USING REFLECTIVE TEACHING
TO DEVELOP STUDENTS’ TEACHING SKILL

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Abstract: This study was conducted to explain the extent to which reflective teaching and peer comments were able to develop the students’ teaching skill. It was a classroom action research involving a group of students who were taking a course unit on Micro Teaching at the English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang (State University of Padang) in the first semester (January-June) of 2012 academic year. The data were collected using observation notes, self-reflection notes, teaching tasks, and questionnaire. The data were descriptively analyzed. The results showed the improvement of the students’ teaching skill in all aspects in question. Furthermore, the students had positive perception on the reflective teaching through self-reflection and peer comments.

Key words: reflective, self-reflection, peer comments.

Students of an English Teaching Study Program in Indonesia are prepared to teach English at high schools, even though they may pursue different careers after they graduate. For that reason, they are provided with knowledge and skills of what to teach and how to teach, so that they qualified to be English teachers.

Teaching is a complex process that is determined by beliefs and thinking processes of a teacher. It involves a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral dimension (Lynch in Richards and Lockhart, 1996). These are shaped by a number of different sources including experience as language learners, experience of what works best, established practice, personality factors, and knowledge about teaching methods or approaches, and educationally-based research principles (Kindsvatter, Willen, and Ishler in Richards and Lockhart, 1996). In order to have competencies and qualities covering the three dimensions, teachers should be provided with knowledge and skills about what and how to teach.

At the university where this research was conducted, the students are taught and
practice what and how to teach in several subjects categorized into English skills and Teaching Skills such as Curriculum and TEFL. Before applying the knowledge and skills mentioned above in a real setting through a subject called Praktek Lapangan (practicum), the students practice teaching their peers in Micro Teaching course. The purpose of micro teaching is to reduce the complexity of teaching in a busy classroom so that the new comer has the opportunity to concentrate on one particular aspect or skill at a time (Wragg, 1999; Wahba, 2003). The students are provided with opportunities to exercise their language skills and knowledge about teaching, thus they develop their teaching skill. They can capture whatever happens in their class, react critically, “scrutinize their own teaching … to discover their strengths and weaknesses” and exploit the experiences well (Wahba: 2003:44).

However, based on the researcher’s experience handling this course unit, it is evident that many students had various problems dealing with language use, teaching techniques/strategies, instructional materials, teaching media, and classroom management. This condition indicates the students’ difficulties in transferring their declarative knowledge into the procedural one. In order to minimize the problems, some efforts had been made in the course. A review and exercises on classroom language use, discussions on some selected texts, they would do teaching practice and were given some suggested teaching methods and techniques. The results of the efforts showed some progress, but not significant.

To solve the problems mentioned above, a strategy in the pursuit of constructive approach that connects theory and practice and through which the students’ awareness of their problems can be increased; an alternative proposed in this study is through reflective teaching. Some literature (e.g. Richards and Nunan, 1990; Ferraro, 2000; Cornford, 2002; Farrell, 2006 and 2007; Canning, 2011) advocates that reflective teaching is a strategy for teaching professional development in teaching. In his earlier article, Farrell (1998) states that reflecting on teaching experience is a way for teachers to explain their judgments and actions with reasoned arguments, which can lead to growth and development.

Reflective teaching is based on a rationale that adults have the capacity for self-reflective thought (Kohlberg 1981 in Murphy 2001). The basic assumptions and the activities show that reflective teaching is intended to “gain awareness of our teaching beliefs and practices” and to learn “to see teaching differently” (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999:4). Specifically, Murphy (2001) states three purposes of reflective teaching. They are: 1) to expand understanding of teaching-learning process; 2) to expand repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher, and 3) to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Reflective teaching is the teacher’s thinking about what happens in classroom lessons, and thinking about alternative means of achieving goals or aims. It is a means to provide students with an opportunity to consider the teaching event thoughtfully, analytically, and objectively (Cruickshank and Applegate in Bartlett, 1990).

Richards and Lockhart (1996:1) posit five basic assumptions underpinning reflective teaching as follows: (1) an informed teacher has an extensive knowledge base about teaching, (2) much can be learned about teaching through self-inquiry, (3) much of what happens in teaching is unknown to the teacher, (4) teaching experience alone is insufficient as a basis for continuing development, and (5) critical reflection can trigger a deeper understanding of teaching.

Some studies that examined the effectiveness of reflective teaching showed indecisive results. Some of earlier studies reviewed by Cornford (2002) such as those conducted by Chandler et al (1991) and Wubbels and Korthagen (1990) in-
Dicated that reflection was not significantly related to teaching performance and no differences between newly-graduates teachers and colleges implementing reflective teaching programmes in attitude toward reflection and innovation.

On the other hand, a number of recent case studies reported the keenness and interest of trainee teachers and lecturers in using reflective teaching (Cornford, 2002). The use of portfolios in reflective teaching also provided benefits in developing student-teachers’ critical learning, modes of inquiry, and knowledge and value sharing (Rearick in Ferraro, 2000). Kettle and Sellars (in Ferraro, 2000:4) found out that “the use of peer reflective groups encouraged student teachers to challenge existing theories and their own pre-perceived views of teaching...”. Two case studies conducted by Farrell in 2006 and 2007 showed positive effects of reflective teaching. The first one showed that reflective teaching enabled the teacher to articulate her belief and reflect on the wisdom of her practice critically, and the second study indicated that reflective practice helped a practicum teacher improve her teaching as she could resolve the problems of different pre-assumptions about teaching and the real practice. Probably, as argued by Cornford (2002), inconclusive results are due to the fact that many empirical findings are not reported.

Despite different views and research findings about the role of reflective teaching, there is a reason to believe that reflective teaching is needed. Beginning teachers or student teachers especially need to develop their critical practices, thus they need to have considerable practice and get feedback, and reflect upon their teaching in order to be thoughtful teachers. Richards and Lockhart (1996:4) argue that “if critical reflection is seen as an ongoing process and a routine part of teaching, it enables teachers to feel more confident in trying different options and assessing their effects on teaching.” Wright (2010) suggests that reflective practice be put as one of research priorities in second language teacher education.

There are various activities of reflective teaching (Farrell, 1998; Murphy, 2001; Ali, 2007). Among others are gathering information on whatever is taking place within a language course, building awareness and deepening understanding of current teaching and learning behaviours, making informed changes in teaching, and documenting changes in teaching and learning behaviours.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) propose some procedures which a teacher can use to conduct a reflective teaching. Six procedures proposed include teaching journals, lesson reports, surveys and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research. This means that reflective teaching can be done by the teachers themselves through self-reflection or the ‘eyes’ of others (comments from others) called as peer comments. Self-reflection can be in the form of written accounts, self-report, or biographies, while peer comments can be carried out through peer observations and collaborative journal writing.

This study implemented reflective teaching strategy to improve the students’ teaching skills. Two questions whose answers were sought were: (1) how well does reflective teaching through self-reflection and peer comments improve the students’ skills? and (2) what is the students’ perception about using self-reflection and peer comments to improve their teaching skills.

**METHOD**

This classroom action research is aimed to improve the process of teaching and learning in a Micro Teaching class. Specifically Creswell (2008) names this kind of research as Practical Action Research. It followed the spiral model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in the form of spiral.
The participants were 34 students of the English Teaching Study Program of Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) who were taking the Micro Teaching subject. The participants were students who had taken and passed all English and pre-requisite teaching courses.

The data were collected through, observation notes, teaching tasks, and questionnaire. The students were required to take notes on their peers’ teaching presentation. The comments were conveyed orally and given to the peers as a source of reflection for them. The researcher also took notes through which she could see the students’ teaching skills and problems. Questionnaires were distributed at the end of the study with a purpose to find out the students’ perception on the practice of self-reflecting and peer commenting. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of the self-reflection and peer comments aspects. For the second cycle, especially, the students were required to write their reflection, and were submitted by the end of the study to the researcher; the students had been informed about this at the end of the first cycle and had agreed to do so.

The data were descriptively analyzed. The students’ teaching performance was scored based on a predetermined scoring rubric.

Prior to the implementation of the study, the students were briefed in applying the activities that would be run in the study. The students were required to teach the texts to be taught at high school curriculum in form of a fragment of teaching. They were given freedom to choose any text for any stage they liked. The researcher gave a short explanation about what and how the students should give comments to their peers.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**The First Cycle**

The first cycle consisted of 6 meetings (3x 50 minutes). Each student taught one of interactional or functional texts of his/her own choice. As planned, the students took notes and gave their comments to their peers. Each student teacher took notes for her/his reflection. The researcher also took notes and scored the students’ teaching performance.

![Figure 1](image-url)  
**Figure 1** The students’ teaching performance of cycle 1

**Students' Teaching Scores of the First Cycle**

The student-teachers’ teaching skill was measured based on a predesigned rubric. The aspects evaluated were the skills in selecting teaching materials, teaching techniques/strategies, selecting and using media, and using effective language. The scores of the first practice indicate that there was some progress in every aspect. Figure 1 shows the progress.
Figure 1 depicts the students’ teaching skills in the five aspects in question. It can be seen that the student-teachers’ ability to select teaching materials and media was good as the average score of each was 7.2, while the ability of teaching techniques and classroom management was moderate (6.8 and 7). However, their language use was rather low.

**The Results of Observations**

The observations were focused on the main aspects which included language use, media, instructional material, teaching techniques. Most of the students (90%) had language problems concerning several different aspects. Some had trivial problems that did not hinder understanding and seemed to be caused by carelessness. Some had problems that could be viewed as errors that sometimes brought about confusion and misunderstanding. The most dominant ones included the construction of ‘passive voice’, ‘questions’, and the use of ‘verbs’ in the sentences having ‘auxiliary’, ‘parts of speech’, and ‘tenses’.

The next focus was selecting teaching materials. All students prepared their instructional materials in accordance with the texts they taught. In spite of that, they had problems dealing with the sufficiency and the appropriateness. Some students prepared limited amount of material, thus they could not reach the objectives. The second limitation was on vocabulary building and grammar focus. Some students did determine new words to teach, but they did not design exercises for the newly-learned words. Many of them even did vocabulary building incidentally. Grammar also hardly received attention in their teaching. When the students taught spoken texts, they merely focused on useful expressions, and when they taught written texts, they emphasized the sub-skills and the generic structure of the texts.

The observation notes also indicated that the students’ problems were concerned with selecting and manipulating media. Some of the media were too small, had no colour, faded away, and had unclear sound. Furthermore, some students had problems in optimizing the use of the media. For instance, a student showing a picture to teach a descriptive text, only asked a couple of questions such as *do you know what picture it is and what can you see in the picture*. Actually, she could have used the picture to introduce new vocabulary and recall the vocabulary the students had learned previously.

There were two techniques of teaching that were dominantly used, question and answer and lecturing. Sometimes some students used demonstration and group discussion techniques. Most of the students began the lessons by posing some questions either to activate their students’ background knowledge or introduce the topic to be taught (sometimes through media). The interaction was merely ‘teacher-students’. Lecturing technique was used when the students explained certain points. Again, the interaction was ‘teacher-students’. Sometimes some students used demonstration technique, especially when they taught ‘advertisement’, ‘request’, and ‘preposition’. Some students used ‘group discussion’ when they asked their students to do a task.

Reflecting on the results of the first cycle implementation, the researcher decided that all activities in the first cycle were repeated in the second cycle. In addition to the first cycle, the students were asked to write their complete lesson plan even though they would only apply a part of it. This was thought to help the students to prepare their teaching well as the students could make decision which must be prioritized and which could be skipped within the time limit give.

**The Second Cycle**

Generally the procedures and the activities of the second cycle were similar to those of the first one. The students were required to teach monolog and functional texts. Each student was given 30 minutes
to teach. The students’ teaching skill is depicted in Figure 2.

**Students’ Teaching Scores of the Second Cycle**

The average scores show that the students improved their teaching skill. In fact, four of the five aspects assessed fell into good category (above 7). The only aspect that shows a little improvement was the student-teachers’ language use (6.6 to 6.7). Thus, this aspect needs special attention. The improvement of the students’ teaching skill can be seen in the figure 3.

![Figure 2 The average teaching scores of the second cycle.](image1)

The biggest improvement was in the selection and the use of teaching techniques and in classroom management. The improvement in selecting and using instructional materials and media was moderate. The least improvement was in the language use. This may indicate that peer comments and self-reflection are not sufficient enough to improve the students’ language.

![Figure 3 The comparison between the average teaching scores of the first and the second cycle](image2)

**The Results of Observation and Self-Reflection**

In the second cycle the students’ teaching skill improved. The nature of the improvement made by the students was similar to that of the first cycle. The language mistakes made by the students in the first cycle declined, both in number and kinds of the mistakes. Most of the students hardly made mistakes in using ‘auxiliary’ in question form. Furthermore,
the frequency of making mistakes in using ‘tenses’, and parallelism ‘singular and plural’ nouns and ‘nominal and verbal’ sentences decreased.

In addition, most of the students improved their skill in selecting and manipulating media. The most obvious improvement could be seen in the size, the colour, and the materials used. Only 5 students (13%) still happened to have such problems. They admitted that they did not prepare their media well. This means that the students understood the criteria of good/appropriate media but were lazy to prepare them. The next improvement was evident in making use of the media in accordance with the purpose they had. For instance, a student used a map to teach ‘asking for and giving direction’. In the first stage, she used the map to introduce the concept of prepositions. The map was also used to show a model of asking and giving direction. By the end of her teaching she again used the map for conversation practice. In other words, the map was used optimally.

As for the teaching materials, most of the students (90%) selected the correct materials regarding the texts they taught. They were also getting skillful in considering the appropriateness of the materials with their students’ levels and interest. When they taught a narrative text for junior and high school students, they chose the texts that were shorter and easier (i.e. the language) than those for teaching senior high school students. Some of the students also showed their progress in the ability to decide on the topics of the texts to meet the students’ interest.

In spite of the improvement, there were still problems related to instructional materials. Many students (60%) used the inadequate materials for each teaching session. This problem caused ineffectiveness because the objectives of teaching were sometimes not completely reached. Next, materials for vocabulary building and grammar were still limited. Consequently, those two aspects did not receive sufficient attention. Last, the materials used to teach interactional texts lacked variation; some conversation models lacked contextual and not interesting.

The two techniques of teaching, question and answer and lecturing, used in the first cycle were still dominant. The procedures were similar to those in the first cycle. The progress was obvious in the quality and the variation of the questions asked and the clarity of the explanation. The questions included the low level and the high level ones, and the types of questions varied (i.e. ‘yes no’ questions and ‘wh-questions’, ‘real’ questions’, ‘evaluative’ questions). When using ‘lecturing’ technique, the students did it better than they did it at the first cycle. This was influenced by the instructional teaching mastery and the improved language use, and the better plan. The other alternatives were demonstration and group discussion techniques. However, demonstration was used only by some students (25%) to teach ‘procedure’ and a few ‘interactional’ texts, while group discussion was used to teach ‘exposition’ and ‘discussion texts by 4 students (10%). A few students also used games and songs as variations.

The Results of Self-Reflection

The notes the students wrote after the second cycle consisted of the expressions about what the students thought they had learned from their own teaching and their peers’ comments. Most of them (80%) thought they improved their teaching after the second practice. Some even stated that they were happy with their teaching and the positive comments by their peers and the lecturer. They stated that they had improved much, but still had many problems in grammar and the way they delivered the lessons.

The students perceived the use of self-reflection and peer comments to improve their teaching skill positively. They stated that peer comments and self-reflection were useful and made them be aware of their weaknesses. They stated that they
used the results of their self-reflection in the first teaching and peer comments as considerations in making improvement of their teaching for the second task of teaching. Furthermore, some students wrote that they were happy with their second teaching. Thus, it could be concluded that the students had positive view on self-reflection and peer comments on their teaching improvement.

In spite of that, most of them stated that they still had to work hard to improve some things. They were aware that they had to study grammar harder. Some thought that they were not good enough in selecting teaching techniques and instructional materials. This means that the self-reflection notes were in line with their teaching scores and the observation notes.

**The Results of Questionnaire**

At the end of the second cycle the students filled the questionnaire to find out their perception about the use of self-reflection and peer comments to improve their teaching skill. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, 10 closed questions and 4 open-ended questions. The students were also suggested to add any additional comments they had.

The results of the analysis show that generally the students thought that the comments given by their peers helped them in a way of showing them what they had to improve. They also found that self-reflection made them become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, thus it ‘forces’ them to review what they should have mastered. The following points are the summary of the students’ responses to the 10 closed questions and 4 open-ended questions.

First, the answers of the ten closed questions.

(a) All students read their plans before they used them in the class.
(b) Most of the student-teachers (90%) showed their lesson plans to their peers before teaching.
(c) Most of the students (80%) revised their lesson plans by considering their peers’ comments.
(d) All students thought that peers’ comments were useful.
(e) All students thought that the lecturer’s comments were useful.
(f) All students did some reflection after teaching
(g) All students claimed that they improved their teaching based on the reflection
(h) Most of the students (80%) thought that they had improved their teaching.

Second, openended questions. The students were required to answer the questions and provided brief explanation for each question. The questions dealt with their perception on peer comments and self reflection.

All students agreed that peers’ comments were useful. Most of them thought that the most useful comments were about the media and the materials. From their various answers, it could be stated that their friends’ comments made them become aware of the problems in selecting media and teaching materials. Some others found the most useful comments were those related to media only. Here are some of their answers.

**S1** : Yes because they saw some points that we didn’t see. We put ourselves as a teacher, and they put themselves as the students that will get the lesson from the planning. So, it’s really helpful.

**S2** : there are some friends’ comments useful. It makes my teaching can be better. After that, I can give some revision into the teaching. About the most useful is media. My friends said the map is complicated, not clear. Yes, I agreed with them.

Only 5 students (15%) thought their peers’ comments confusing. These students explained that they sometimes did not understand the comments. Appar-
ently, this was brought about by different and contradictory comments given by the peers. They also stated that sometimes they found that the comments given were not right, especially those related to language use.

S10: Sometimes their comments sometimes are different from each other.

S13: Yes. It is confused because the peers got misunderstanding. For example: something that I did is complete, but the peers said nothing or I didn't got that thing.

S9: For example, she said I have to 'at'. I have to use 'on the left' or 'on the right'.

All students answered that self-reflection was useful. They described that self-reflection made them understand what they had to improve, which to add, eliminate, or change. They became aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They also stated that self-reflection motivated them to do their best in the next teaching.

S11: I promise to improve my next teaching based on my friends' comments.

S3: I improved my second teaching. I am satisfied. I will do much better in the next teaching.

For the last question, most of the students answered this question, while a few left in blank. Their answers varied. Some stated that the lecturer's comments were very helpful. Some mentioned some knowledge and skills they got from learning some other subjects such as TEFL and curriculum helped them. Others believed that the better media, lesson plans, and confidence helped them improve their teaching. The following quotations may explain this.

S9: from the lecture's comments, from my friends' comments, from my reflection.

S5: reading the teaching theories and what I learned from TEFL and TESOL also help me to un-derstand the teaching itself.

S6: Internet provides me many interesting teaching materials.

Thus, what the student-teachers perceive as their teaching improvement was reflected in the results of peer comments, self-reflection, and questionnaire. The students felt that their teaching skills were improved after they were aware of their weaknesses from peer comments and self-reflection done after peer-teaching. This made them feel necessary to eliminate their weaknesses for their following teaching. The little improvement on the language used seems to correlate with the minimum comments and reflection they did on this aspect.

DISCUSSION

There are some noticeable points to discuss about the findings of this study. The increasing teaching skill reflected in the scores the students gained show that peer comments affect the students' teaching skill positively. In relation to this, Murphy (2001) states that inviting peers to look at one's teaching will give an outsider's view and thus gives better understanding about her/his teaching. However, an important thing to be highlighted is that some students found that their peers' comments were sometimes confusing. This is one of the drawbacks of peer comments. To reduce this kind of drawback, the students should be given a chance to consult/confirm their peers' comments to the lecturer.

In doing the reflection, the students not only used their opinions and experiences to look at their weaknesses and strengths, but also the comments of their peers. They were aware of their weaknesses and thus promised themselves to improve their teaching. This affirms what Richards and Nunan (1990) state about the function of reflection for teacher development. They contend that the improvement of teaching may be achieved through reflection in the process of doing reflection a teacher asks the questions 'what' and 'why' which gives her/his a power over her/his teaching. In this study, unfortunately, most of the students' statements
in their reflection notes indicated that most of them were only concerned with their problems in using media and materials. They did not reflect upon their grammar problems; this is similar to the evidence found in the peer comments. This unveils a reciprocal relationship between grammar problems and grammar awareness. The students’ grammar problems may have resulted from their lack of awareness, or vice versa.

Another aspect that received less attention both in the peer comments and in the students’ self-reflection was the teaching technique. This fact seems to be affected by the students’ limited knowledge and experience in teaching. In fact, teaching in the Micro Teaching was their first experience. This finding also confirms the argument that practice and feedback are important regardless the theory one has learned (Cornford, 2002; Farrell 2006; Farrell 2007).

The data depicted in the peer comments and self-reflection notes mentioned above was congruent with their problems in using English and teaching techniques in teaching. Their language problems may be due to lack of grammar mastery and/or their ignorance of the importance of grammar. The latter is probably the influence of misconception of the meaning of communicative competence among the students. Savignon (2001:24) states that “the perceived displacement of attention to morphosyntactic features in learners’ expression in favor of focus on meaning has led in some cases to the impression that grammar is not important ...”. Thus, the students who hold this view might tend to ignore grammar in their comments and reflection.

Last, the positive effect of peer comments and self-reflection was also affixed by the students’ positive perception on these variables in their teaching improvement. This is similar to the results of the study conducted by Al-Barakat and Al-Hassan (2009) that showed the positive attitudes of student teachers toward their peer assessment. They found their peers’ comments and their reflection helped them in improving their teaching. The contention purported by Richards and Nunan (1990) can be quoted to explain why the students perceived so. Teachers who reflect upon their teaching and get feedback from friends undergo a process of mapping, informing, contesting, appraisal, and acting. In other words, they answer the questions: (1) what do I do as a teacher, (2) what is the meaning of my teaching, (3) how did I come to this way, (4) how might I teach differently, and (5) what and how shall I now teach. For the arguments above, peer comments and self-reflection are promising techniques that can be applied to develop and improve the students’ teaching skill.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS
Conclusions

There are three major conclusions that can be drawn, including the extent to which self-reflection and peer comments improved the students’ teaching skill, the component that received less attention in the self-reflection and peer comment, and the students’ perception on the use of self-reflection and peer comments.

Self-reflection and peer comments could improve the students’ teaching skill. This is indicated by the comparison of the scores gained by the students before and after the treatment. In fact, the average scores and the scores of each aspect in question increased from cycle to cycle. The biggest improvement was evident in the use of teaching media and the selection of instructional materials. The improvement in choosing and using appropriate teaching techniques and classroom management was average. Yet, it should be noted that the improvement of the teaching skill in the use of language was diminutive.

Both peer comments and self-reflection notes reveal that the students paid less attention to the language use. Very few
students made comments on their peers’ language problems. Only three students did reflection as seen in their self-reflection notes. This proves that the students had low grammar mastery and awareness.

The students had positive perception on the use of peer comments and self-reflection as the way to improve their teaching skill. They stated that they learned from their mistakes through reflection. Nonetheless, there were some students who thought that their peer’s comments were sometimes confusing. The students thought that the lecture’s comments and previous related knowledge were other significant factors that helped them improve their teaching skill. In addition, some added that the knowledge obtained in other courses such as TEFL and Instructional Media helped them in teaching.

Suggestions

On the basis of the findings, the researcher suggests that other lecturers apply peer correction and self-reflection techniques in teaching Micro Teaching subject and other courses, especially whose nature is similar to it such as Public Speaking and Interpretation. The English Study program is also suggested to look at the syllabuses of Grammar courses and the teaching of this course unit, so that the students’ language problems can be minimized. Furthermore, integrating knowledge about text types and text-based teaching of the four language skills in any possible courses such as Reading and TEFL need to be highly considered.

REFERENCES


