

Reflective Writing:

Students' Diaries to Improve the Teaching and Learning Process

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Abstract—The teaching and learning process based on the reflective practice model for secondary teacher is the focus of this paper. The reflective practice model used is adopted from Brookfield's critical model (1995) that contained of four perspectives or lenses and this paper concentrate on how teachers look at the perspectives from students' eyes. The research used a qualitative interpretive approach to examine the reflective writing that is students' diaries as the main data source to improve teaching and learning process for both the teacher and students. The diaries were analyzed and gained the reflection from students' perspectives on how teacher taught and students could gain knowledge from the lesson. Since this is a reflection activities, teacher gathered information to improve her teaching skills and develop her ability to communicate with students. It is shown that the teacher slowly changed her style in teaching and learned from the diaries that her characters affected the learning environment in the classroom. Then the teacher created the habit of writing to students that there is an improvement of her students' ability in learning English. This reflective writing can be done after the students attended the English class and teacher always gives feedback to motivate students improving their English skills.

Keywords: *reflective writing, students' diaries, teaching and learning improvement*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reflection is considered as an effective way in increasing teachers' ability to present good learning material, build better teacher-student relationship and also develop classroom management skills [1]. According to Boud, Keogh, and Walker, reflection in the physical sense is to look self-images in the mirror and making sense of it as experiences [2]. This process of thinking back will lead to build teachers' critical analysis and construct dialog and meaningful storage of knowledge as reflection becomes their habit [3].

Reflection also mentioned in Teacher Competency Standards in Indonesia as activities to improve students' learning process and teacher' professional development [4]. The government facilitates the classroom action research as the formal reflection to improve professional development activities [5]. However, there is no instruction or guideline of reflective practice to encourage educators to improve teaching and learning process [6]. Although it is mentioned in teacher standards that teachers should provide teaching and learning

documents (e.g. students' test result, lesson plan, students' journals or diaries).

This issues raise a question as the focus of this paper: how to do reflection which is effective to improve teaching and learning process. This study is expected to introduce perspectives of reflective practice and provide examples of effective reflection activity for teachers to improve their skills in teaching and learning process. Below are some model of reflective practice by experts that support this study:

A. *Reflective Practice Model: Brookfield's Critical Model*

Teaching is not about understanding about certain subject and its effects on teachers themselves and students. It is so naïve to refer to the statement and think that teachers teach to change the world [7], because there are several aspects influence the activities. Some problem will occur during and after the teaching process such as the unexpected scenario or plan and students' test result. Teachers should reflect on their experiences while teaching to understand the problems to overcome it as reflection is in-depth focused attention [8]. Furthermore, Brookfield suggested teacher to be more critical based on the purposes of reflection, that is to understand that education process interaction are limited by the considerations from the government and to question their assumptions and practices on the effect subject matters they teach [7]. This is important to reveal the aspects of education that affect the students and their learning process. Educational policies, students' background (social and economy) and how important the subjects for the future are part of aspects should be understood to support the good learning. Brookfield suggested teachers to look at their practices from four different perspectives or lenses as follows: autobiographies as learners and teachers to reference their own education and experiences to develop their skills in daily practices, students' eyes (as the focus of the paper) to reflect and position themselves as students and it will develop new perspectives or changes [9] in viewing their practices, colleagues' experiences to compare ones' activities with others by effective reflective conversation with colleagues that expose teachers' experiences which are similar to enrich their knowledge in solving teaching and learning problems.

B. Reflective Writing: Students' Diaries

There are ways in doing reflection relating to autobiographies such as teaching logs, teacher learner audits, role model profiles, survival advice memos, videotaping, peer observation and reflective writing [7]. Reflecting writing itself has several forms, for example learning journals and diaries as suggested by Bolton that it is better to do the reflection by expressing the experiences through reflective writing as reflective process rather than recording what has been thought because it can capture events, individuals, thoughts, feelings and values [8]. It can gain students' perspectives by expressing and sharing what they have been through during the lessons as writing can store aide-memoires, present arguments, demonstrate knowledge and explicate experiences (p. 116). Students' diaries as reflection through students' eyes of perspectives Brookfield is important to know students' experience learning to help teachers building a convincing connections between teachers' expectation and students' concerns and also their expectation on the learning process [7]. Reflecting on students' perceptions about teacher's actions and words make teachers aware of problems arise as the effect of teachers' behaviour and mistakes (p. 93).

Conducted a research on using autobiographies that is students' diaries which has purposes to explore personal learning and make use as technique to aid reflection [10]. He asked students to write on 'reflection sheet' after the lessons to identify what they had learnt, comment on any emotional reactions, and list any factors which had helped or hindered their learning (p. 45). Boud, Keogh and Walker agrees on using diaries because it provides an objectivity in relation to the initial learning experience [2]. Teachers can read the diaries and find out what students really feel on the lessons and what really happen inside students' mind. Referred to pre-service teacher who has to reflect and analyse of what he or she saw, heard and felt in the classroom through the practice of writing reflective journals. By using experiences to reflect, pre-service teacher are able to think about their attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions to promote self-evaluation and change [11].

It can be assumed from several research above, reflective writing is an effective way as reflective practice for teachers. Teachers can reflect on their teaching practices based on learning journals and diaries, students' diaries for this study, to capture and analyse students' experiences in learning process including their feeling or emotion and their expectation. Using their diaries will develop teachers' awareness and lead to criticize.

II. METHOD

The study was designed as a qualitative interpretive approach, wherein students' conditions become the focus as their diaries were examined [12,13]. As interpretative study, the authors enabled to construct insightful understanding of teachers' reflection based on students' perspectives such as their ideas, values, emotions and the meaning of the lessons [14].

This study took place at a secondary school in a city where the second author teaches English. She applies the reflective practice by asking students to write diaries after the lessons.

She started in 2004 when there was a project and learning journals was of the assessment tools. At first, students were assigned to write the diaries to train and develop their writing habit [6]. Students have responsibility to pay attention and understand the material to express it to the diaries including their feeling and emotion towards the learning process. The second author as the English teacher followed Boud, Keogh and Walker phase of reflective activities in applying reflective writing to students [2]. The first is the preparatory phase when students start to explore what they have to write such as classroom situation or setting and other supporting circumstances. The second phase is the actual field experience which may include jottings of events, remarks, questions, thoughts and even feelings or emotion felt during the lessons (p. 9-10). The third phase is reporting, in this case, in a form of diary that teacher will read and comment.

As Boud, Keogh and Walker suggested, there are three points of this activity that the teacher identified [2]. The first is self-evidently, that students themselves can learn and reflect on their experiences. The second is the intention of this activity that lead to goal-directed critical reflection. The third is the complexity of the reflective process which involves both cognition and feelings that are closely interrelated and interactive (p. 11). It can be assumed after the teacher read and commented on the students' diaries and then she realized that this was the way she evaluated her teaching practice as suggested by Zwozdiak-Myer [15]. She found out that students' diaries are unique because each student has his/her own perspectives towards the lessons and situation during the learning process as it is written in the first person [16]. Especially, when she read and analysed students' feelings during her lessons. This fits with the statement that implied that "...the purpose of reflective writing is learning which will precipitate some form of action or change in behaviour" [17]. Based on the points, teacher tries to expose students' experiences, knowledge and feelings and turned those to learning. Teacher expectation at first was students could learn from their experiences by doing the task (writing diaries) and developing their sense of responsibility to submit their diaries continuously. Another expectation was to make this activity as students' habit to develop their learning skills. But then the teacher revealed important points beyond the activity which will explain and describe in findings.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At first, the teacher's intention was to apply the students' journals/diaries as assessment tools by asking students to write about their learning experiences after the lesson. She did not realized that she already applied reflective practice. Furthermore, she provides the feedback for students by reading and commenting her students' diaries that motivates students to develop their understanding and as a reward to their work in learning [18]. By reading and commenting students' diaries, the English teacher can apply critical reflection through students' perspectives or lens [7]. Critical reflection is reflecting not only on learning process but also the impact of the learning to students and teacher itself. As mentioned before, the reflective writing activity has benefit both for students and teacher itself. Students can develop their skills

especially in writing and reviewing their own understanding in the lesson. Other benefits gained by the teacher itself is consider the outcomes of the reflection activity [9]. Students' diaries become her evaluation tools to reflect not only the learning process but also her attitude which impact students. She improved her speaking skills after she knew that the students were annoyed by her 'sundanese' accent. She noticed that her students were afraid of her temperament when she was angry that made her tried to change her attitude. She also applied various learning strategies to deliver difficult topics to students.

These benefits are explained more by Boud, Keogh, and Walker, that there are four elements in reflection or re-evaluation process [19]:

TABLE I. FOUR ELEMENTS IN REFLECTION OR RE-EVALUATION PROCESS

No.	Elements in reflection (re-evaluation)	Description	Present (yes/no)	
			Teacher	Students
1.	Association	Relating new data to that which is already known.	Yes. Teacher recognises his/her strength and weaknesses in delivering the subject.	Yes. Students develop their understanding based on what they have learned.
2.	Integration	Seeking relationship among the data.	Yes. Teacher can reflect on the gap on the teaching and learning process and improve it for the future.	Yes. Students can express their knowledge into writing material
3.	Validation	Determining the authenticity of the ideas and feelings that have resulted	Yes. Teacher can seek the impact of the learning process to his/her students.	Yes. Students can confirm their understanding of the content if teacher gives proper feedback on their writing.
4.	Appropriation	Making knowledge one's own.	Yes. Teachers develop the knowledge of teaching and learning process.	Yes. Students develop the knowledge towards the lessons.

Moreover, the English teacher understands the aims and purpose of the lessons that is the lessons will have benefits for her students for their better life. She builds students' values through everyday habitual activities diaries. This thought is resulted to give direction, purpose and meaning to teacher's pedagogic actions and lives [7].

Based on the benefits the teacher exposed, it can be seen that the English teacher had a critical dimension [20] and critical reflection level [21] because she has consideration of matters and perspectives and renewed those. She also focused on her practice in and outside the classroom by paying attention to her students' social conditions. She was concerned with what happened to students' real condition and improve their potential. It may include as self-reflection that examining her beliefs and values, expectations and assumptions, family imprinting and cultural conditioning, impacts on students and their learning [22].

The reflective writing also motivate students to improve their learning. By encouraging students to write their own journals or diaries, students can understand their own problems during the lessons, pay attention to the lessons, increase their memories about the subject and the teacher does not have to ask her students one by one. Refereeing to those benefit mentioned, the teacher continues the activity until now.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are many kind of activities to reflect on teaching and learning process to improve the quality. Applying reflective writing is an effective way referring to all the benefits mentioned in this study. Student voice can be exposed to find out what really happen during the lessons including their feelings towards the lessons The diaries compiled are to develop students' writing skills and make it easy for them to express their opinion. Some students testified that reflective writing indeed develop their writing skills. It supported them in some programmes in the higher level of their study such as students' exchange programmes, debate contest and school projects. The effective feedback on their works (diaries) also improve their metacognition skills to understand the matters, the teacher should read and give comments to motivate students in writing the diaries. It needs teacher's commitment and focus on students' characteristics through reading the diaries and gives them assistance in and outside the classroom. It is a good example for other teachers in Indonesia to apply the reflective writing in their schools by asking their students to write journals for reflection and is supported by the school principals or supervisors in order to improve education in schools.

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