

HELPING EFL STUDENT TEACHERS TO MAKE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PROBLEMATIC MATERIALS OF THEIR SITUATIONS: PRACTICING SCHÖN'S AND BROOKFIELD'S APPROACH

Dereje Tadesse
Haramaya University, Ethiopia

Abstract

This study was prompted by experiential confrontation with prospective teachers' opting for fending off effective reflection and harboring of silence, each of which debilitated developing adequate skills of planning appropriate lessons and presenting them meaningfully. Choosing a practitioner inquiry design formulated based upon works of Schön (1983, 1987) and Brookfield (1986, 1995), this study inquired into ways for effective reflection within the existing condition. Ten pre-service EFL student teachers were selected purposefully to take part in the study. Reflective journaling was employed both as a research method and strategy of reflection. The finding indicates that Schön's theory of trainer-trainee collaborative reflection upon problematic materials of their situations is not only a robust explanatory theory but also practical and useful strategy of EFL reflective practicum.

Background

A pre-service teacher education program is incomplete without a practicum component. With this conviction, in the year 2003, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (now on abbreviated as MOE) introduced what it called new teacher education system overhaul with the intention of redressing the preceding crises in teacher education (MOE, 2002, 2003, 1994). The policy reform was premised upon research findings that showed that, to mention a few, teaching skills and techniques of teachers were very basic; methods of teaching were treated theoretically; there had been mismatches between teacher education and secondary school practices; reflective practicum and action research were neglected; theoretical and practical courses in teacher preparation programs were fragmented (MOE, 2003, pp. 40-45). Similarly, English as Foreign Language (EFL) teacher educators had pointed out the persistence of similar problems (Hailom, 1993).

The policy-strategy guide distributed to every teacher education institutions in Ethiopia (MOE, 2003) orients all the processes and outcomes of the pre-service teacher education programs. Accordingly, among the key competencies that teachers of all levels must exhibit before they qualify are (1) competent in the subjects and contents of teaching, (2) competent in the classroom actions/interactions, and (3) competent in the values, attributes and abilities essential to professionalism (MOE, 2003, p. 45).

Central to the new pre-service teacher education system overhaul is the practicum component and the need for teacher education institutions to emphasize practical knowledge in their programs. That is why, for instance, Haramaya University, which this study selected as its setting, has been robustly engaged in translating the reformed policy to practice. The Haramaya University's *Handbook of Practicum* (2007), for example, states that the pre-service practicum is carried out in three consecutive phases. Practicum I is where student teachers mainly involve in school observation. This comprises 2 credits which mean two hours per a week and a total of 32 hours activities. This course is offered when the student teachers are in their second semester of the second year (Haramaya University, p.20). Practicum II is where student teachers take over actual teaching in secondary school classrooms, receiving feedback from the supervising teacher educator and schoolteacher. It comprises 7 credits, which means that 7 hours per a week or 112 hours practices. It is offered when the student teachers are in their third year first semester (p., 84). Lastly, Practicum III is a course in which the same student teachers carry out practice-based inquiry or action research formulated during the previous phases with the advice of the teacher educator. It comprises 4 credits, which means four hours per a week or a total of 32 hours of practice (p., 101). This is offered during the last semester of the whole three-year program.

The Problem

Despite the government's aim to overhaul the teacher education system, practical experience of the inquirer--as teacher educator--shows that there is no indication that the problems that had generated the reform are abating. For instance, his practical experience in the EFL teacher practicum shows that the vast majority of the student teachers do not engage in describing and expressing their practicum experiences. On top of this, the inquirer's observation of EFL student teachers' practicum teaching actions indicates that they develop no adequate skills of planning appropriate lessons and presenting them meaningfully. Besides, observations of their lesson plans show that their designs and presentations overly involve issues far removed from pupils' lives and experiences.

Still, after the end of the whole EFL practicum program, many of them experience what some theorists (Brookfield, 1995; Farrell, 1998) call *impostorship syndrome* i.e., they burnout on their pre-service practices. Consequently, since teaching skills and English skills re-construction is significantly proven so un-becoming, many of the prospective teachers are observed to be inclined to thinking that they were incapable of becoming effective teachers of English. On the whole, it is commonplace that student teachers experience what Shulman (in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 424) refers to as "pedagogical amnesia", which means, the inability to read-and-write, textualize and build image of their fruits of practicum learning. Due to this they usually resort to fending off questions and harbor silence. Unusually, they consider practicum course from instrumental point of view; that they consider practicum time as a vacation or a means for cheap grade as it is secondary to theoretical courses.

Nevertheless, in second and foreign language teacher education, practicum is an opportunity not only to develop pedagogic skills, but also of the language skills (Williams, 1989). This is mainly because EFL student teachers experiment with English for themselves, which implies English being knowledge as well as language (medium) of reflection by itself. Secondly, in a practicum, EFL student teachers learn to become pedagogically competent prospective teachers. They bear the challenge of equipping themselves with the skills of planning lessons, implementing them and reflectively assessing the lessons in/on action. Thirdly, it is a key opportunity for them to equip themselves with the metacognitive skills of subjecting to inquiry the implicit assumptions that shape the way they behave in practicum. The latter skill is pivotal since it enables student teachers to independently improving their understanding of how effective teaching works as well as to reduce to minimum the misunderstanding engendered by their use of the language (code).

Research Questions

The general question guiding the inquirer is 'How can I enhance reflective learning within the existing condition?'. The specific questions are:

1. How can the student teachers' potential to reflect be prompted?
2. What form of effective reflectivity can be achieved?
3. What determinants of effective reflection can be created?

As a practitioner inquiry on own practice, analyzing the institutional conditions or formulating a generalizable 'theory' is less significant.

Theoretical Framework that Guided this Study

Schön's and Brookfield's theories of reflection

Schön's (1992, 1987, 1983) theories of reflection offer essential frameworks for integration of reflection and action, and theory and practice in reflective practicum. To Schön, reflection is mainly an *ontological* process of generating model and knowledge through reflective conversation with "the problematic of [...] the indeterminate zones of practice" (p. 11). Rejecting what he calls as technical rationality, Schön advanced a new concept of reflective rationality in his theory of reflection-in-action and knowing-in-action. To Schön, practitioner knowledge is knowledge in action. A practitioner faces with surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation in which he finds himself/herself. Then, he/she sets the problems. That is, he/she *names* them and *frames* the context in order to attend to them. Next, he/she "carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation" (Schön, 1983, p. 68). Also, the practitioner keeps

accounts of or builds up a repertoire of knowledge--"examples, images, understandings and actions" (1987, p. 38).

Similar but with slight different philosophical ground to Schön's, Brookfield (1995, 1986), one of the prominent scholars who extensively writes on theories and practices of reflection, defines reflection as an *epistemological* process of constantly 'hunting' and revising the implicit assumptions that define how we think and act on educational practices. Brookfield defines assumption as "the taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that seem obvious to us not to need stating explicitly" (1995, p. 2). He stresses that "In many ways, we *are* our assumptions" (ibid, p., 2; Emphasis is original). This is because assumptions give meaning and purpose to who we are, why and how we act/interact in what we do. For this reason, Brookfield (1995) offers numerous reflection tools that encourage student teachers to engage in critical reflection on their assumptions about topics such as the dynamics and rhythms of classroom processes; the daily struggle to confront irresolvable dilemmas and contradictory demands; the significance and meaning of teaching for those that teach; the strengths enjoyed or humiliations suffered as part of the teaching process.

Reflective practicum contrasts to a mere translation of research-driven knowledge to practice, which entails technical practice of "fixed and clear" body of knowledge (Schön, 1983, p. 41). Both Schön's and Brookfield's concepts of reflective practice entail that student teachers should be engaged in constructing reflectively and communicatively interpreted, discussed and validated understandings from confronting problematic situations in practice rather than in ascribing or applying normatively and theoretically pre-established categories of meaning.

Socio-cognitive model of language and learning

The socio-cognitive model of language and learning upholds language as a practice that is constructed and re-constructed in a social condition. It disavows the traditional split between language 'competence' and 'performance' (Chomsky, 1965). This might entail the de Saussurean view that structure of a language is an event: "...it consists in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition" (Koegler, 1992, p. 48 based on works of Hans Gadamer). Sociocognitive linguists (Pennycook, 1999; Morgan, 1998; Canagarajah, 1999) contend that the main goal of EFL/ESL teacher education should be to enable prospective teachers to see language, "not simply [as] a means of expression or communication but as a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future" (Okazaki, 2005, p. 175). Thus, in this view reflective practicum can serve as a conduit for both competence and performance supplement each other in order to construct new knowledge about the structure and skills of the language. In other words, a reflective practicum as practical learning experience provides rich input, for it is where words and structures unfold in context. What this means for an EFL practicum is that English is used in a real communicative situation (Cullen, 1994) because EFL student teachers get the opportunity not only to engage in writing, speaking, reading and listening of real issues, but also grab the authentic chance to re-construct their language awareness, i.e., how the words and structures of English function as "a fabric that links people" (Freeman, 1996, p. 749).

The current theories suggest that EFL reflective practicum encompasses linguistic (English), pedagogic (teaching) and inquiry (metacognitive) practices and skills reconstruction in tandem. It is also believed that if EFL student teachers are helped to critically reflect on *what* lessons they practiced to teach, *how*, and *why*, they will not only explicate their implicit assumptions but also reconstruct and advance their teaching skills and language skills. This, in turn, involves student teachers in as much describing, discussing and conceiving of their practicum experience in the medium of English as it engages them in thinking, acting, and observing teaching English. In a collaborative, dialogic and critical reflective situation, the opportunity to subject own and colleagues' practices to observation, evaluation, analysis and refinement will become opportunities for effective reconstruction of new knowledge and skills teaching, inquiry and English language in tandem.

Methods

The present inquirer adopted a *double-methodology*, which serves both as a research method and strategy of reflection, simultaneously. That is, following the works of Donald Schön's (Schön, 1983, 1987) theory of knowing-in-action, a practitioner inquiry research approach was pursued. Practitioner

inquiry approach assumes that a practitioner's own practice becomes the area of inquiry and change (Dahlstrom, 2006). This approach fit with the thrust of the inquirer, namely the desire to improve own understanding and practice of training EFL teachers. Dispensing with the traditional dualism between research and training, the inquirer played multiple roles—analyst, trainer, explainer, facilitator, participant observer and a coach providing constructive feedbacks.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was employed to select participants in the study. Ten EFL student teachers in the Department of English of Haramaya University were selected based on their willingness. Similarly, one colleague teacher educator was selected as 'critical friend' (Schön, 1987, pp. 71-73). The role of the "critical friend is to assist with the objectification needed for the inquiry" (Dahlstrom, 2006, p. 66), for instance, through feedback. A consensus was reached to anonymize the names of the participants for confidentiality. Thus, alphabetically, TR-01, 02...10 was used as codes (TR abbreviates trainee).

Reflective journaling was adopted both as a training and data collecting strategy for, early critical observation of the student teachers' situation of practice indicated that they lacked tools for effective reflection (This will be presented below). Instead of the official tools, three types of reflective tools were adapted and employed: (1) *Dilemma Analysis* tool (Talanquer, Tomanek, & Novodvorsky, 2007), (2) *Plan-implement-observe-reflect* tool (designed based on works of Schön, 1983, 1987, 1992), and (3) *Critical Incident* journal entries (adapted from Brookfield, 1995). See Appendix. Critical Incident journal promotes student teachers to keep reflective accounts about high and low moments in their practice of teaching, or details of the significant incidents that stand out in the professional lives of teachers (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 148-9). The Dilemma analysis tool promotes to be responsive to context dilemma and document why it was important or relevant to them, how the dilemma did emerge, how it developed, how they tried to solve the problem, how the dilemma or problem influenced their beliefs about teaching or learning, and what they would do about it next. This tool would encourage the skills of alertness, sensitivity, perceptiveness and responsiveness. It is believed that the Plan-implement-observe-reflect tool involves student teachers in designing a unique lesson or activity, implement it and keep account of their reflections on the design and implementation. It encouraged them to reflect for action and reflect on the action. Weekend reflective discussions on journal entries were also employed as both an additional pedagogy of reflective practicum and data collection.

Context of school culture

Since the early 1990's, Ethiopia has reformed its education (TFG, 1994; MOE, 2002, 2003). One of the fundamental breaks with the past was the policy of medium of education. Unlike before, where Amharic was chosen as a medium of education from primary to junior school level, children are taught primary school (referred to as first cycle or Grade 1-6) and junior school (referred to as second cycle or Grade 7 and Grade 8) in their mother tongues. English is studied as a subject beginning from the first grade. Following the adopted federal system, as opposed to the former centralized or unitary system, each regional state designs English Student Book, which serves as sole resource, for each grade level at its Regional State Education Bureau. Although, English assumes medium-of-instruction status at secondary level, yet, the same style of teaching from Student Book designed by same body persists in the secondary levels (Grades 9 and 10), too.

However, the most radical break with traditional school system is the new secondary education mode which jettisoned the traditional teacher-led system practice. The reform built live satellite-TV transmission teaching-learning mode into every secondary classroom across the country (FDRE, 2006). Accordingly, for the last five and more years, secondary school, also referred to as Grades 9 and 10, lessons have been transmitted through live satellite TV-link from a studio in the capital city. Customarily, the satellite TV educational style is referred to as *plasma* or *plasma policy*. These terms resonate with the brand new flat Panasonic plasma screen installed in the classrooms.

Context of reflection tools

The nature of reflection tools that the student teachers use was highly structured, performance-oriented and underpinned by pre-defined objectives approach. A set of *Observation Checklists* is distributed to each student teacher (Haramaya University, 2007). Observation items included

observing how “the teacher communicate objectives to the students”, whether “questions are asked throughout the lesson”, whether “high level of subject knowledge was evident”, and whether the teacher used “methods that enabled assessment of the children’s understanding”. Student teachers conduct classroom observations and tick yes/no boxes. Responses to such items are considered as reflection. Based on this, student teachers are evaluated on five-scale Likert scale i.e., from poor grade to the best grade of excellent.

Thus, one of the core factors for student teachers’ difficulty was lack of bottom-up reflective tools. This kind of reflection tool has lots of shortcomings. For instance, the items might direct student teachers but responding by writing or ticking ‘yes’ or ‘no’ alone, as observation indicated is the case, does not involve them in thinking, analyzing, exploring, discussing and documenting the *why* and the *what-ought-to-be done*. Besides, many of the items confused and were unclear to them. For instance, in informal interview discussions held with the student teachers, they said “high level of subject knowledge” and “methods that enabled assessment” were among those many notions that the student found confusing and unclear. Furthermore, the student teachers developed fundamental misconceptions. For instance, the interview made with the student teachers earlier in the course showed that for them practicum is nothing more than teaching out the official textual materials (the centrally designed *Student’s Textbook* and *Teacher’s Guide*) or implementing in school classrooms the theoretical courses taken inside the university. Similarly, they view reflection is as compiling guided writing based upon the Observation Checklists distributed to them.

Generally, from the contextual analysis phase, what the inquirer gathered was that the core factor that sustained the problem of the student teachers’ inability to reflect was their lack of effective tools for reflection. As was observed above, this factor, in turn, was generated by institutional system that predetermined not only the contents, processes and outcomes of secondary school education, and hence, of the practicum, but also prescribed teacher educators, as well as their trainees, a list of items, called *checklist*, which serve both as a tool for reflection and recipe for evaluation. Thus, as was discussed above under Methods, the inquirer designed an innovative intervention strategy, the result of which we see next.

Results of the Intervention by the Inquirer

As was discussed above, once the contextual core factors generating and sustaining the problem was understood, the inquirer intervened with his innovative structure and action i.e. open discussion and dilemma analysis tool. Both obstacles and opportunities emerged from the intervention or the longitudinal collection and analysis of the student teachers’ reflection journals.

Challenges to opening up for reflection

On the one hand, for the inquirer, his reaches and power was limited. That is, for instance, due to the strict rule of the school culture, which strictly follows the national policy, it was impossible to promote the student teachers to interrupt the TV-lesson or to employ their self-designed tasks “undermining” the national Teacher’s Guide. On the other hand, on the part of the participant student teachers, during the early stages of the inquiry, protectionism and provision of manipulated information was demonstrated. For instance, a participant student teacher (anonymized as TR01) wrote what in fact did not coincide with observation made of his classroom actions/interactions: “I used student-centered approach so that the students understand the subject of the lesson by themselves. I used it also to teach listening, speaking and, even, for writing”. Another student teacher accepted that “the reflective practices of university students in this school are excellent” (TR05). Likewise, some protected the profession by claiming “teaching profession is a good job.” However, constant comparison of this account with other data set showed incongruity. For instance, unobtrusive observations shows incongruity; that student teachers are commonly heard complaining of “being a teacher”. All these *closure* might be due to the fact that confidence building takes time or is more complex than the inquirer originally thought.

The inquirer intervened against these unproductive behaviors by turning them into objects of weekend open discussions and reflections with the student teachers, besides other practical challenges and experiences they encountered. They were encouraged to explore the meaning, cause and the unwanted consequences of these behaviors. For instance, a student teacher reflected:

Since I am beginning teacher, problems may occur. I feel fear and loss of confidence, especially at this early class. Even though I know the answers to the questions that students ask, it disappears out of mind in classrooms. The reason is because I did not consider these as reversible feelings. Now, I understand that this is normally what happens to everyone, not just to me. I've understood this after various reflections with my colleagues.

Thus, gradually passivity and protectionism of self and peers, which were impediments to experimentation with and reconstruction of reflection skills, gradually diminished. Indeed, Dewey's (1933) conceptualizations of open-mindedness and wholeheartedness require teachers to open up and examine their own and others' assumptions and practices. These are essential to reflective action. In contrast, exchange of distorted information or commonsense cannot bring about reflective learning. Effective reflection is fundamentally perspective transformation.

Reflection on own assumptions

Clues to reflective re-construction of taken for granted assumptions, or *revision of assumptions* has been identified in the analysis of the reflective journals of the participant student teachers. This appeared in the challenging and revising of assumptions about oneself, learners and knowledge. For instance, on a reflective discussion, a student teacher (TR02) reflected "I thought the plasma teaching was superior. But now, I see that it was only the graphics, the beautiful color and the technology that fascinated me. These, however, contribute nothing to communicative language teaching". What is more, his revised assumption further generated similar revisions in other student teachers' assumptions, too. For instance, other student teachers (TR06) began to challenge assumptions that underlie their attitude to the plasma when they argued "Students see the plasma picture, its different designs...They do not consider it as about English learning". This contrasts with their earlier assumptions that the plasma was a "good model of teaching". Still, others reflected on the built confidence triggered by, in words, '*such free and good discussions*', on even what they described as "sensitive" issues such as critiquing, scrutinizing and making evaluative *judgments* on the Practicum structure and the wider school educational practices.

Cross-skills test design

Reflection on and improvement of the concept of test or testing was one of the emergent inquiry categories. It was observed that this was one of the key categories at work in the reflective journaling. The student teachers attached the kinds of artefacts or materials they designed to their Plan-Implement-Reflect Journal. Initially all their test items contained solely grammar and vocabulary. In contrast, in addition to testing of grammar and vocabulary skills, their testing artefacts demonstrate attempts to address, particularly, reading and writing skills. Also, there is apparent attempt to contextualize the question items.

The inquirer, also here a coach in Schön's sense, brought themes in their documents to reflective discussion sessions, with offering issues in the current theories of testing such as 'communicative language testing', 'validity', 'communicative competence', especially relying on works of Hughes (1987), Bachman and Palmer (1996), and Morrow (1979). The inquirer observed that these were, to some extent, new concepts to them. However, in the weeks that followed they designed much improved cross-skills tests. Yet, many of them were in doubt about applying their improvised testing technique due to the large class size and lack of stationary, e.g., printing papers. But, the most important challenge that held them back 'physically' from translating these into action due to, mainly, the *analytic-assessment* school culture, where the emphasis are on objectivity and screening.

Attempt to design real issues tasks

These kinds of skills and opportunities were remarkably observed when the student teachers attached their plans to their Plan-act-reflect journals. One of the student teachers planned lesson tasks on a flood disaster that havocked recently Dire Dawa town, killing many people. His instructions for the pupils ask student teachers to think back what they felt and write these the first paragraph. Then, requires the pupils to add one more paragraph as regards what precautions should be taken for such a disaster not to occur again. The vast majority, however, designed their lessons on *khat*, a widely and customarily consumed plant by the surrounding people, which, however, many allege as drug. The instructions ask pupils to write and/or speak (against) this tradition, raising its consequences on health, economy (e.g., family financial crises), and education (as many believe it is a stimulant for

'studying'/reading 'for a lengthy time' with 'extraordinary ability of understanding'). Still other recurrent issues of their lesson tasks involve issues of drought and poverty, each of which reverberates with the pupils' environment and lives. Overall, all their lesson tasks show interesting level of potential reflectivity, which, however was less translated to action in classroom teaching actions/interactions. The constraints, according to their reason-giving accounts as well as observations, too, involved 'the aired live lesson', which does not allow flexibility, and the "syllabi coverage", i.e., the student teachers were told by the school teachers that a certain number of chapters had to be covered before they (the student teachers) handed back the class.

Reflection on school practices

Ability to reflect on the wider school practices and explanation of how the wider issues connect to the classroom behaviors, actions and interactions have been demonstrated in the reflective journal of student teachers. For example, a student teacher reflects "the rationale of the plasma-based English teaching style must be pedagogic, i.e. that motivates different activities, and varieties of tasks. The plasma is the most influential factors for my students to become less participant". He reflected on *discrepancy* between what he knows in theory and practically witnessed. Another student teacher proffered alternative insights, too. He (TR07) reflected:

The current Ethiopian secondary school practice is supportive of the cause of the plasma, but I think the plasma should rather be controlled by the teacher. And, the time given for a lesson must be changed from the mere 40 minutes to, longer, for instance, 1 hour.

Conclusion and Implications

One of the guiding questions for the inquiry was 'How can the student teachers' potential to reflect be prompted?' This study provides evidence that congealing the Schön's and Brookfield's conceptual frameworks of reflective practicum yield fruits. Their conceptual and practical tools have been employed for triggering generative factors for steady but remarkable change in the student teachers' ability, such as seen above. This study, thus, suggests teacher educators may see relevance in the findings from this study as they seek to develop reflective tools and strategies for enhancing reflective learning even in the most constraining contexts. One of the interesting experiences was the role of these constraints; they emerged both as opportunities and constraints. The student teachers' reflective journal entries on Low Point of Performance and Dilemma Analysis indicated that these themes were the major issues they reflected about. That means these stressful and dilemmatic experiences triggered the student teachers to pause, reflect in detail and write critically in their dilemma analysis and critical incident journal entries as the situations constrained the way the student teachers practiced teaching and reflection.

The findings show there is an opportunity for other EFL teacher educators in the context of the inquirer to concomitantly improve the poor reflective, teaching and English skills facing the student teachers. The action strategies of reflective journaling and reflective discussion on the journal entries have effected moderate changes in the student teachers' reflection skills. It has been understood that encouraging student teachers to design lessons especially on issues related to pupils' real, practical and true life is not only a fundamental skills that they need and could develop, but is also a fundamental opportunity for teacher educators to raise awareness of EFL student teachers that language is meaningful event, activity or social practice. Furthermore, *increased awareness of the role of reflection* on their practices was also what was at issue in their journals. For instance, a student teacher (TR04) asserts, "this kind of reflection is indispensable for me because it enables me to understand what I experience. This will help me a lot when I become a full teacher". Likewise, another student teacher (TR10) substantiated that "due to this reflection process, I realized that even I can learn a lot from my students' comments and remarks about my teaching practices".

What is more, in this inquiry one of the remarkable observations was that 'higher' level of English language proficiency is not necessarily determining factor for effective reflective learning. These student teachers have already stored lexical and syntactic repertoires, though these are chunks, disconnected and rusty. As far as reading of their journals in a *holistic* approach (Biggs 1995) is concerned there is adequate level of intelligibility and steady improvements in their composition and expression skills. The findings are indicative of the fact that their poor English skills are contingent upon the condition under which they practice teaching. The cognitive potential is already there. They

have also been introduced to essential concepts in language and teaching in other courses. Thus, they must be provided just with a reflective tools and open and free condition which enable them to see and use English as connected whole in their practicum activities. A constrained or poor circumstance of English skills development cannot recursively constrain itself once reflective conditions are established for the EFL student teachers.

Policy makers may see relevance in the findings from this study in that if we are to improve a reflective practicum, we must allow student teachers open, participative reflective changes and transformation of school practices rather than reduce them to passive absorbers of tradition. This study has indicated that 'the aired live lesson', which does not allow flexibility and the ascription to the student teachers of "syllabi coverage" norms, were serious constraining factors. All this entail the need for more critical reflection on the reflection or the reflective practicum across universities and schools and staffs of both parties.

Consequently, if we are to improve the effectiveness of reflective practicum, teacher educators should be allowed to autonomously provide student teachers with *generative* reflection tools, rather than just assess them on institutionally pre-established competencies and procedures. It has been understood from this inquiry that reflective tools provide material as well as conceptual *freedom* to think critically and textualize experiences even in a condition that does not tolerate questioning and exploring alternatives to institutionally imposed recipes of teaching. Inasmuch as the trainer involves his/her student teachers in open, democratic and participative discussions, institutionally defined procedures and rules cannot close down memories and pulse of critical reflection on own practices. Exclusively for EFL teacher educators, the finding strongly suggests the vital roles of Stephen Brookfield's practical and critical *tools* and Donald Schön's explanatory reflection-in-action epistemology.

References

- Bachman, L. & Palmer, A. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Biggs, S. (1999). *Teaching for quality learning at university*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. (1986). *Understanding and facilitating adult learning*. Sanfrancisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1965) *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cullen, R. (1994). Incorporating a language improvement component in teacher training programmes. *ELT Journal*, 48 (2), 162-172.
- Dahlström, L. (2006). Critical practitioner inquiry-creating voice amongst subaltern professionals. In Dahlström, Lars & Jan Mannberg (eds). *Critical educational visions and practices in neoliberal times*. (pp. 57-70). Umea, Sweden: Global South Network Publisher.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford, J. (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. Chicago: Henry Regnery.
- Farrell, T. (1998). Reflective teaching: principles and practices. *English Teaching Forum*, 36 (4). <http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/forum/archives/1998/docs/98-36-4-b.pdf>
- FDRE/Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2006). Report on the development of education in Ethiopia to the UNESCO forty-seventh session of the international conference on education 8-11

September 2004 Geneva, Switzerland (Retrieved on December 30, 2008 from www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE47/English/Natreps/reports/ethiopia_scan.pdf).

- Freeman, D. (1996). Renaming experience/reconstructing practice: developing new understandings of teaching.' In D. Freeman, & J. Richards, (Eds.), *Teacher learning in language teaching*. (pp. 221-241). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Haramaya University. (2007). *Practicum guidelines*. Haramaya: Haramaya University.
- Hailom, B. (1993). *Explorations in the preparation of pre-service EFL teachers: a learning-centered approach*. Ph.D. Thesis, Addis Ababa University.
- Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kogler, H. (1996). *The power of dialogue: critical hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- MOE/Ministry of Education. (2002). *National framework for teacher education system overhaul*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.
- MOE/Ministry of Education. (2003). *A national curriculum guideline for pre-service teacher education programs*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.
- Morgan, B. (1998). *The ESL classroom: teaching, critical practice, and community development*. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Morrow, K. (1979). Communicative language testing: revolution or evolution? In The communicative approach to language teaching. In C. J. Brumfit and K. Johnson, (Eds.). *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. (pp. 143-157). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Okazaki, T. (2005). Critical consciousness and critical language teaching. *Second language studies*, 23 (2), 174-202.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. London: Sage.
- Pennycook, A. (1999). Introduction: critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 329-348.
- Schön, D. (1992). The theory of inquiry: Dewey's legacy to education. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22 (2), 119-139.
- Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. USA Basic Books Inc.
- Talanquer, V et al. (2007). Revealing student teachers' thinking through dilemma analysis. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 18(3): 399-421.
- TFG/Transitional Government of Ethiopia. (1994). *Ethiopian education and training policy*. Ministry of Education Addis Ababa: St. George Printing Press.
- Williams, M. (1989). A developmental view of classroom observations. *ELT Journal*, 43 (2), 85-91.

Appendix 1 **Reflective Journaling Instruments**

A: Dilemma Analysis Instrument (adopted from Talanquer, et al., 2007)

Identify a particular challenge or dilemma related to your practicum experience. It might be a sticky situation that caught your attention, made you confused and forced you to make a decision. Carefully, build your analysis of the situation addressing the following questions:

1. What was the problem or dilemma?
2. Why was it important or relevant to you?
3. How did the dilemma emerge? How did it develop?
4. How did you try to solve the problem? What was the rationale for your decision?
5. How did the dilemma or problem influence your beliefs about teaching or learning?
6. What would you do the next time?

B: Plan-Implement-Reflect Journal Entries

1. **Plan:** Briefly summarize what you did to get ready for the Practicum class (You may want to discuss your preparations for lessons and how important this preparation was, and/ or what other preparation you might have done.)
2. **Implementation:** Briefly summarize pertinent information related to: what the students were learning/ producing this week; what types of instructional strategies were being employed; what interactions you had with students.
3. **Focus:** Narrow your discussion to a particular issue/idea/incident that captured your interest. Briefly relate the issue/idea/ incident. And why you think it is important.
4. **Reflections:** on the plan and the implementation, reflect upon your feelings/ opinions as well as what you've experienced and/or read about your focus issue/ idea/incident. Consider the following questions (just as examples) why is it an issue? Was the incident avoidable? How would you have responded to the incident (or how do you wish you had responded) and why? How does the issue/idea/incident relate to what you've experienced previously or to what you've read/ heard about in this class or another? What did you learn this week that will help you as a teacher?
5. **Artifacts:** Attach or include evidence of your preparation, involvement, professional growth, e.g., full or mini lesson plan, copies of student work, comments from students, peer teachers, etc.

C: Critical Incidents Journal

I. High points of practice

Think back over the past week. Choose an incident that made you say to yourself, "This is what teaching is really all about" or "This is a great day in my life as a beginning teacher." Write some notes about this incident. Make sure that you write down where and when the event happened, who was involved, and what it was that made the event so significant.

II. Low (negative) points of practice

Think back over the past week. Choose the event that caused you the greatest distress in your practice as a beginning / practicing teacher, i.e. the kind of event that made you regret or question your joining of the teaching profession, or the event that you spent the most time worrying about. Write some notes about this incident of where, why, and when this event happened, who was involved and what it was about the event that was so distressing to you.

Biographical Note:

Dereje Tadesse is a teacher educator in the field of English as a Foreign Language at Haramaya University, Ethiopia, and may be reached at dttdesse@yahoo.com.