

Pathways to Reflective Learning and Teacher Development: Insights from Teacher Trainees' Diaries

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ABSTRACT

Teacher trainees going out to schools for their teaching practicum are often required to keep reflective diaries to help provide them with valuable insights into their own thoughts, beliefs and practices. Reflective writing is a form of authentic communication, more superior to talk as it helps shape our thinking. This process of shaping experiences are more explicit because writing requires great deliberation and word choice leading to more explicitness in expression. Call it 'a humbling process' or a 'mirror of the mind'; learning diaries enable learners to take the private and individual learning journey towards self-development and self-realization. This study investigated the professional development of two teacher trainees who underwent a three-month long teaching practicum in Malaysian public schools. Data collected from the diaries were triangulated with open-ended interviews. The findings revealed that both students felt that their teaching practicum was a meaningful learning experience. Further probing indicated that through over critical reflection, one progressed from awareness of theoretical concepts to involvement and implementation, while the other was able to move onto higher levels of creation and transcendence where she could one day become a teacher to others. More importantly this reflective journey helped teacher trainees chart their beliefs and perceptions on the teaching and learning process and what future pathways they wanted to take.

Keywords: Reflective learning, teacher development, teacher trainees, learning diaries, teaching practicum

ABSTRAK

Guru pelatih yang menjalani latihan praktikum di sekolah perlu menyimpan diari reflektif agar dapat mendalami pemikiran, kepercayaan dan amalan mereka. Penulisan reflektif merupakan satu bentuk komunikasi autentik dan mempunyai kelebihan berbanding pertuturan kerana ia berupaya membentuk pemikiran. Proses membentuk pengalaman lebih eksplisit kerana penulisan memerlukan pemikiran dan pemilihan perkataan yang akan menghasilkan luahan yang eksplisit. Penulisan diari pembelajaran memberi laluan kepada pelajar meneroka pemikiran peribadi dan sendiri ke arah pencapaian pembangunan dan kepercayaan sendiri. Kajian ini mengkaji perkembangan profesional dua guru pelatih yang menjalani latihan praktikum selama tiga bulan di sekolah kerajaan di Malaysia. Data dari penulisan diari ditriangulasi dengan temu bual terbuka. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan kedua-dua guru pelatih bersetuju bahawa latihan praktikum mereka merupakan pengalaman yang bermakna. Guru pelatih memberi pandangan bahawa catatan refleksi yang kritikal membantu beliau berkembang daripada kesedaran tentang konsep teoritik ke penglibatan dan pelaksanaan manakala guru pelatih yang kedua telah mendorong beliau melonjak ke tahap yang lebih kreatif yang dapat menjadikan beliau guru yang berkesan kelak. Tambahan, perjalanan refleksi ini membolehkan guru pelatih meneguhkan kepercayaan dan persepsi proses pengajaran-pembelajaran serta membantu mereka mengorak langkah untuk maju pada masa hadapan.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran reflektif, pembangunan guru, guru pelatih, diari pembelajaran, praktikum pengajaran

INTRODUCTION

You cannot teach a man anything:
You can only help him to find it within himself.
(Galileo 1564-1642)

The quotation above speaks volumes to anyone involved in the teaching and learning process. No one can deny that

both teaching and learning are core components of all learning organisations. In institutions of higher learning, the task to mould and develop apprentices into full-fledged professionals who can operate and function effectively in the real world poses a great challenge. Henceforth, learners must find within themselves what they want and what they need to do to meet the ever-changing global market

demands. This can only be achieved through deep-loop learning and critical reflection (Brookfield 1990; Zubizarreta 2004). Therefore, it is pertinent that learning organisations of today equip their learners with the required knowledge and skills that would encourage such reflection.

According to Brookfield (1995) the reflective domain requires learners to be consciously aware of the learning process. Research methods such as verbal self report procedures, interviews, critical incidents, life histories, surveys and analyses of written journals and diaries are some of the many tools that teacher educators can use to investigate the reflective development of learners. Although these research methods are commonly associated with teacher education research, it is possible to think about how 'teacher as a professional' and 'teacher as inquirer' can coexist as concepts that lead pre-service teachers to productive talk about identity in the domains of reflective learning and teacher development (Hallman 2007).

In Malaysia, both the Teacher Education Department (TED) under the Ministry of Education and Education Faculties in public universities under the Ministry of Higher Education have been assigned the task to train teachers for all public schools. Teacher trainees in both these two groups have to undergo the Practicum or Practical Teaching. Though the duration varies from a period of three months to six months in each institution, the intentions are noble – to develop trainee teachers who are reflective and able to function effectively in schools upon graduation. In most practical training sessions, teacher trainees are required to write reflective journals to record their insights, reflections and critical thoughts during their teaching sessions.

SITUATING THE USE OF STUDENT JOURNALS IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Writing, like all other art forms, has its own rewards. Writing encourages individuality as writing is by nature personal and allows learners to use their own words to express their own thoughts and feelings. Writing is also a means of self-expression as it is an avenue for communication that can liberate learners from embarrassment and limited oral communication skills. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) highlight that writing gives learners a pathway for clear thinking, as the act of writing requires one to be reflective and exact. Kathpalia & Heah (2008) add that reflective writing can help unearth what lies beneath the written product and highlight aspects that make the learning process more informed for the student as well as the teacher

Researchers like Brock et al. (1992) and Oxford (1990) contend that written materials such as diaries and learning journals are an excellent tool for reflection as they are simple to conduct and promote development of reflective teaching and learning. They are a form of self-report which allow learners to record "their thoughts, feelings, achievements and problems as well as their impressions

of teachers, fellow students and native speakers" (Oxford 1990: 198). Christensen (1981) advocates diaries and journals as they are tools for investigating the planning and evaluating of learners' personal learning and creativity in learning. On the other hand, O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 94) state that diaries have the disadvantage of "containing far more information than is needed for a straightforward analysis". No doubt, this shortcoming can be addressed by giving respondents guidelines or directions to writing their diaries.

Brookfield (1995) in *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* points out that reflective writing enables the documentation of experiences, thoughts, questions, ideas and conclusion that signpost our learning journey. Such a scholarly approach to writing requires critical inquiry into practice and into learning. One has to realise that change and improvement result only after reflection. Reflective writing provides that avenue for learners to think critically about what they do and why they do something.

Hiemstra (2001) in his paper, *Uses and Benefits of Journal Writing* adds that journaling is a learning method that can aid learners in terms of personal growth, synthesis, and /or reflection on new information that is acquired. It also allows a freedom of expression, which sometimes is inhibited in a group setting. Another outcome (though not always expected) is the ability at self-discovery. Learning to listen and trust the 'inner voice' and to interpret new thoughts can increase self-confidence. Besides that, the journaling technique can also help solve problems as writing down and imaging ways through a problem via personal insights and reflections can sometimes be rewarding.

Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that reflective journal writing can improve various aspects of health. Bruce and Adams (1998) cited in Hiemstra (2001) describe that subjects who wrote thoughtfully and emotionally about their traumatic experiences generally experienced improved physical health. They pointed out that journaling not only reduced stress but is also a form of therapy for enhancing psychological healing and growth. Hiemstra (2001) adds that though learners may not need such psychotherapy, writing helps to release pent-up emotions, counter anger or frustration and overcome stress in today's busy work places and lifestyles.

Beed et al. (2005) highlight that pre-service teachers become thoughtful practitioners when they engage in written reflections about lesson plans, common readings experiences related to internships and their own education classes. Besides that, the researchers provided teachers trainee with structured reflective writing that facilitated their growth through three levels of deliberation reasoning. In the first level, teachers focussed on the technical accuracy of the teaching procedures. In the second level, teachers provided reasons for their instructional actions and their outcomes. In the third and highest level of reasoning teachers questioned thoughts, feelings and actions that they had previously taken for granted, thereby critically

considering the extent to which teaching practices foster equitable conditions for learning. These levels of reasoning parallel the levels of teacher learning elsewhere described as knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice and knowledge-of-practice (Hoffman & Pearson 2000).

Wagner (1999) further adds that student journals can also be used for course evaluations as they provide qualitative data which can be used to complement traditional evaluation procedures. He highlights that journals provide a wealth of data which cannot be obtained or gleaned through other assessments tools like tests, interviews or presentations. Kaur (2003) adds that student journals are 'cognitive tools' that provide valuable insights into students' qualitative experience of how they perceive their academic experience. She emphasized that this leaves 'a powerful impact' on both teachers as well as researchers on the experience that learners undergo during internship programmes. Kaur (2003) draws attention to the fact that journaling allows individuals to discuss issues close to their hearts and yet 'warrants them the confidentiality the consciously seek'. Such feedback is of utmost importance to course designers of internship programmes.

In a similar vein, Halbach (1999) also pointed out that learner diaries as a source of overt reflection can be used both as a source of information about trainee teachers' perceptions of the Practicum and as a research tool to evaluate teacher training courses. More importantly, these diaries help trace the development of learners as they journey along the educational landscape of becoming teachers. She however, cautions that three factors need to be taken into consideration when using diaries as research tools for data collection processes.

The first factor is that the analysis of the trainees' comments relies heavily on how the researcher interprets them. One has to make a decision on which comments are relevant and then establish connections between them. The researcher has to note that when dealing with qualitative data that escape statistical analysis, there seems to be no way of avoiding interpretation but the following steps can be taken to avoid erroneous conclusions: use two sets of data for any interpretation before reaching any conclusion and present the conclusions to the informants (i.e. the trainees) so that they can express their own opinions and comments about whether the interpretations are correct.

The second factor concerns the fact that since trainees know that their diaries will be read by their supervisors, it will most probably have an important influence on what they write, hence making their comments less critical or otherwise. Hatton and Smith (1995: 43) echo a similar sentiment when they suggest that journal entries can sometimes be "altered to accommodate to the perceived expectations of the reader, rather than suit the writer's end". This shortcoming can however be kept at a minimal level if different sources of information and research techniques (e.g. interviews and questionnaires) are used to triangulate initial findings obtained from diary entries.

The third factor that one has to keep in mind is that reflective diaries have become required pieces of writing in most teacher trainee practicum sessions that they write just enough to comply with stipulated regulations. Hence trainees' motivation to write their true beliefs, perceptions and opinions may take a back seat. This is one aspect that has no easy solution as it is more often than not the motivated, mature and responsible trainees that would take time to express their true feelings and perceptions. According to Halbach (1999), this is an unavoidable limitation that has to be kept in mind when analysing data. She however stresses that this in no way invalidates diaries as a tool for evaluation.

Teacher educators widely acknowledge the fact that writing reflective diaries may pose a problem to some trainees. Trainees may experience the inability to move on or face an obstacle such as a writing block. Hiemstra and Brier (1994) point out that there are various types of blocks. They highlight that some blocks are 'internal' and may reside inside the learner while some blocks are 'external'. Nevertheless, both blocks produce varying degrees of frustration, and anxiety. They emphasized that there are a number of techniques that can help learners move beyond their writing blocks. Techniques such as imagery work, daily logs and even dialogues with fellow learners can help a learner move forward with new insights, reflections and ideas. Cortright (2000) puts forward techniques such as writing quickly and allowing words to fall freely from the subconscious, dating journal entries, using different writing and recording techniques to enhance a feeling of creativity and setting aside a particular time devoted to diary writing.

THE STUDY

This study traced the professional development of two teacher trainees who underwent a three-month long (12 weeks) teaching practicum in two Malaysian public schools in the state of Selangor located on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Both the teacher trainees were from the Faculty of Education at a local public university in Malaysia. In this study, the two teacher trainees are given the pseudonyms 'Gaya' and 'Yani'. Both are females aged 22. They enrolled in the university immediately after their SPM examination (equivalent to O-Levels Examination).

One important component of this Practicum exercise required the trainees to maintain a reflective diary. In this study, the reflective diary is defined as a diary in which teacher trainees are required to 'record and react' to classroom activities or any other experience related to each English Language teaching period that they conducted during their three-month practicum exercise. The data collection process in this study consisted of the teacher trainees' journal entries over the three-month practicum and open-ended interview protocols.

Each week the teacher trainees, Gaya and Yani wrote five diary entries. All diary entries were subjected to both macro and micro level analysis. For the initial macro data analysis process, the diary entries were coded for easy referencing – for example Entry G1A meant diary entry made by Gaya (G) during Week One (1) for Lesson 1 (A = 1, B = 2 etc.) whereas Entry Y12D meant an entry made by Yani during Week 12 for Lesson 4. The micro analysis involved reading the diary entries a few times before inductive and deductive analysis procedures were carried out. For the deductive analysis the diary entries were analysed twice. First the entries were analyzed based on Nunan's (1996) proposed five levels for encouraging and implementing learner autonomy (i.e. awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence). Then they were analyzed based on Hoffman & Pearson's (2000) levels of teacher learning i.e. knowledge-for-practice (KFP), knowledge-in-practice (KIP) and knowledge-of-practice (KOP). Inductive analysis involved reading the entries a few times to locate emerging categories such as teaching and learning, classroom management and logistic issues. For purposes of validity, an independent rater was employed to verify each of these coding systems. The process yielded an 80.4 inter-rater reliability level.

Besides investigating diary entries, each student was also interviewed twice during the practicum. The first interview took place in the middle of the practicum (in Week 6) and the other was conducted at the end of the practicum (Week 12). According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 167) open-ended interviews provide the respondent with "broad freedom of expression and elaboration" and hence "allow greater depth". They stress that by allowing maximum freedom of expression, usually ample and unexpected information emerges. The interview responses obtained were audiotaped and later transcribed for further analysis.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2006: 461) point out that a study's validity and reliability is further enhanced when a "conclusion is supported by data collected from a number of different instruments". Such triangulation is viewed as a useful technique as it provides multiple perspectives on a single phenomenon and increases confidence in one's findings (Cohen et al. 2003). Data obtained from the diaries and interviews were constantly compared, contrasted and triangulated using both deductive and inductive approaches before any conclusions were drawn.

FINDINGS

In this study, Gaya, a female teacher trainee aged 22 was required to teach English to students in two Secondary Three (equivalent to Year 9 in other countries) ESL classrooms. In Malaysia, Form Three students have to sit for a centralised public examination (PMR) at the end of the school year. Therefore, it is a normal practice for schools not to give examination classes to teacher trainees. Gaya was an exception because the school was short of TESL teachers and she was required to teach an intermediate

Form three class comprising of students with mixed abilities in English. Having to teach an examination class was a challenge for a novice like Gaya. She needed to learn and move fast, complete the relevant syllabus and conduct revision lessons to prepare her students for their Form Three public examination (PMR).

On the other hand, Yani was given two Secondary Four (equivalent to Year 10 in other countries) ESL classes. Yani was also challenged because she was given the best Secondary Four (Science One) class. This meant she had to provide interesting and challenging activities for her class. On the other extreme, the other Form Four (Arts 2) ESL classroom comprised of students with limited language proficiency. So for Yani having to teach two ESL Form Four classes of differing levels of proficiency was a challenge.

The findings of this study record the journey taken by the two teacher trainees took during their Teaching Practicum exercise.

GAYA'S JOURNEY

Flipping through the first few pages of Gaya's diary gave the impression that she was a confident trainee who knew what she needed to do and was looking forward to give her best. Her positive spirit and enthusiasm was clearly evident in her diary entries during Week 1. She said that she was 'delighted' being in the school and there 'weren't any problems getting acquainted with the staff' as they were 'warm and welcomed them (the trainees) with open arms'. She wrote, "It is a wonderful experience being in school and it kind of feels funny too because for the first time I am referred to as 'teacher' (it's nice!) . . . I am so excited and cannot wait to start teaching". During that week most of her jottings merely narrated what she did and it included her observation of the school activities. There was not much critical reflection, but she did express some concern over her students' limited English language proficiency.

During her third week, as she started teaching the two Form Three classes assigned to her, the earlier confidence and enthusiasm slowly started to diminish. She noted that her Form 3D class and some of her students in 3B did not respond to her. She explained she had tried her best to give interactive lessons but with little success. She wrote:

I am still worried on how to teach the low English language proficiency classes. I need time to know them and I need to think of some interesting activities to do with them.

Now I understand why people say time is precious. Most of the time, my time is taken away due to assembly and sometimes the students come to class late and sometimes the previous teachers come out late. Now I am worried about not being able to complete my planned lesson. . .

By Week Four, Gaya's diary entries revealed that she had some critical issues at hand. She recognised that she faced some challenges. Firstly was the issue of classroom

management. She wrote that she had trouble controlling her unruly students who were “rather noisy during the teaching and learning process”. Besides that, she realised that her ESL classrooms comprised students with mixed abilities and she was grappling with the task of having to prepare suitable activities that could cater to her students’ learning needs. She also voiced her concern that her Mentor (school supervisor) was pressuring her to move faster as she needed to complete her syllabus quickly. This would leave sufficient time for revision activities as her students in Form 3 had to sit for a public examination (PMR) at the end of the year. Pressured by time constraints she felt a number of logistics issues also needed to be addressed. For example, she highlighted that a lot of time was wasted

during school assemblies that ‘ate up her classroom time’ and sometimes the teacher before her “came out of class late” leaving her with only 20 minutes out of the designated 35 minutes. This was further corroborated by her during the first interview in Week Six. Gaya stressed that a lot of time was wasted because ‘some students come in late after recess and sometimes if I have a class before recess the prefects would leave 10 minutes earlier for their duty’. Gaya felt that this ‘psychologically disrupted’ her classroom teaching as ‘students became edgy’ as it signalled time for break and therefore students’ tend to lose concentration. A further analysis from the diary entries and the interview revealed that Gaya was faced with four main challenges. These challenges are presented in Figure 1.

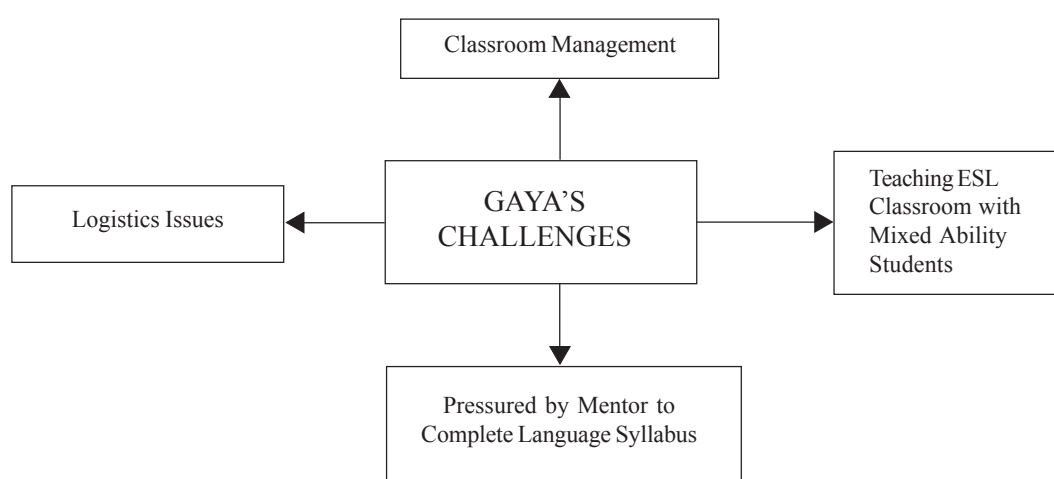


FIGURE 1. Gaya’s Challenges

This stage of Gaya’s awareness was her first stage of growth as a teacher. She was faced not only with students’ learning problems but also with logistics issues like time and class management. Her failure to control the students in class during the learning process seemed to be her major concern in her many jottings during the second month. In some of her diary entries, she acknowledged her own inadequacies, for example, she made the following entry during Week 4: “I don’t expect to have good class control with the students, as some of the teachers told me they would be a handful” and later in Week 6 she noted: “I have warned them a million times to be quiet and do their work unfortunately, the boys could not be bothered”.

During her interview session in Week Six, Gaya highlighted classroom management as her biggest challenge. She stressed that the boys in Form 3B were very playful and she disliked having to go for relief teaching in Form Four and Form Five classes (Year 10 and Year 11) as they *never listened* to her. By this time, she also became aware that she felt ‘tired and suffocated’ as she was actually spending every available minute in the day preparing for her lessons. She stressed that she now realised that teaching was ‘hardwork’ and a lot of time

was needed for materials preparation. She wondered how regular teachers were able to cope teaching 25 periods a week compared to her 10 periods.

Sometime around Week Six, Gaya felt that she needed to get involved and face the challenges instead of just talking about them and she wrote: “I must think and do something so that I can manage and have good class control”. She was seen considering taking steps to intervene so that teaching and learning could be carried out more effectively. She was seen actually trying to put theory into practice.

In Week Seven, she posted the following entry: I am now reading books on educational psychology, classroom management and counselling. I hope they will provide me some solutions” This however did not help as she wrote in Week 9:

After 12 hours of crying at home to my family and friends, I have decided to be firm with my students. I realise that reading about classroom management alone is not enough Sometimes I think experience will teach you to handle these problems. . . . Today I shouted at the top of my lungs in one of the classes but the students continued chatting.

By Week Eight, Gaya was getting nowhere and she realised that she had to tell someone her problems and seek help from her peers, her mentor and perhaps her supervisor. She was however nervous and sceptical of taking this move as she would expose her inadequacies as a teacher. Nevertheless, she sought help from her peers but she felt they provided little help as they too had similar problems. She was too afraid to talk to her mentor and finally decided to talk to her supervisor. She noted that she had a 'friendly chat' with her supervisor. When her supervisor pointed the problem of class control, she quickly took the opportunity to ask for help.

She wrote:

I listened to my supervisor for she had been a teacher for many years. As I listened, I felt good because I think my supervisor really understood me. She shared with me her problems as a beginning teacher. I suddenly felt good and realised that - Yes! Here is a person who had the same problems. . . . I waited eagerly for answers. She gave me some strategies but she stressed that each class was unique and learning from trials and errors was the greatest teacher. I want to remember those words. . . . Suddenly I feel a load off my shoulders.

By Week Ten, a rejuvenated Gaya was seen in her jottings. Her writings and experiences were upbeat and she was talking about the interesting activities she was doing in class. She talked about how interested her students were during her literature lessons when she narrated to them the story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Her students' enthusiasm was also recorded when she played Mariah Carey's song *Hero* and when she included language games as classroom activities. She noted that everyone was involved. Surprisingly, her journal entries no longer talked about her inability to control her classes. She also expressed her surprise when her students with limited English language proficiency displayed more enthusiasm to do the exercises and showed interest during her classroom lessons.

At this stage, Gaya did not realise that she had moved from her state of awareness and involvement to intervention as she was clearly taking some positive steps that had actually helped her overcome her limitations. She was now providing some interesting and fun lessons. These activities captured the attention of her students and hence class control was no longer an issue of concern as every student wanted to be involved in the learning experience. This also gave her the time to now concentrate on actual learning problems. In Week 10, she wrote:

If I have time, I think I need to put aside some time for students who still have problems with their verb tenses. I need to be more creative and I need to provide interesting lessons that some students enjoy.

Another interesting development seen in Gaya's diary towards the end of her practicum after Week 10 was her increased awareness of educational issues discussed in the diary entries. Her diary was filled with newspaper

cuttings from the newspaper (The Star) issue of a public debate on Teaching Practicum. It was something close to her heart and she critically analysed these cuttings, giving her own thoughts and ideas on Practicum.

Her diary also included her readings of educational journal articles. One article that caught her attention was an ELT journal article *The Teacher as Language Learner: Worlds of Difference* by Jo McDonough. She not only posted the findings but was able to critically analyse it and relate it to her own findings in her class. She had most certainly moved from a novice teacher to a beginning teacher and budding researcher.

By the end of the Practicum, Gaya reflected on her 12 weeks' practicum experience. She noted that every day in school, she learned something new about teaching and her students. She also emphasized that teaching was 'real hard work but very rewarding'. She realised that sometimes things learned in classes do help but noted that most of the time "we have to use the theories and adapt them to suit the unique situations in our classroom". This was well expressed by Gaya during the second interview in Week 12 when she highlighted that classroom management theories that she read from books did not work well but she had learnt to adapt. She pointed out that "books say do not put students down but I have learnt that sometimes if a student is too naughty we should punish or be a bit sarcastic, then these students normally get embarrassed and they will behave themselves". She however checked and cautioned herself by adding that "I do not usually punish or embarrass my students because they are at a very sensitive age and I know that, so I think it is a very delicate matter".

Gaya also stressed that she was a changed person and was confident she would make a good teacher. She stressed that she would very much like to be a teacher and 'would not trade it for all the money in the world'. She acknowledged she faced many challenges but she enjoyed every single moment of her time in the schools. During her interview session, she talked about how much she had grown to love her students and as she spoke of her experiences, tears welled up in her eyes.

Reading Gaya's journal coupled with open interviews helped the researchers trace Gaya's reflective learning process and development as a teacher. This journey towards self realisation for Gaya is presented in Figure 2. The researchers felt that Gaya's meaningful learning journey and development could be seen viewed based on Nunan's (1996) five levels of learner autonomy (Level 1 - Awareness to Level 5 - Transcendence) and Hoffman & Pearson's (2000) levels of teacher learning i.e. knowledge-for-practice (KFP), knowledge-in-practice (KIP) and knowledge-of-practice (KOP).

At the beginning of her teaching practicum exercise, Gaya was seen focussing on the technical accuracy of the teaching procedures. She prepared her lesson plans based on the theoretical knowledge she had received in her classes and most of her decisions were based on

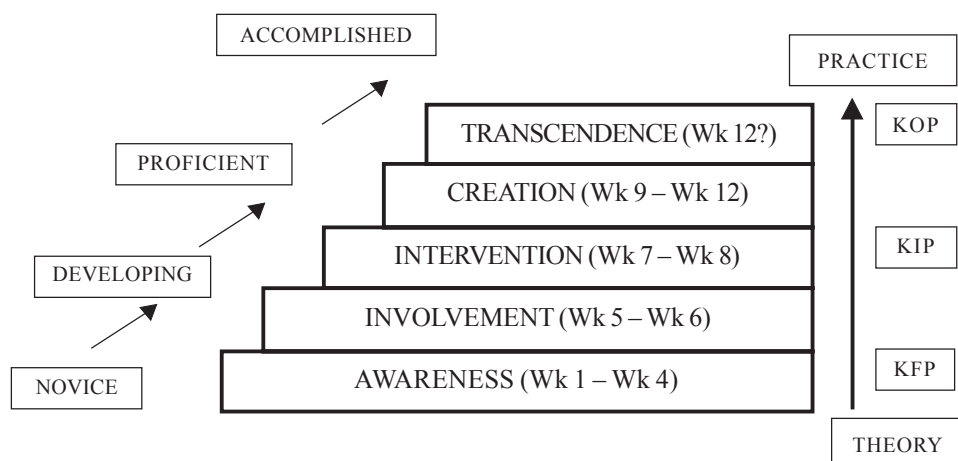


FIGURE 2. Gaya’s Journey Towards Teacher Development

knowledge-for-practice. At this stage of awareness, Nunan (1996) highlights that learners identify the implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred teaching and learning styles/strategies. By the end of Week 4, the realities of the workplace confronted Gaya. She had got involved as she was faced with issues such as classroom management and teaching mixed ability students. At this stage, she was slowly moving from awareness to involvement as she was taking steps to handle her challenges. Gaya was involved in selecting her own strategies to overcome her challenges – she talked to her peers and read books. When these were of little help, she realized that keeping quiet was not helping, she had to look for help and take some steps – she had to intervene. She decided to get involved in modifying and adapting her classroom strategies – she kept her eye on the ‘naughty’ and unruly students and called on them often to keep them focused on the classroom learning process. Based on Hoffman & Pearson’s (2000) levels of teacher learning, Gaya had moved from using mere knowledge-for-practice (KOP) to knowledge-in-practice (KIP). She realised that keeping an eye on these students helped. Soon, over the weeks she is seen to be growing more confident and she soon becomes more creative. At this stage of creation, Nunan (1996) emphasizes that learners create their own goals and objectives and are able to create their own tasks suitable for specific teaching and learning situations. Gaya was doing that – she was beginning to give her students fun and interesting lessons and by the end of her teaching practicum, she was somewhere between being a proficient to an accomplished teacher. She was articulate and was beginning to question theories as she wondered if the teaching of grammar in context was the best strategy. At this stage, she was seen using her knowledge-in-practice (KIP) to knowledge-of-practice (KOP) based on her experience teaching her learners. If she is successful and reaches the level of being an accomplished learner, she would reach transcendence which Nunan (1996) explains is where learners can go

beyond their classrooms and make links between experience and become teachers to others.

When Gaya was asked about the turning point in her life as a trainee teacher, Gaya acknowledged that she had to thank her supervisor. She emphasized that sometimes books do not have all the answers but experience has it all. She said,

I talked to my supervisor and she told me something that I will always remember: You will only have problems in class control when you have uninteresting lessons. Give them a lesson that calls out to each and everyone of them and just wait and see the difference.

Gaya emphasized that by Week Ten when she started preparing fun lessons, her students started enjoying them. She became a more creative teacher and was suddenly able to do more. She also realised she was less anxious and started spending less time worrying about preparation. She also had more time to focus on her students’ limitations and offer them help. This also gave her more time to read and react to educational issues and read journal articles. In short, for Gaya the practicum was indeed an enriching learning experience and a moment in her life she admits she will treasure forever. It was a journey that took her from awareness, to involvement and intervention and finally to creativity. It was in her words ‘a fulfilling journey’ that took her ‘from crayons to perfume’.

YANI’S JOURNEY

Yani is also a teacher trainee doing her Practicum. Her first journal entry expressed her fear and anxiety in having to face her students. She admitted that she silently said a prayer every time she entered her classes. Her anxiety was further increased when she was given the best Form Four (Year 10) Science class to teach. Her initial diary entries from Week 1 to Week 3 were mostly narrations of activities and lessons that she carried out. There was little reflection about what she was doing. She did not

look critically at how successful she was and whether or not she was able to achieve her learning objectives.

Somewhere along Week Three, Yani was observed by her mentor – a teacher in the school. This was the first wake-up call for Yani. Her diary entries revealed her critical and reflective side. Yani wrote the following entry: “My mentor feels that I do not do enough teaching. I really do not understand him”. Her anxiety was further increased as her mentor observed her teaching three days in a row. At every step, she was told what to do. Her mentor wanted her to teach the students how to write a summary but Yani personally felt “the students were not ready”. In another lesson, her mentor felt that her ‘reading text was too simple’ while Yani reflected that she took it from a recommended supplementary workbook for Form Four (Year 10) students. It was obvious she was pitching her lessons at a lower level than what the mentor had been doing in the class. Yani highlighted this in her diary (YW5D) when she wrote that her mentor:

... is just teaching and pitching his lessons to prepare his students for the SPM level but I can see that a majority (of the students) are weak and only 10-12 students are really good – only these students can follow his lessons so if I teach and follow what he says then I am sure many of the students will not be able to follow my lesson and I think I and students will not be happy.

During Week Six when Yani was interviewed by the researchers, Yani felt that the main challenge facing her was not the students or the teaching but her mentor. She felt he was too demanding and did not give her the freedom to do what she really wanted. She also explained that the students in Form Four Science One were good but the students in Form Four Arts 2 possessed limited English language proficiency. Hence, she had to prepare two very different lesson plans and she found that she had insufficient time to cope with the demands put on her. She admitted that she had great trouble teaching Form Four Arts 2 as the students were not willing to take part in activities due to their limited language proficiency. She felt that she had little time to prepare for her lessons in school as she was always burdened with having to go for relief classes. For her at this moment, teaching was ‘difficult’, “requiring a lot of patience and hard work”. Would she want to be a teacher? A big flat “No” at this stage, was her response recorded in her diary.

By Week Seven, Yani had grown familiar with her mentor, being always there. She admitted that she could now “talk to him and get suggestions”. She admitted that he was pleased when she took his suggestions: “For one activity today I tried my mentor’s technique of group work, using the worksheets he had prepared for his class. I was surprised it actually worked and the students in Form Four Arts Two actually did their work. I somewhat appreciate him for that”.

In Week Eight, Yani was observed by her Supervisor and it signalled her second awakening. Her supervisor had given her some negative comments and Yani was devastated. Yani wrote:

I thought it was a good lesson because I put in so much time and energy preparing for it. Perhaps it was that my students just kept quiet and did not respond to my questions. Maybe my students were frightened to see a stranger in the class.

But my supervisor felt I wasted a lot of time calling students to the board and this did not get all the students involved. My supervisor also felt I needed more interesting teaching aids . . . Maybe what she says is correct. I must try to improve

By Week Nine, Yani was beginning to write her true feelings and how she felt about her teaching experiences. She was finally reflecting on each of her activities and thinking about how she could get her Form Four Arts 2 to start talking. She talked about strategies she could use and at some places discussed her successes and her failures. For example in Week 9, she reflected that: “I am truly impressed because the students participated really well. It is perhaps because I used handouts and pictures and this enabled them to understand better”. Later in Week 10, she noted that “my (her) lesson did not go too well today because I think I planned too much. My drawing activity also was not liked by some students because they said that they could not draw”.

By Week 11, Yani was beginning to get overtly critical of her actions. This conscious awareness on her part helped her to progress in her growth as a teacher. She noted aspects like ‘the use of this text aroused the interest of my students and I posed a lot of questions to get them thinking’. When faced with challenges, she was willing to get involved and at times intervened during her classroom lessons, for example: “I think today was not a good lesson. The students found it boring. Sometimes I think these students are trying but their grammar is weak. I corrected a few sentences for them but I know I have to focus on grammar for my next lesson”.

During the interview session in Week 12, Yani admitted that the Practicum was a ‘challenging’ experience. She said that it was tough at the beginning but it helped her to see the ‘connection between theory and practice’. This she did consciously and along the way she also realised that teaching is much more than just preparing lessons. “I think it is about relating to your students but the most difficult part sometimes is having to face the students and to ensure that they understand what we are teaching”. Yani had developed from the novice teacher in Week 1 to a budding teacher. Asked if she would consider teaching as a career, she gave an affirmative “Yes!” Quizzed as to why, she replied: “It’s so wonderful. I liked my students and I felt so good when I was able to help them. They all want me to come back and teach them”. Asked if she would like to go back? She replied “Of course I’d like to teach but a different school so that I can get new experiences.

Yani’s journey was slightly different from Gaya. She had her challenges and when her meaningful learning journey and development were mapped out based on

Nunan's (1996) five levels of learner autonomy and Hoffman & Pearson's (2000) levels of teacher learning i.e. knowledge-for-practice (KOP), knowledge-in-practice (KIP) and knowledge-of-practice (KOP), we would realise that Yani too experienced development (Table 1). Tracing Yani's development, we can see that the journey helped

her grow from a frightened and anxious novice to a slightly more confident budding teacher who is now ready to venture into the noble world of the teaching profession. Like Gaya, Yani's journey is also one that took her from awareness to involvement and intervention and certainty again a fulfilling journey.

TABLE 1. Yani's Journey Towards Teacher Development

Levels of Autonomy	Yani's Development	Levels of Teacher Learning
	<i>Novice</i>	
Level 1- Awareness	Week 1 – Week 4 <i>Developing</i>	Knowledge for Practice
Level 2 – Involvement	Week 5 – Week 8 <i>Developing</i>	Knowledge for Practice
Level 3 - Intervention	Week 9 – Week 12 <i>Developing</i>	Knowledge in Practice
Level 4 – Creation	Stepping in at Week 12	Knowledge in Practice
Level 5 - Transcendence	Not observed	

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The reflective diaries of both Yani and Gaya helped to trace the development of both the teacher trainees as they journeyed along the learning landscape of their 12-week long Practicum. Generally, the findings show that the diary entries helped them to critically reflect their practices and take stock of what they were doing. Getting them to sit down and write critically what they did for each lesson indirectly helped them progress and develop into better trainee teachers.

From the diary entries, it can be seen that Gaya's view of learning is that it is a natural process and it is centred on the discovery and construction of meaning that one obtains from information and meaningful experiences. Gaya had problems with classroom management but through her readings and social interactions and communication with herself and others around her, she overcame her shortcoming. This gave her the confidence to go further and once the main obstacle was out of her way, she progressed very fast and moved from the stage of awareness to involvement and intervention. Once she had been successful in her intervention measures, she developed the confidence to try new and innovative ideas thus helping her to move onto the stage of creativity. In contrast, Yani took a longer time to get to the stage of awareness and involvement but once she was aware of her limitations, she tried to take steps to intervene but she was not as successful as Gaya.

Nunan (1996) states that once learners are at the stage of awareness, the learners can analyse their own strengths and weaknesses. This is what both the trainee teachers were able to do, even though at different points during their practicum. From the 'awareness' stage, both trainees moved on to involvement where they are willing to decide on making choices from a range of options. Once involved,

they were able to move on to the stage of intervention, where they learned to adapt and modify tasks according to the given situation. Gaya progressed faster from involvement to intervention by Week 10. By Week 11, Gaya moved on to the next stage of creativity where a learner is willing to create their own tasks and try new ideas and innovations. At the end of the Practicum exercise, Gaya was seen as a teacher trainee who was very confident and relaxed. She had the time to read and respond to both newspaper and journal articles. On the other hand, Yani (by Week 10 and 11) was just beginning to experience the stages of intervention and involvement. Though she had progressed, her progress was slow compared to Gaya.

Based on Hoffman & Pearson's (2000) journey of pre-service teachers, Gaya's reflective diary entries revealed that she was able to use lessons learned during her term at the university as both knowledge-for-practice and knowledge-in-practice. Nevertheless, the end of her Practicum experience saw her as a budding researcher where her classroom experience and pedagogical knowledge could be used as knowledge-of-practice. In contrast, Yani is still on her journey and by the end of the Practicum was seen as being at the following two levels – using knowledge-for-practice and knowledge-in-practice.

Interview sessions with both teacher trainees also looked into the question of diaries as a reflective learning tool. Both trainees admitted that the diary writing was something that truly helped them to review each lesson critically. According to Gaya, the writing of the journal meant 'sitting down and reflecting what I did and what I needed to do next'. Gaya stressed that she liked writing and the diary writing actually helped her think clearly. For her, it was the one place for 'discovering my (her) true self'. Gaya spoke positively about keeping a diary and stressed that it was something she truly cherished as it recorded a moment in her life she would like to remember forever. However,

Yani openly admitted that at first she did not like writing the diary entries as it was a 'chore' that she did not like. Moreover, she stated that she was afraid to write her true perceptions and feelings because 'it was going to be read and needed to be handed in to the faculty'. Nevertheless, sometime by the middle of the Practicum she felt 'it was the only friend with whom I (she) could share my (her) true secrets, worries and anxieties about the practicum'.

Both students admitted that the reflective diary was a tool that actually helped them listen to their 'inner voice' and come to terms with it. For Yani, it was a 'humbling' process as she had no faith in diaries at the beginning but at the end it was the one place she could turn to for true insights and reflections. For Gaya, it was a 'mirror of the mind' as it reflected what she did and how her current ideas and thoughts for both readings and experiences would perhaps colour her future teaching beliefs and practices.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The findings of this qualitative case study yield information that has some pertinent pedagogical implications. Firstly, the main finding of this study indicated that diary entries went beyond simple narration of events. It recorded the humbling process that teacher trainees go through when they go out for their teaching practice. It is also a reflective tool that is worthy of mention and one that should perhaps be looked upon as yet another additional channel of communication between supervisor and trainee.

The analysis of diary entries also revealed that teacher trainees need some form of guidance and scaffolding that can help them to be more critical and they must be equipped with the necessary skills that could help them to help themselves further. As a starting point of reference, teacher educators could look into Nunan's (1996) proposed scheme of five levels for encouraging the gradual development and autonomy of learners. Nunan asserts that learners need to be systematically guided through a step-by-step journey to a point where they are able to make informed decisions about their own learning process. In his proposal, he shows how learners can be guided to move gradually from awareness to involvement, intervention, creation and finally transcendence where they become teachers to others. This complete journey of self-discovery ending with complete autonomy is something all teacher trainees should aim for at the end of their teaching practicum.

As evidenced by Gaya and Yani's writings, presenting an "identity as a beginning teacher through the space of their diary entries means making important choices about how to write for multiple audiences" (Hallman 2007: 484). These subjects' feelings of tension when representing themselves as teachers in practice may lead many to perceive their identity as fractured or dissonant. However, when considering the possibilities that journaling affords in thinking about how to negotiate identity of trainee

teachers' experiences, it may be possible to think about dissonance as innovative and creative (Hallman 2007). Perhaps this recognition means that teacher trainees and teacher educators alike must abandon their hope for a one-dimensional identity as teacher, and instead realize that the path to becoming a teacher must confront and embrace the tensions between mastery and inquiry. In this regard, teacher educators can help teacher trainees recognize that the dissonance they feel in the effort of constructing their identity as beginning teachers during Practicum should be viewed as constructive.

To help teacher trainees cope more effectively, teacher educators in all educational contexts should consider including reflective diaries as a part of the teaching practicum exercise. Reflective diaries are a record of events and results and trainees' personal reactions to them. Such writing provides them the opportunity to sit back and reflect upon their teaching objectively and not view all classroom problems as personal inadequacies. Reflective dairies provide trainee teachers with an avenue for increased confidence through increased insight that can enable them to critically review their everyday classroom practices. This research tool can help them to look for personal solutions to problems that arose during the teaching and learning process. Such critical review, in the long process may give way for new thinking and improvement. More importantly, it may help them challenge themselves to develop their personal philosophy of teaching.

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