

Using the Reflective Approach in a teaching Practicum

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Abstract:

This paper explores the benefits of using a reflective approach in a teacher development programme at the post-graduate level in Bangladesh. The teaching practice component, which followed a reflective approach, aimed at raising awareness of issues related to teaching and learning. Based on a small scale study, the paper also highlights the benefits of maintaining portfolios, both from trainee teachers' and supervisor's perspectives. The implications for pedagogy focus on the kinds of insights that may be gained by trainee teachers in the process of reflective teaching.

Introduction

This paper explores the benefits of using a reflective approach in a teacher development programme in Bangladesh at the post graduate level. The first section outlines the programme and the main features of the practicum. The second section provides a brief summary of the reflective approach by defining reflection, what reflective teachers do and highlighting why teachers should adopt this approach. The importance and benefits of maintaining and keeping portfolios as a form of reflection is also emphasized. The third section details the trainee teachers and supervisors' perceptions about the program in general and the teaching practicum in particular. The last section highlights the implications for pedagogy.

The MA in ELT Teaching Practicum Module

The teaching of a second/foreign language demands and depends on specialist knowledge, skill and training. The majority of English teachers in Bangladesh are constrained by lack of training facilities, resources and motivational support. Their language proficiency is low and their teaching competencies are insufficient. As a result teaching and learning in Bangladesh is trapped in a vicious circle. There is a shortage of qualified English language teachers at all levels. Most of the current practicing teachers do not have the required qualification for effective second/foreign language teaching. One of the reasons is very few universities offer an MA in English Language Teaching (ELT) and the ones which do so, offer courses which are basically theoretical. Moreover, the practicum component is either missing or not properly carried out and is generally a simulation or a one-shot approach. For example, the MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT programme offered by the English Department of Dhaka University has a practicum component on its teacher education course but students are expected to carry out only a simulation class or teach one class in any institution. Students are graded on this one-time performance by their teachers.

Learning to reflect is a developmental process, and the reflective approach has become a major aspect of most teacher education programmes in the developed world. In Bangladesh some teachers at the tertiary level who have undergone training abroad are aware of this concept but unfortunately they have not been able to implement it successfully due to numerous contextual constraints.

Recently (2002) in Bangladesh the English Department of the Institute of Modern Languages, Dhaka University launched a new Master's Degree programme in ELT. In order to introduce the concept of reflection to Bangladeshi teachers of English, this programme has incorporated the reflective approach in its teaching practicum component. This is one of the compulsory core courses of the programme and is aimed at developing apprentice, novice and practicing teachers of English as a 'second/foreign language' within the context of Bangladesh. The duration of the MA programme is one academic

year and consists of three core modules including the practicum and three optional modules. The students are also required to write a dissertation consisting of 15,000 words.

The main features of the MA teaching practicum component are outlined below.

Aims

The aims of the teaching practicum were:

- To enable trainee teachers to think deeply about issues raised with regard to content, teaching strategies and activities.
- To develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of issues under study (e.g. content, teaching strategies).
- To facilitate trainee teachers' uptake of reflective practice.
- To connect theory, practice and reflection.

The Role of the Supervisor and Trainee Teachers

Supervisor

The role of the supervisor during the programme was to act as a facilitator and guide and to provide support throughout.

Trainee Teachers

Trainee teachers were expected to do the following:

- Collaborate and share ideas
- Act as critical friends
- Plan lessons and give feedback to each other
- Give feedback on each others teaching
- Write reflections on their own teaching
- Share their reflections with their peers
- Respond to each other's reflections
- Maintain a portfolio

Practicum Structure

The practicum was carried out in three phases. The phases were as follows:

Phase I: Observation.

Phase II: Preparing lesson plans and engaging in actual teaching. Trainee teachers were required to teach three one-hour lessons in different classes and levels during the teaching practice period.

Phase III: Teaching and reflection on teaching

The process of reflection was inbuilt and embedded throughout the programme. Trainees were expected to reflect during and after all the phases. They were required to reflect on the whole experience and write reports for the portfolio. Trainee teachers were required to submit:

- (a) Reflections on specific incidents that took place in their lessons
- (b) An overall evaluation of the whole teaching practice experience in terms of what they had learned

The Teaching Portfolio:

One special feature of the teaching practicum was that trainee teachers were required to maintain a teaching portfolio. The objective was to gather evidence of their learning and professional growth from the practicum and to record their experience. All materials including drafts had to be arranged in the portfolio chronologically to show growth over time. Table 1 below shows the lists of items to be included in the portfolio and the marks allocated for each item.

Table 1: List of Items and Marks Distribution for the Portfolio

S1 #	Contents	Tool	Mode	Marks
Stage 1	Class Observation at least two classes of one hour each	Observation schedule	Discussion with tutor (pre+post observation discussion with peers Keeping record (Writing in portfolio)	10
Stage 2	Lesson Plan (draft & final copy)	Refence materials	Self-study, peer feedback. Consultation with tutor. Record keeping and writing up in portfolio	10
Stage 3	(1)Classroom Teaching (one hour) (2) Feedback on Teaching	(1)Lesson plan, Materials, Teaching aids (2) Receptive mindset (being open to critical comments)	(1)The CLT Approach (2) Self-reflection Feedback from peers and tutor Record keeping and writing up in portfolio	(1)Nil (2) 10
Stage 4	-Reflection on Teaching Lesson Plan	Analytic mind frame	-Understanding, evaluation and showing insight. -Making links between theory and practice -Writing in portfolio	20

The Reflective Approach to Teaching

In order to understand the reflective approach to teaching we must be clear about what reflection is and what reflective teachers do.

The simple meaning of reflection is stepping back and thinking about one's actions or thoughts. A survey of the literature review on reflective teaching provides us with an array of definitions and views about reflection by eminent scholars and researchers. Let us look briefly at some definitions. Dewey (1933) sees reflection as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends". Milrood (1999:10)

defines reflection as “the process of mirroring the environment non-judgmentally or critically for the purpose of decision making”. From the above definitions it appears that reflection is looking back at oneself carefully, consciously and critically for the purposes of decision making and action. In other words, reflection is a kind of self-examination to judge whether things have been done in an appropriate and realistic way and to go further and make meaning of one’s actions by questioning motives and attitudes; to engage in deliberation and self criticism with the purpose of refining one’s teaching practices.

Three types of reflection have been quoted in the literature on reflective teaching :

Reflection – on- action (Schon 1983, 1987; Milrood, 1999):

Refers to reflecting on one’s actions and thoughts after an action is completed. It is pondering on and recalling one’s teaching after teaching a class. The teacher attempts to give an explanation for his/her behaviour and activities performed in the class.

Reflection-in- action (Schon 1983, 1987):

Refers to spontaneous and continuous reflection during the action. So this type of reflection is dealing with problems or cases on the spot. Thinking can be put on hold or deferred in this instance.

Reflection- for- action (Killon and Todnew 1991; Milrood, 1999):

Reflection for action engages the teacher in reflection to guide future actions. It involves proactive thinking in order to guide the teacher and enable her to cope with what may happen in the future. This is different from the other two approaches mentioned and is a more practical approach.

Reflection and teacher development are interlinked and intertwined. Teacher development is viewed as a continuous process that begins with pre-service teacher preparation and becomes an integral part of the entire career of the teacher. Reflective teachers are concerned about development in general and self development in particular. Reflective teachers are thoughtful and need to think seriously about what they do in and out of class and their overall behaviour as teachers and practitioners. The idea is to learn from their mistakes, successes and failure and improve and develop themselves further. The purpose of development is to enhance the teacher’s awareness and generate changes in behaviour and attitude.

Pennington (1992:47) makes the connection between development and reflection very explicit. She states: “reflection is viewed as the input for development while also reflection is viewed as the output of development”. Pennington highlights the reflective/developmental orientation and claims that this combination is essential for “improving classroom processes and outcomes and developing confident, self-motivated teachers and learners” (1992:51). In another article Pennington writes that through “deep reflection teachers were able to reconstruct a teaching framework to incorporate the previously contradictory elements”(1995:725).

Wallace (1991), outlining the three models of professional preparation, is more inclined towards the reflective model of teaching because he sees it as a compromise solution. He argues that it gives “due weight both to experience and to the scientific basis of the profession”. He states that received knowledge (e.g. scientific research, theories, concepts) and experiential knowledge (gained through practice of the profession, observation of practice and related to ongoing experience) leads to reflection followed by practice (the order may be changed) and this helps to achieve the desired goal. It is this dynamic and “continuing cycle of practice and reflection which leads to” (1991:59) professional competence.

Like Pennington, Richards regards reflection as a key component of teacher development too. He stresses the importance of self-inquiry and critical thinking and believes that this duo can “help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking” (1990:5).

Richards, in an interview with Farrell, goes further and explains that “critical reflection refers to an activity or process in which experience is recalled, considered and evaluated in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response to a 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 action” (1995:95).

To summarize, reflection is the process of engaging in critical self-enquiry for decision making and focusing on areas for development when one is not under time pressure and is in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Benefits of Reflective Teaching

Why should teachers engage in reflective teaching?

Teachers need to reflect on their teaching practices for professional growth and development. Engaging in reflective teaching is beneficial for teachers as it is a rich source for evaluating their current practices and adjusting them on the basis of renewed awareness and realization.

Some benefits of the reflective approach in teaching are summarised below:

1. Reflective teaching makes teachers more thoughtful, organized and provides them with the opportunity to act in a deliberate, intentional manner.
2. It provides teachers the material and tools for building, constructing their “own particular theory from practice”. Teachers learn to link theory with practice.
3. Since teachers are engaged in continuous development, in the process they become more patient and tolerant of other’s mistakes. They develop more empathy with their students and undergo a change in attitude which is positive
4. Through this approach teachers gain experience and feel an urge to go beyond their limited selves and explore further.
5. Reflection is regarded as an “intelligent action” and hence it makes reflective

teachers more distinguished as educated human beings.

6. This approach brings both personal and professional benefits for teachers.
7. It introduces novelty, helps teachers avoid monotony and frees them from impulsive and routine behaviour. It is one way of identifying routine and counteracting burnout (Farrell 2003).

These are some of the many benefits which a reflective approach offers. Now I briefly discuss the benefits of maintaining a portfolio. This is one form of reflection and paves the way for development and change. Trainee teachers need to maintain a portfolio. This is a writing folder which allows trainee teachers to keep a systematic record of their teaching experiences, personal and professional comments about their teaching. Besides reports other forms of writing can also be collected in a portfolio. For example, letters, drafts, lesson plans, notices or a page from a diary.

3.2 The Portfolio:

A portfolio is a collection of students' work over time. A portfolio provides a means for reflection. It provides the opportunity for critiquing one's work and evaluating the effectiveness of lessons or interpersonal interactions with fellow trainee teachers or peers. Portfolios are also valuable because they serve as a measure of writing ability. They "reflect the kinds of instruction valued in composition and therefore judgements made of portfolios are claimed to be inherently more meaning full" (Christine Coombe and Lisa Barlow, 2004:19).

Benefits of Reflective Teaching Portfolios

The literature survey on portfolio assessment highlights a host of benefits in maintaining portfolios. Some major ones have been summarized below:

- Generally Portfolios have clear goals and these are spelled out at the beginning of instruction and are clear to both learners and teachers from the very beginning. Both parties know what to expect.
- They record the gradual development and promotion of learner reflection (Gottlieb, 1995).
- By incorporating reflection as a core element of the portfolio process, learners learn to think about their needs, goals, weaknesses and strengths in a more conscious manner.
- By having a reflective element in the portfolio, the process of learning and teaching becomes more personalised.
- Learner reflection allows learners to contribute their own insights about learning to the assessment process.
- Portfolios are a multifaceted and systematic record of a learner's progress. The observations that are recorded and students' work that is included relate to major instructional goals. Portfolios can consist of a wide variety of materials starting from drafts to finished products. It can also include checklists, learner notes, comments, letters, records of student self-reflection, lesson plans, reading logs,

audiotapes etc. Hence a variety of materials and multiple products collected over time can be included.

- Reflection enhances feelings of learner ownership of their work and increases opportunities for dialogue between trainees/learner and teachers about curricular goals and learner progress (Coombe and Barlow, 2004).
- It is flexible and non-threatening as learners can write their reflections and comments in a more relaxed manner and in their own time and space.
- It involves and engages the learners in the process of learning. By reflecting on their own learning they not only develop awareness but are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and eventually work on their weaknesses. Thus it helps learners to take responsibility for their work and they have the opportunity to revise, improve and self-assess their work.
- Portfolios are useful for teachers too. They provide teachers with samples of learners' work over time. Teachers can track the progress of the learners and they help them to assess learner progress and improvement more systematically.
- The teaching portfolio is an authentic collection of learners' work and is very informative for both the teacher and the learner.
- Portfolios provide opportunities for learner-teacher dialogue. Learning becomes more relaxed and meaningful.

The Study

A small scale research was conducted to collect trainee teachers' and supervisors' perceptions about the practicum component of the MA in ELT programme for the academic year 2002-2003. The purpose was two-fold: (a) to discover the insights gained from both supervisors' and trainee teachers' experiences and to draw implications for pedagogy; (b) to suggest changes to the programme in the light of feedback obtained from their observation and comments.

Sample size

Twelve trainee teachers were enrolled in the practicum. Three trainee teachers were assigned to each supervisor and had to work closely with their individual supervisors throughout the term. The trainee teachers were all novice practicing teachers (except one), teaching in different colleges and private universities in Dhaka. All of them had a BA Honours degree and an MA degree in English from recognized universities in Bangladesh. They were pursuing a second Masters degree in Applied Linguistics and ELT from the Institute of Modern Languages, Dhaka University. A majority of the trainees were in the age group 28-35. Only one trainee was in her mid-50s.

Four supervisors were involved in the practicum programme. All of them were established academics in the field of English language teaching and were very experienced teachers. Two of them had obtained their Ph D from the UK and were senior professors in the department. The other two supervisors also held an MA degree in ELT from the UK.

Methodology

Supervisor and trainee responses were elicited through interviews and questionnaires. There were structured interview questions for the supervisors and the trainee teachers had to fill in an open ended-questionnaire. There was an informal follow-up discussion session with a couple of the trainees and supervisors. It was not possible to conduct follow-up discussion sessions with all the respondents due to time constraints and the university being closed due to political unrest. In order to get an in-depth picture of the teaching practicum a qualitative approach was followed. First of all the supervisor's perceptions are presented . This is followed by a discussion of the trainee teachers' perceptions.

Insights from Supervisors and Trainee Teachers

Supervisor's Perceptions

The supervisors were asked to comment in particular about the following areas of the practicum:

- Objectives in introducing the practicum
- Practicum format versus the traditional format
- Strengths and weaknesses of the practicum
- Adequacy/inadequacy of time spent on the practicum
- Interaction with teacher trainees during the practicum
- Benefits of maintaining a reflective teaching portfolio
- Views about portfolio assessment and comparison of portfolio assessment with traditional assessment
- Changes/suggestions .

Summary of Findings

Findings from supervisors' perspectives reveal a number of positive comments about the practicum. The supervisors felt strongly about the benefits of the reflective approach and were very clear in stating the objectives of the practicum. The purpose was obviously developmental and to enable trainees to connect theory with practice. They seemed to strongly support the learning which they envisaged would come out from the process of reflection.

The practicum format stretching over a three-month period as opposed to a one-shot traditional zoom-in and zoom-out approach was also appreciated. In addition it was observed that the current structured format indicated to trainees particular areas for reflection which in turn aided supervisors to locate trainees' growth in those specific areas. It was further pointed out that there was space and time for self-criticism which lends credibility to the fact that there was scope for reflection. Moreover, progression and reflection were seen as tangible outputs of the programme. Awareness-raising of issues related to teaching and learning was regarded as another useful dimension of the practicum. To see themselves from a distance and to be able to see themselves through the eyes of others was a useful and valuable experience for the trainees. The whole experience, it was perceived, made the trainees more focused, alert and mature.

It was believed that the trainees benefited from the interactions they had with their peers and supervisors and this exchange and interaction built a kind of bond and kinship between them. Trainees learned to be more open, frank and accepting of their mistakes.

The supervisors highlighted the benefits of maintaining a portfolio. They expressed the fact that it helped them to track the growth of their trainees over time and gave them some insight about how they were attempting to integrate theory and practice. All of them commented on the usefulness of maintaining a portfolio since they observed that the trainees were progressing in their journey of observation, reflection and teaching. They talked about the positive merits of such an approach and observed that portfolio assessment was much better than traditional forms of assessment because it is non-threatening and non-summative. The thrust of assessment was not on whether the teacher is good or bad but on whether learning has taken place. One supervisor stated that “it was very rewarding to note that towards the end the trainees were using the metalanguage of teacher education”. Two supervisors commented that “maintaining a portfolio was a new learning experience for both them and the trainees”. It was perceived to be mutually beneficial to both parties.

The major shortcomings outlined by supervisors were time constraints, administrative problems, political disturbances and organizing and arranging permission for classroom observations and teaching sessions. One supervisor commented that the theoretical part of the course did not cover the reflective approach in depth. This is a failing that has to be rectified. However, it is to be noted that according to Ur (1996), although it is desirable to have both external and personal input but still she personally felt that she learned most through thinking about her own teaching experience.

Suggestions for improvement included starting the practicum earlier in the course and extending it over two terms (e.g. six months). A further suggestion was to add variety to the programme and make it more cohesive and tightly knit. There was also a suggestion to revise and update the observation tool.

Trainee Teachers’ Perceptions

Trainee teachers were asked to give their views on the following aspects of the practicum:

- Initial expectations about the practicum
- Reactions about the practicum
- Difficulties and problems encountered during the programme
- Perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme
- Narration of one good and one bad experience during the programme
- Comments about the adequacy/inadequacy of time spent on the programme
- Problems faced while maintaining a portfolio
- Value of maintaining a portfolio and views on portfolio assessment
- Specification of areas where they had improved
- Identification of areas for improvement
- Help in ongoing professional development
- Change of attitude towards their understanding of their role as teachers.

- Suggestions/improvements to the programme.

Summary of Findings

The majority of the trainee teachers expressed positive sentiments about the practicum. They expressed the view that they had started the course with high expectations and believed that it would be a learning experience. They hoped that the course would provide them an opportunity to put theory to practice and build their confidence. A few had been apprehensive that it might be another useless theoretical course and some were nervous and concerned about their performance as well as peer evaluations.

The reaction of the trainees was also positive once they had actually embarked on the course. They found it to be an interesting and stimulating experience. Again a couple of them were worried since the practicum had been introduced for the first time and they were not sure how they would cope with the demands of the module.

The trainees highlighted the strengths of the practicum and commented that it was very practical, that the whole process made them aware of their weaknesses and introduced them to ways of effective teaching. It appears from their comments that the practicum worked as an eye opener for them and gave them a broader perspective about pedagogy. Most of them stated that the keeping of a portfolio was a new and valuable experience for them and it proved to be extremely useful and enlightening. It helped them to understand their own development and allowed them to get insights into their own performance. They could easily comprehend and track their own growth and development. Through this experience they learned to see their shortcomings as well as to assess their own teaching.

The trainees felt that their supervisors gave them adequate time and they seemed to be pleased with the kind of interaction they had with their supervisors. The discussions were healthy and informative and they learned to be more open and frank and spoke about their fears, anxieties, strengths and weaknesses. Some trainees commented that informal discussions with their supervisors helped them a lot. The majority felt that real learning had taken place in a number of areas. They could easily perceive a change in their role as a teacher. Nearly all the trainees commented that they had stopped being the authoritative, dominating and all knowing figure in the classroom. They tried to accommodate the needs and solve the problems of the students. They learned to be sympathetic, kind and caring. They felt that they were able to bridge the gap between themselves and their students. As a result of their changing role, they felt that the teaching/learning environment and their teaching behaviour changed as a whole. This they felt was a big change in their set beliefs and attitudes about the role of a teacher. A couple of trainees mentioned that while teaching they were aware about their students' interlanguage system and the stages of development which the students were going through. As a result they were not correcting their students frequently and were more tolerant of their mistakes. They believed that the teacher and student relationship grew healthier when they discharged their new role as a facilitator and guide. This positive attitude and transformation of their role is noteworthy and commendable.

The trainees also learned how to link theory with practice. They stated they were able to analyse and select materials carefully and judiciously for their students. They learned that the materials chosen would not work well if they were below or two steps beyond the students' level. Another mentionable development was that they reduced teacher talking time in the class and gave more time to students to speak. Thus, they made attempts to make the classes more learner-centered. It was heartening to note from their comments that the trainees were trying to empower their students.

The trainees stated that the whole experience of observation, teaching and reflection enhanced their perceptions of teaching and learning. They mentioned their personal and professional development which took place as a result of this course. Before the practicum they were very complacent and perceived themselves to be good teachers but during and after the course they became aware of their deficiencies and this realization made them cautious and careful. All of them were happy to report that they had become more conscious teachers and had learned to evaluate their performance after every class. Another important realization was the importance of undergoing training. They felt that since they had benefited from the practicum all teachers whether pre-service or in-service need to go through training. This was perceived to be a significant realization.

Some of them suggested a few changes to the programme. The major ones include increasing the duration of the course from three to six months and increasing the number of classes (both observation and teaching). They suggested making the programme more uniform and consistent and introducing variety (not to limit observations to Dhaka city and to be able to teach and observe elementary, intermediate as well as advanced classes).

To summarise, the study reveals that both the trainees and the supervisors found the reflective approach adopted in the practicum to be a valuable endeavour. Both parties mutually benefited from this exercise. In particular the study showed that the insights gained by the trainee teachers provided useful pointers about their performance. The practicum made them aware of issues related to teaching and learning. Trainees generated the change process through reflection and increased awareness. They developed empathy and positive attitudes. Trainees seemed to be engaged in reflection-on-action. Maintaining a portfolio proved to be a new and useful experience for both supervisors and trainees. For the trainees it was a real learning journey. It helped them to learn the strategy of monitoring, informed them about their strengths and weaknesses in a more conscious manner. It provided opportunity for a dialogue between supervisors and trainees. Overall learning became relaxed and meaningful. In short the study revealed some tangible benefits of the reflective approach and the benefits of keeping a portfolio. Major changes suggested to the study included extending the duration of the practicum module, making it more structured, introducing a range of levels for observation and revamping the observation schedule.

Implications for Pedagogy

Analyses of perceptions of the supervisors and trainee teachers about the practicum has provided insights into their minds and has taken us on an interesting journey towards the

mental horizon of the trainees. These insights may have the following implications for pedagogy:

Personal and Professional Development

Reflection promotes personal as well as professional development. It develops the critical faculty. Trainee teachers can learn to connect learning/ teaching experiences with their own life and also learn to link theory with practice. Analysing and making sense of experiences can make real contribution to learning. Reflection provides a big opportunity to learn about one's strengths and weakness and develop meta-cognitive skills. The trainee teachers in this study learned to be self critical and at the same time to accept criticism positively.

Attitudes and Motivation

In the reflective approach there is scope for trainees to develop positive attitudes by reflecting on their own mistakes and work towards improvement. It is motivating to examine one's progress over time and observe the learning curve.

Insights

Reflection provides insight into different dimensions of teaching/learning. For example, it throws light on the trainees' performance in the class and makes them think deeply of issues related to their classroom behaviour. It makes the trainees proactive by making them engage in a dialogue with themselves and their colleagues.

In this study the trainee teachers mentioned that in their reflective journey during the practicum a number of insights were gained. In particular insights derived from SLA theories were connected to practical classroom situations. The trainees stated that they realized during the practicum that the teacher needs to choose appropriate materials suitable to the level of the students. If the materials are below or far above their level of understanding, learning would not take place. In this instance they were trying to link theory with practice. The reference is to Krashen's Input Hypothesis where it is stated that a second language is acquired through processing comprehensible input. Input one step beyond (i+1) the current level is required for progress and improvement. The trainees also understood that for learning to be effective the affective filter has to be lowered and the teacher needs to create an atmosphere which is conducive to learning. The trainees realized that when the teacher was friendly, the learners were in a less anxious state and when the filter was low, input received from the teacher was easily converted into intake. Once again they were drawing links between theory (Krashen's affective filter hypothesis) and actual learning in the classroom.

The greatest change took place in their understanding of their role as a teacher. Their old beliefs about the teacher being the authoritative and sole transmitter of knowledge in the classroom were changed. They realized for effective learning the teacher needs to act as a facilitator and guide. They discarded their old beliefs about the superiority of the teacher in the classroom and learnt to modernize and adapt themselves into this new role and seemed to be pleased with the results.

Awareness

Reflection brings about increased awareness. Reflecting on one's actions and being able to identify the caveats makes the trainees conscious and cautious. In this study the trainees also became aware of the importance of training and stated that training was imperative for development.

Collaboration and Cooperation

Working together and learning from each other is a valuable experience. It fosters the spirit of caring and sharing and also paves the way for successful team work. In this study the support of the supervisor and their colleagues meant a lot to the trainees. Providing support builds an atmosphere of confidence and trust and bridges gaps. Caring and sharing in the classroom makes learning enjoyable and less intimidating.

Syllabus design and Materials Selection

Reflection increased the trainees' knowledge of syllabus design and materials selection.

Classroom Environment

Insights into effective classroom management were also achieved. The trainees learned the importance of a healthy atmosphere in the classroom and the effort of making factors conducive to learning. They learned how to tailor a lesson plan to meet the time constraints, to give equal attention to all students and avoid the 'action zone' syndrome. They gained an awareness about the importance of equitable distribution of teachers' attention. They also learned how to engage students in group work and learned how to cut down boredom.

Monitoring

Monitoring is an extremely useful strategy. It helps trainees to reflect, to see what is working and what is not working and to change and adjust accordingly. Monitoring should not be perceived as a threatening activity but seen as an activity which is carried out to support trainee teachers and put them on track. In this study trainees engaged in monitoring and found it to be a valuable strategy.

Maintaining Portfolios

Maintaining a portfolio was perceived to be a very valuable exercise. It is concrete evidence of trainee reflection and shows growth over time. Portfolios record and display the efforts of trainees in a chronological manner. Self-reflection, feedback from supervisors and peers and self-monitoring are useful stages for the trainee. This procedure allows more freedom of time and space for the trainee. It is more flexible and less intimidating than the traditional teaching practicum.

Portfolio Assessment

It is extremely useful for formative assessment on the part of the supervisor. There is also scope for formative evaluation on the part of the trainee.

Conclusion

Today in the South Asian region classrooms are plagued with inadequacies. There are inadequacies in the educational system as well as within the teachers themselves, mainly due to poor language proficiency levels and lack of training facilities and resources. A reflective teacher training programme as has been described above appears to be one of the effective ways of channeling teachers into an on-going developmental process. Teaching needs to be purposeful and meaningful. For this, teachers need to be aware of themselves, their existing ideas and beliefs, the teaching/learning environment and their learners' needs and learning background. But there are questions at this point that need to be raised:

- Will trainee teachers in reality transfer these practices into their classrooms?
- If yes, how long will they continue this practice?
- Will their attitude change be permanent?
- How can the tempo and enthusiasm be sustained?

Obviously, these are serious concerns and need to be investigated. Nevertheless, an ongoing teacher development programme seems to be an imperative. There should be a policy to incorporate ongoing professional teacher development programmes. The underlying principles of these programmes must include concepts of reflection, critical self-analysis, collaboration, cooperation and monitoring. In-service training needs to be taken seriously at all levels. Teacher development through continued awareness and reflection is not only vital but one of the purposeful and democratic ways of teaching/learning and one of the procedures through which teachers may be helped.

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Appendix 1: Structured Interview Questions for Trainee Teachers

1. When you started the practicum what were your initial expectations?
2. When the programme was introduced what were your reactions?
3. How easy or difficult did you find it?
4. What problems did you face?
5. What did you like about the programme?
6. What are your perceptions about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme?
7. Narrate at least one good experience you had during the programme.
8. Narrate one bad experience that you went through.
9. Do you think your supervisor gave you adequate time?
10. Comment on the kind of interaction you had with your instructors.
11. Did you face any problems while maintaining a portfolio? How did you tackle them?
12. Maintaining a portfolio was a new experience for you. How would you assess its value?
13. Do you think this approach (Portfolio) has increased your perceptions of teaching and learning?
14. Can you mention specific areas where you felt that you had improved?
15. Mention some areas where you felt you needed improvement.
16. Do you think there should be some changes to the programme. If yes can you make some suggestions for improvement.

Appendix 11: Structured Interview Questions for Supervisors

1. What was your objective in introducing this practicum?
2. Can you make some comments about the particular format of the practicum. Are there any differences between the traditional one and the one you introduced?
3. What were the strengths of the programme?
4. Can you throw some light on the weaknesses?
5. Was the time you spent on it adequate?
6. Can you comment on the kind of interaction you had with your trainees during the programme. Was it useful?
7. Can you list some difficulties or problems you faced during the programme?
8. I believe you did portfolio assessment. What is the benefit of trainees keeping a portfolio?
9. What are your views about portfolio assessment? How would you compare portfolio assessment with traditional assessment?
10. Can you think of any changes that would benefit the programme?