT, pictures)	1		✓								✓				
	2														
	3	✓						✓						✓	
	4														
	5														
Classroom interaction	1	✓				✓		✓		✓					
	2														
	3														
	4														
	5														
Using notes	1														
	2														
	3	✓						✓		✓				✓	
	4	✓				✓		✓						✓	
	5														
		23	14	3	3	7	2	16	3	10	9	4	1	13	4

Extract 2: Teacher 2's third teaching

"There are still some students who did not pay attention on the activities. To solve this problem, the teacher should walk to that particular student and do cross-checking technique with them (i.e. Do you agree?, Is that correct?)

Extract 3: Teacher 2's fourth teaching

"The last activity was to practice answering yes/no question by using 'some' or 'any'. It was done as a whole class. It would be better if the teacher review a bit about count and non count nouns in the shopping list".

On the other hand, when discussing a particular teaching aspect, Teacher 1 seemed to thoroughly discuss it by not only describing the situation, but also analyzing reasons, and discussing ways to improve in the future.

Extract 4: Teacher 1's second teaching

"Another point was L2 that I tried to use with students in the class but it decreased my confident when I could not express the

sentences that I would like to say. I should prepare my language to deal with teacher anticipation. I found that students usually pay more attention when I asked them in L2. I would be better if I can use it more fluency."

Extract 5: Teacher 1's third teaching

"However, I found that I still have problem with using L2 in the class that I should be more aware in the next. Even I tried to use L2 but I think it was not enough because I still switched to L1 when I couldn't explain in L2. I should find some techniques to deal with this problem."

Extract 6: Teacher 1's fourth teaching

"Finally I used a lot of L1 in the class to save the time. I learnt from my co-teacher that using L1 can save the time. So I tried to use L1 to solve my big problem about time management. At the end of teaching I found that I could cover all prepared activities on time. Then I have learnt that using L1 was a good way to explain a grammar point because it could save the time of giving explanation. Moreover, it might be easier to check student understands. However, I should be more aware of using L2 when I taught the pre stage of teaching in order to encourage the students to speak L2 as well."

6. Discussion and conclusion

It is seen that both teachers were not writing at a highly reflective or critical level of thought. This is especially the case with Teacher 2 who usually only wrote the description of her teaching and ways to solve the problems. This finding also accords with Minott's findings (2008) that students were unable to write reflective journals.

However, the teaching performance of these two teachers had greatly improved. They had adapted or used the supervisors' comments for their next teaching lessons. This may suggest that supervisors' feedback helped the teachers become cognitively engaged in the content under study despite the fact that their journals were not written critically. Our study also confirms previous studies that students need training in writing reflective journals. On the basis of this study, benefits and recommendations for using journals are proposed and can be structured for the pre-

service teacher training program, inductive program for the beginning teachers, or professional development schemes as follows.

- *Guiding students to reflect critically*

For this study, writing journals is one requirement that the teacher trainees have to do. However, we as supervisors never train them how to write. Therefore, what we see from the findings reflects what we supervisors did not do i.e. sufficient preparation. It can be seen that one of the trainees seemed to be less critical than the other. As shown in the findings, she tended to describe the situation rather than to reflect on it critically. To promote critical thinking throughout the process of supervision, the supervisors needed to guide them through the six phases of reflective thinking. And, this training or guidelines should be explicit; as suggested by Spalding and Wilson (2002: 1415), “We teacher instructors must teach – not simply assign – reflection, if we want pre-service teachers to become more reflective”. Normally, the students are good at describing the situations because they just report the facts or what happens in the classroom; however, for some situations where they need to discuss more, they should learn to provide justifications. And to be able to do this, they need to evaluate themselves, analyze the situation, seek reasons, and plan what they should do in the future. Thus, it is the supervisor’s responsibility to provide the students with guidelines of how to write reflections.

However, apart from journals, there are other tools which teacher trainers can use to promote reflective thinking as suggested by the College of Education, University of Maryland (2011).

a. Using think aloud: The teacher trainees can intentionally express out loud thinking about teaching with their teacher partners or colleagues. This is especially effective when teaching the teacher trainees how to plan. It uncovers the reasoning behind making decisions. Another component of think aloud is describing and analyzing positive and negative experiences as they surface.

b. Conducting action research: Teachers can consider a problem area that they are facing and design a procedure for collecting information (data) to learn more about the problem. They can use this data to further analyze the situation, to act on the problem, or to reevaluate.

c. Using video/audio tape and reflective analysis: Teachers can record a video or an audio tape while teaching. After that, they can view or listen to the tape for the purpose of analyzing the instruction and student responses. The video or audio

tape may be used as a tool for reflective dialogue between the teacher trainees and individuals from the mentoring team. It can be combined with a journal entry.

- *Reflective thinking in teaching profession*

Developing reflective thinking is essential for teaching professionals. Keeping a journal can also encourage a student's growth, development and maturation in their academic and professional life as pointed out by Hiemstra (2001). The study by Fielden (2005) shows that keeping a reflective journal could be an aid in developing reflective habits; therefore, the first few steps for supervisors to help develop students' reflective thinking is by asking them to keep reflective journals. This is because keeping journals can help teacher trainees not only to think of their teaching performances but also to critically reflect on how successful their performances were. While writing the journals, teacher trainees need to externalize their feelings. And, as they keep a reflective journal regularly, they could also develop critical reflection as a skill as pointed out by Fielden (2005).

In other words, this process promotes metacognition which covers the ability and knowledge to plan, monitor and evaluate oneself (Cornish and Cantor 2008). If the growth of metacognition is higher, it may lead to intellectual development. The students will eventually learn to give opinions and arguments. They may start asking themselves questions such as 'Are these arguments well-supported or well-justified?' or 'Are these opinions sensible?' When students learn to evaluate their points of view, they will begin to be more critical. Eventually, they will be able to commit themselves to a point of view that is objective, well-reasoned, and sophisticated—which in fact are the qualifications needed in the academic world.

To sum up, we can say that once the critical reflection skill is developed, it is hoped that the teacher trainees would be able to apply what they have learned from teaching practicum to real situations. In addition, we hope the ideas presented here provide guidelines that can help teachers in all levels understand reflective professional thinking.

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Biodata:

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