

Promoting Reflective Learning in Microteaching Class through Self and Peer Assessments

Abstract

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Taking the setting in an English Education Department, the study aimed at using of self and peer assessment in Microteaching class to promote reflective learning to the student teachers. It concerned on how both assessments can be used in the classroom to improve the quality of learning to teach process.

This study consisted of 3 cycles and spanned a period of two and a half months. Initially, the lecturer explained how the performance of the students would be measured. Next, she promoted peer and self assessment procedures; here she provided the evaluation sheet to discuss. In Cycle 1 and 2 researcher's role in guiding and giving the assessment was still dominant and the assessment was restricted to the criteria given while in Cycle 3 it is lessen as the researcher allowed the students to assess more freely and independently. The data were collected through observation and focus group discussion. To finalize the analysis process a peer review by researcher and co-researchers was carried.

The result shows that students perceive self and peer assessment in a positive manner. A clear written assessment criteria form, careful scaffolding, various class management and supportive class atmosphere are aspects that influence the success of the actions. The written assessment criteria form helps them to understand how to teach English better and to criticize each performance. By peer assessment the students are allowed to review the work of their friends which furthermore encourage reflective and critical thinking. By self assessment the students have opportunity to reflect on the cognitive and affective aspects of their learning and identify their strengths and weaknesses also and use information for future improvement.

Keywords: self- assessment, peer-assessment, Microteaching, evaluation-sheet, reflective-learning

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A. Introduction

This research explores the question of how to help student teachers acquiring the novice teacher's standard competences in a Microteaching class. As I reflected on my role as supervisor of the student teachers, or the teacher of practicing teacher, I found that some students were less critical and faced complex problems in dealing with the nature of microteaching class. I found a gap between their levels of English knowledge and skills and expected performance in the Microteaching class. As a supervisor, I wanted to provide experiences that can trigger a deeper understanding of teaching through process of critical reflection. Therefore I decided to a study to improve the students' understanding and skills of teaching by implementing peer and self assessment to enhance the reflective learning. My main research question was how peer and self assessment can be used to promote the reflective Microteaching. I believed that these two types of assessment would trigger the students to be more reflective and critical.

B. Literary Study

Microteaching is a technique used in the training of teachers, in which different teaching skills are practiced under carefully controlled conditions (Richards et.al.,2002). The aim is to "give instructor confidence, support, and feedback by letting them try out among friends and colleagues a short slice of what they plan to do with their students" (*Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning Harvard University, 2002*). Teaching is believed as a complex set of activities which can be broken down into different skills. There are 3 dimentions of skill that should be acquired in a microteaching class namely performance skill, cognitive process and affective learning(McGarvey and Swallow in Wallace, 1991).

Wallace (1991) divides *microteaching* into 4 stages: the briefing, the teach , the critique and the reteach. In the briefing stage, the students are given the explanation about the skills that should be taught and how to do it. The teach stage is the time when the students do the actual teaching. In the critique stage the students receive feedback particularly about the way they teach from the the lecturer and friends. These may also come from themselves. In the last step, the reteach stage, the students are given chance to improve their teaching.

Currently, a more reflective approach in microteaching has been suggested. In this approach, "the microteaching experience is intended not simply to provide an opportunity to master experience that can trigger and a deeper understanding of teaching through processes of critical reflection" (Richard and Farrell, 2011: 7). Hence, the student's personal ability to understand and reflect on the cognitive and affective aspects of teaching of teaching becomes the central focus. According to Miller (2009) in Richards and Farrel (2011:7) reflective microteaching sessions involve thinking about the total teaching act in all its dimensions. He also mentioned that the types of feedbacks given by supervisor would mirror this approach. They are not being primarily prescriptive but be reflective in nature and focus more on making the student

teacher having deeper understanding of teaching through a process of dialogue and reflection. In other words, reflective microteaching can be identified from the types of activity in the class and also kinds of feedback and how it is given.

Reflection is a way of learning which has an important role. It helps the students to have greater self-awareness about their learning development and better understanding about their strengths and weaknesses. It has been described as a "...deliberate process during which the candidate takes time, within the course of their work, to focus on their performance and think carefully about the thinking that led to particular actions, what happened and what they are learning from the experience, in order to inform what they might do in the future" (King, 2002).

It can be argued that the duty of the supervisor is to encourage the student teachers to be more reflective. In microteaching class, where the student teachers play two roles: as a student (of the guiding lecturer) and the teacher (of their peers), the student teachers need to reflect on their teaching performance as part of their learning to teach. Reflective teaching *is* an approach to teaching and to teacher education which is based on the assumption that teachers can improve their understanding of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching experiences (Richards et.al. : 2002). In this case, the student teachers can always reflect on their microteaching performances to improve their understanding and capacity and at the same time they can learn also from peers' performance and feedback. Reflection can be done in many ways: individually or in groups, orally, through pictures or in written format. It can be descriptive and functional, critical and analytical or creative and imaginative (Coughlan, 2007-08). Discussion with peers and supervisor is an activity that can be used to promote reflective teaching and learning (to teach).

Brown, Rust and Gibbs (1994), Zariski (1996), Race (1998) and others have described some potential advantages of peer assessment for students as : giving a sense of ownership of the assessment process, improving motivation, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, developing them as autonomous learners, treating assessment as part of learning, so that mistakes are opportunities rather than failures, practising the transferable skills needed for life-long learning, especially evaluation skills, using external evaluation to provide a model for internal self-assessment of a student's own learning (metacognition), and encouraging deep rather than surface learning (Bostock, 2000).

Peer assessment (sometimes referred to as peer review) involves students taking responsibility for assessing the work or performance of their peers based on a set of assessment criteria while self assessment requires students to reflect on their own work and judge how well they have performed in relation to the assessment criteria. Peer assessment is particularly useful in helping students to develop judgment skills, critiquing abilities and self-awareness. In microteaching class the students can be engaged in providing feedback to their peers. It encourages the students to learn more deeply, to build up their understanding, as well as to gain an insight into their own progress in comparison to their peers. Meanwhile, self assessment provides opportunities for them to be able to identify what constitutes a good (not so good and poor) piece of work or state of behavior. In can be said that reflection is the key to self assessment and peer assessment. Self and peer assessment "promote lifelong learning, by helping students to evaluate their own and their peers achievements realistically, not just encouraging them always to rely on (tutor) evaluation from on high" (Brown, 1996 in Bostock, 2000). Such self assessment encourages students to become independent learners.

C. Procedures

The study I conducted was action research; it was simply part of regular microteaching class procedure and was my reflection on my own practice as supervisor. The aims were to allow them practice teaching and to make the participants get accustomed to reflective thinking about behavior, opinions and belief about teaching. My concern was to put a more reflective approach in microteaching class by using peer and self assessment.

This study consisted of 3 cycles and spanned a period of two and a half months. Initially, I collected some basic data about the problems that the student had. In the beginning of Cycle 1 I explained and distributed the written assessment criteria to be used as the basis for judging and evaluating the teaching performance. In this cycle, students were asked to apply peer and self assessment. In the second and third cycles the self and peer assessment were still applied with different management. In Cycle 2 my role in guiding the assessment was still dominant and the assessment was restricted to the criteria given while in Cycle 3 it is lessen as I allowed the students to assess more freely and independently. The data were collected through observation and discussion. To finalize, the analysis by co-researchers was carried out to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

D. Results

In the first cycle, I invited three to four students to microteach and gave feedback soon after they finished. I commented on the good and not so good points. I could feel that some of them were not ready to listen to my critique and comment on some 'not so good' points. I was afraid if my comment would make them down so I always tried to be fair and moderate and encourage them to do better in next round. I invited my students to give feedback but it was not easy to make them speak. When I said "Is there any comment or critique?" they said "no" and smiled. When I asked, "What do you think about your performance?" Some students answered "it was not good", or "I was blank." or "I don't know."

In the interview, it was found that the students were afraid if their comment would hurt their friend's feeling and so they did not dare to do it. Another reason was that they had nothing to say, they do not know what to say. However, some students came and see me after class expressing their worry and anxiety about many things for example they were worried about the quality of their lesson plan, media, and some others. What I can learn was that my students did not fully understand the extent to which they must behave while acting as teacher also as student and the class atmosphere was not yet comfortable. Some of them did not remember my explanation about the criteria of a good performance in the beginning of the class and they left the assessment form home. Feedback given seemed to give little effect to their performances. It was very disappointing when I found them repeating the same 'mistakes' again and again which furthermore lead me to the conclusion that some of them did not really learn and understand the essence of the feedback I gave. I also realized that the microteaching procedures that I had in my previous microteaching classes was very conventional and so the result was unsatisfactorily. I found my feedback focused more on the unsatisfactorily behaviors rather than on the 'learning to teach.' I did not intensively invite the students to share their ideas and feeling during class due to the time limit. I rarely gave sufficient opportunity for them to assess neither their own performances nor peers' performance.

In the second cycle, I tried to give a more reflective feedback. I commented not only the facts that I could see but tried to go beyond. I tried to not being and focus more on making the student teacher having deeper understanding of teaching through a process of dialogue and reflection. I 'used' my power as supervisor to 'force' them speak up in the class. In each meeting I divided the students into 2 groups, some would microteach and some others were assigned to give feedback/to peer-assess. I told them that the quality of their feedback would contribute to the final mark; therefore they needed to be very serious in giving feedback. I believed it was fair enough because the ability of giving feedback represented their understanding about the course. To help them assessing, I asked them to stick to the microteaching assessment rubric given previously as the basic for judging.

I also encouraged self assessment in this cycle and this time it was well-arranged. Every time a student teacher finished his/her teaching, I asked him/her to sit on the 'hot seat', representing a teacher chair placed in the middle of the classroom, to listen to the feedback from his/her friends and I allowed him/her to argue or respond to the feedback given. I enjoyed the discussion they made and I felt they were starting to be more reflective and critical. In this cycle, I also asked the student teacher to self assess the performance as part of reflective learning by expressing what they thought and felt as well as thinking of the possible actions for future improvement. I gave my feedback after they finished the discussion. The class was relaxed but serious; I always tried to communicate well with them and keep being 'firm but kind' to create good atmosphere and rapport. Misjudging sometimes occurred and I was responsible to return them to the right tract. Sometime I let the flow of the discussion and sometimes I interrupt it to avoid misleading. I could see the student started to be more open-minded and brave in expressing their thought. They used the rubric as the basis for them to evaluate and judge. However, I am not satisfied yet since I felt that students were trapped in the standard and common critique, some of them copycatted friend's ideas.

In the third cycle, the focus was to encourage them to be more independent in making a judge so this time they peer-assess and self assess based on their understanding and they did not necessarily have to use my rubric, but they could use it if they wanted. The 'hot seat' was still used; voluntarily peer feedback was got by each student. At the end, I also asked them to give oral and written reflection towards the whole process in the microteaching class, not limited only to the teaching performance. Here below are some of the reflections written by the students:

...indeed a different experience I have got in classroom makes me proud. I have realized that I did not know anything about teaching in the past....I am worried of what will happen to me in microteaching classroom at first. However, what is happening in the classroom does not like what I imagine. Mrs. Lusi can, though looking so patient, guide me in understanding the essential of how to be a professional teacher. The thing I like most is the way she treats the students. I feel involved so much in classroom activities... (Yanuar Irakas)

Some of the students reflect on their strength and weakness as follows:

...but I am not confident in speaking in front of a class. My English is still not fluent. By microteaching I can practice my English more intensively. (Khoirul Fajari M)

For the future I hope I will be able to fully control the whole students in the class which approximately 40 students...(Khoirul)

I think this is a great class because I can learn many things about teaching...because my lecturer explain the materials clearly and gives me motivation. The important thing is Thanks to my friends who always give me comment and suggestion to improve my skills in teaching. (Ratna)

A good teacher should be discipline, master the subject, appreciate and respect his/her students, be patient, friendly....in this course I experienced that class discussion was a good way to make the students active ... (Ratna)

At the final session of the microteaching class I found my student more confident and brave in expressing themselves. They were not hesitate to share ideas and feelings in the class because they finally believed that experience needed to be investigated and studied and experience without reflection would not necessarily result in learning. Thinking critically was indeed not so easy for some of my students but at least they finally realized that to be able to critical they need to be knowledgeable. They were aware that mistakes were evidence of their lack of knowledge and ability they have so far and that teacher is a profession that needs lifelong learning. Their awareness about this was good news for me as their supervisors who only can monitor them a very short time and space namely a microteaching class.

E. Conclusion

This study reveals some facts about the use of peer and self assessment which I used to enhance reflective learning in my microteaching class. The students perceive self and peer assessment in a positive manner. The assessment criteria sheet helps them understand the expected skills and behaviors that they have to acquire and show. At the same time it also helps them in criticizing each performance in the peer and self assessment sessions. Slowly but sure they can identify aspects that need improvement and what to do to make it better. By peer assessment the students are allowed to review the work of their friends which furthermore promote constructive feedback. By self assessment the students have chance to reflect their learning.

Careful scaffolding in implementing peer and self assessment strategy as tool to improve student's ability to criticizes, to give critical comment and to evaluate the work is one of the keys of the successful practice. Supervisors should push them step by step and always think to start from the easy part to the difficult one. Classroom atmosphere should also be carefully designed because positive relationship among participants of the microteaching class gives impacts to the quality of the learning.

Reflective feedback means more focus should be given to deep understanding rather than mistakes per mistakes made by student teachers. In my study, students received more feedback than I could have provided. The feedback received provides information about the quality of students' effort and about future actions that they need to do. At the end I would like to refer to Aitchison and Graham cited in Bount et al (1993) in Day (1999: 52) who mentioned "experience has to be arrested, examined, analyzed, considered and negotiated in order to shift it to knowledge." It is implied that experience alone cannot become knowledge unless it is

consciously reflected and used as source of learning. Peer and self assessments can be used to empower learners in the sense that both encourage students to be more reflective in their effort to learn how to teach.

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