



BECOMING A REFLECTIVE EDUCATOR: A CASE STUDY AT UITM PAHANG

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ABSTRACT

*The concept "reflective thought" was first introduced by John Dewey in 1933 in his book *How We Think*; a book designed for teachers. Little did he know, almost a century later, his basic assumption that 'learning improves to the degree that it arises out of the process of reflection' is still being discussed by scholars around the world. As time goes on, the term 'reflection' spreads, producing a host of synonyms, such as 'critical thinking', 'problem solving' and 'higher level thought'. Reflective teaching is viewed as the path forward for both learners and educators alike and it leads to better learning and teaching. This study sets out to identify who among the lecturers in UiTM Pahang are ready in the pursuit of becoming reflective educators.*

Keywords: *reflective thought, reflection, reflective teaching*

Introduction

At the risk of sounding unsympathetic to the pains many new lecturers are going through and the wrath that some senior lecturers are facing, it is time to take stock of how we lecturers or educators, view our very own teaching and re-examine our teaching strategies. Our conclusion is that we should go to the very basics; understand the fundamental nature of teaching and become a reflective-teaching converts.

The roots of reflective teaching can be traced way back to 1933 when John Dewey wrote *How We Think*. He defined reflection as actions based on active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads (Stanley, 1998). In its true essence, reflective teaching is simply looking at what we, lecturers, do in our classrooms. It is about thinking about why we do what we do and thinking about if what we do works. In other word, reflective teaching is a process of a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation (Brookfield, 1995). Being a reflective educator simply means reflecting on the relationship between the teaching and learning and between the educators and the learners. A good educator should learn while teaching and the act of reflecting, in fact, turns the teaching experience into learning. Reflective teaching; thus, is a means of professional development which begins in our own classroom.

Reflective teaching is very important to the development of teaching professionals because it enables us to learn from experience. We, the lecturers, must engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation to understand our own actions and the reactions they prompt in ourselves and our students (Brookfield, 1995). However, many of us teach without having to think about our teaching. Dewey (1933 as quoted by Stanley, 1998) stated that many of us are led by routine action which is guided primarily by impulse, tradition, and authority. We often

lose sight of the fact that our everyday reality, purposes and goals and we tend to forget there is more than one way to frame every problem. If we are to become more effective educators, we need to become more reflective educators.

As UiTM moves towards having a total number of student enrollments of 200,000 by the year 2010, the university must not rely on its academics who possess no passion in teaching because, like it or not, the development of this university and the quality of graduates it produces rely heavily on its academia. In addition, our government has also voiced the need for more Bumiputra graduates under the New Economic Scheme. For example, according to Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) it is predicted that a total number of 60,000 certified Bumiputra accountants are needed by the year 2020 (Veerinderjeet & Abdul Halim, 1993). As such, UiTM needs to take up this challenge by not only producing the number but also producing certified Bumiputra accountants who are qualified are able to perform. Ironically, we are back at square one; to be able to do just that, UiTM needs lecturers who are always finding ways to develop professionally and who believe that they can improve their understanding of their own teaching by practicing reflective teaching. According to Farrell (2008) reflective teaching frees us from routine and impulsive action. It allows us to become more confident on our teaching actions and decisions; thus, making us a better educator. He also mentioned that teaching without any reflection can lead to burn out on the job and if we may ask, where does burn out on the job lead to?

Literature Review

In the literature dealing with teaching, one comes across numerous references to the concept of reflective teaching. Those who support such approach argue that reflective teaching will make educators question clichés that they have learnt during their formative years and will enable them to 'develop more informed practice, make tacit beliefs and practical knowledge explicit...leading to new ways of knowing and articulating' (Crandall, 2000). Those who do not reflect upon their teaching practices 'will be likely to teach as they were taught and, thus, ineffective strategies...will be replicated' (Braun & Crumpler, 2004).

Reflective practice is an evolving concept. In his book *How Do We Think?* which was published back in 1933, Dewey defined reflection as a proactive, ongoing examination of beliefs and practices, their origins, and their impacts (Stanley, 1998). Since then reflective practice has been influenced by various philosophical and pedagogical theories. Brookfield (1998) stated that critical pedagogy, espousing examination of underlying power bases and struggles, emphasizing active implementation, testing, and refining of ideas through experience shapes the concepts of reflective practice. In reflective practice, practitioners engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in themselves and in their learners (Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

According to Dewey (1933, 1993) reflective teaching does not consist of a series of steps or procedures to be used by educators. Rather it is a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems. This involves intuition, emotion and passion and is not something that can be neatly packaged as a set of techniques for educators to use. Everyone knows that good teaching is not about techniques. Good teachers possess some connective capacity. They not only connect themselves to their students, but their students to one another, and everyone to the subject being taught. Reflective teaching should involve a critical examination of our motivation, thinking and practice (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2004). Florez (2001) stated that reflective teaching is a means of professional development which begins in our own classrooms whereby its goal is not

necessarily to address a specific problem at the outset, but to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis. Richards (1996) saw reflective teaching as a key component of teacher development. He stated that self-inquiry and critical thinking can help educators move from a level where they may be guided by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking which are actually responses to past teaching experiences and they involve conscious recall and examination of the experiences as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action. According to Farrell (2008) reflective teaching is an approach to a professional development that is based on the belief that educators can improve on their understanding of their own teaching by consciously, systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences. This notion was supported by Lange (1990), who saw the reflective process is a teacher's path toward becoming an expert teacher through the opportunity given by the framework of the process to examine his relationship with his students, his values, his abilities, and his successes and failures in a realistic context. Generally speaking, reflective teaching enables educators to develop pedagogical habits and skills necessary for self directed growth.

The Study

The process of reflective teaching may begin with educators keeping a teaching diary or a journal. This is by far, the easiest way to begin the process of reflective teaching since it is purely personal even though it does require a certain discipline in taking time to do it on a regular basis (Tice, 2004). Next, teaching observation by peers is another process of reflective teaching. Inviting a colleague to come into one's classroom to collect information about how one delivers his lessons; Video recording of one's teaching is another approach that can be used in providing very useful information for reflection because it is able to show aspects of one's own behavior while one is teaching. Getting students' feedback is another way of knowing what students think about their lecturer and what goes on in the classroom. Lastly, keeping a teaching portfolio or a dossier provides documented evidence of teaching from a variety of sources that can help one to reflect on and improve one's teaching. First developed in the mid 1980s by the Canadian Association of University Teachers for a project to identify the kinds of information a faculty member might use as evidence of teaching effectiveness, a teaching portfolio is the key to reflection-in action (McNinch, 1998). He also stated that the process of preparing a teaching portfolio is an attempt to make public, concrete, and definable what too often has been private, obtuse and vague about how an individual goes about the business of teaching.

This research is carried out to firstly, find out how many of the lecturers in UiTM Pahang are practicing reflective teaching and secondly, to gauge how many of those who are not, are willing and ready to become reflective educators.

Research Questions

The research questions are derived from the need to identify the numbers of lectures who are practicing reflective teaching, and the need to gauge the level of readiness among them in becoming reflective educators. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the lecturers doing in documenting their teaching?
2. What attitude do the lecturers hold towards peer observation?
3. How do the lecturers react to video recording of their teaching?
4. How do the lecturers react to students' feedback?
5. How important is a teaching portfolio as a part of an on-going process of effective teaching?

Research Methodology

This research has taken place in UiTM Pahang, Jengka campus. To date there are 320 lecturers teaching in nine faculties: Faculty of Applied Science, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Management and Business, Faculty of Accountancy, Faculty of Management and Office Technology, Faculty of Information Technology and Quantitative Science, Academy of Language Studies, Centre of Islamic Teaching and Understanding, and Faculty of Sports and Recreation. Even though there are three UiTM campuses in the state of Pahang, Jengka campus was chosen as the research location because it is the state's main campus.

The research involved 120 respondents from all faculties of UiTM Pahang. Questionnaires were distributed as research instrument for the gathering of data in this research. Prior to the main data collection, the research instruments had been pre-tested in a pilot study of eight randomly selected lecturers, who were later excluded from this study to avoid contaminating the results. Based on the responses of the piloted respondents, the instrument was revised from qualitative open-ended questions to 'tick-box' questions even though the quality of the data is usually better using the first, but can be time consuming and potentially ego-damaging to analyse.

Data Analysis and Findings

The results are presented using descriptive statistics (bar graphs and tables) that show how the data are broadly spread and how they are related in terms of one aspect to the other. The Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0 was used to calculate these measures.

The response rate was 73% (110 respondents). As shown in Figure 1, out of this number, 62 (56.4%) were female lecturers and 48 (43.6%) were male lecturers.

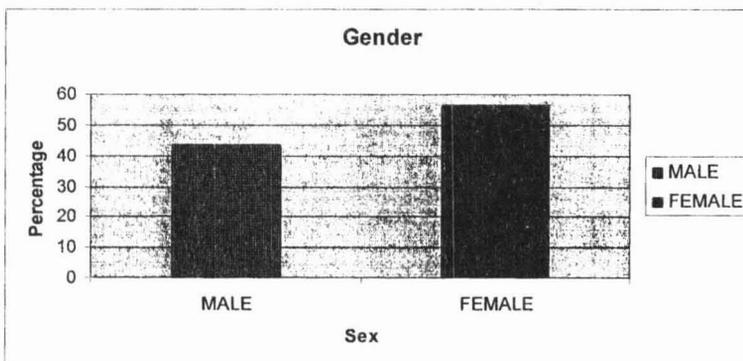


Figure 1. Percentage of female and male lecturers

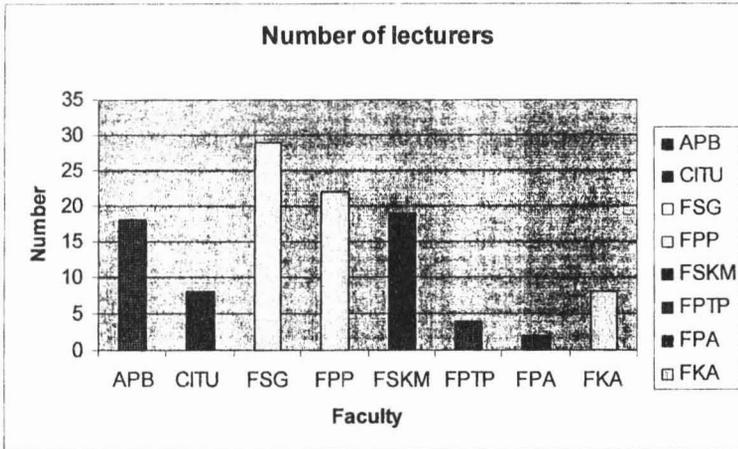


Figure 2. Number of respondents according to faculties

Table 1 shows that 61.8% of the lecturers responded are in the age group of 25 to 40 years-old. Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents (29.1%) have an average of 6 to 10 years of teaching experience.

Table 1. Age of respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
< 25	1	0.9
25 - 30	29	26.4
31 - 40	38	34.5
41 - 50	31	28.2
> 50	11	0.1

Table 2. Years of teaching experience

Years	Frequency	Percentage (%)
< 1 year	3	2.7
1 - 5 years	32	29.1
6 - 10 years	24	21.2
11 - 15 years	21	19.1
16 - 20 years	7	6.4
> 20 years	23	20.9

The study revealed that not even 1 lecturer (0%) keeps a teaching journal. Even though keeping a teaching journal is the easiest way to begin the process of reflective teaching, it does require a certain degree of discipline to do it (Tice, 2004). Only 21 respondents (19.1%) are willing to be observed while they teach by their peers as revealed by the survey (table 3). 12 lecturers (10.9%) reacted positively to be videotaped while they are teaching. Generally speaking, 108 lecturers (98.2%) reported that they enjoy and look forward to reading their students' comments at the end of every semester. Finally, 106 lecturers (96.4%) view their teaching portfolios as a tool to reflect on and improve their teaching.

Table 3. Willingness items with percentages of respondents' selections

Survey Question	Agree	Disagree
1. I keep a teaching journal/diary.	0 (0.0%)	110 (100%)
2. I am willing to be videotaped while I am teaching.	12 (10.9 %)	98 (89.1%)
3. I enjoy being observed by my peers when I teach.	21 (19.1%)	89 (80.9%)
4. I view my teaching portfolio as a tool to improve my teaching.	106 (96.4%)	4 (3.6%)
5. I enjoy reading my students' comments at the end of the semester.	108 (98.2%)	2 (1.8%)

Conclusions and Implications

The following conclusions can be drawn concerning the study on the lecturers in UiTM Pahang on their readiness in becoming reflective educators. The majority of the respondents expressed that they are not really ready to become reflective educators yet. Firstly, most probably, they feel that keeping a teaching journal or diary is time-consuming. The majority of the lecturers are required to teach between 18-22 hours per week. In addition, they are required to perform academic research and writing. Most are actively involved in numerous faculty-related clubs, societies and committees. It is understandable why not even one lecturer maintains a teaching journal or diary because keeping a teaching journal requires a certain discipline in taking the time to do it on a regular basis (Tice, 2004). Normally, entries are made about had taken place in the classroom and descriptions on one's reactions and feelings and those that have been observed on the part of the students after each lesson. In re-reading the diary, one is able to develop strategies to deal with particular teaching problems and one is able to see how his teaching practice has developed over time and as his career and teaching requirements change.

Secondly, the respondents view the idea of peer observation negatively. Inviting a colleague to come into one's class to collect information about one's lesson through a simple observation task or through note taking simply frightens them. Most probably because of the shy nature of Malaysians, the majority of the lecturers do not welcome any 'strangers' into their classrooms; not even their own colleagues. In reality, peer observation is able to generate useful information on one's teaching. For example, information on how a lesson is delivered, what patterns of interaction occurred in the classroom and how errors are dealt with on the lecturer's part can be viewed from different angles if there were an observer in the classroom. This is definitely a way of ensuring one's professional development as an educator. The whole process of peer observation not only aids personal reflection on teaching, but also reinforces the idea that teaching is about dialogue and learning from experience (Beaty, 1997). Likewise, the respondents also reported that they do not like to be videotaped. Probably, again, their shy nature is the reason for not favoring videotaping. The recording can be beneficial in showing aspects of one's own behavior that may be distracting to one's students such as the way and where one stands, one's use of non-verbal communications; effective or otherwise, or there may be things happening in the class that one might not be aware of.

All of these reasons might partially explain why the majority of the participants are not practicing reflective teaching and are not ready to become one. This suggests that there is a need to help the lecturers to recognise the importance of reflective teaching and further research can be carried out to reveal the reasons behind their unwillingness. What is worth noting is that the respondents reported that they enjoy reading their students' comments on them at the end of every semester. Bailey, Curtis & Nunan (2004) mentioned that students' opinions and perceptions on their teachers add a different and valuable perspective and reinforce the idea that reflective teaching involves a critical examination of the teacher's motivation, thinking and practice. Another important point that emerges from this study regards the importance of teaching portfolios that are maintained by all lecturers in UiTM Pahang. This study has shown that all respondents are aware of the role of teaching portfolios. Drake & McBride (2000) stated that an educator's teaching portfolio is like a self-portrait: it is his best impression of himself as a scholar and as an educator at a particular point of his career.

Hassett (2000) stated that good educators are those who have a sense of purpose. They are people who not only enjoy their work but also their students and they expect success for all their students. These educators tolerate ambiguity and are also willing to adopt changes to meet their students' needs and they are also comfortable with 'not knowing'. Most importantly, they reflect on their teaching. Simply, being a reflective educator means reflecting on the relationship between the teaching and the learning and between educators and learners. As lecturers, we can reflect on our classroom decisions and events, but reflection also involves the emotional, passionate and intuitive side of teaching. Ergo, reflective teaching encompasses critical self evaluation which can be difficult on the emotional level. A good lecturer then, should learn while he teaches and most importantly he should not only reflect the relationship between his teaching and his students' learning but also the relationship between him and his students.

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