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Perceptions of Mentors and Mentees on the Importance of Engaging in Reflective Practices in the Mentoring Process During the Teaching Practicum

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influenced the reflective practices by mentors and mentees in the mentoring process during the teaching practicum. The study was carried out in two secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. Nine mentees and twelve teacher mentors participated in the study. A qualitative case study was employed to explore the experience of mentors and mentees who engaged in the reflective practices. The study showed that the overall impact of engaging in reflective practices obviously was varied, but generally positive for both mentees and mentors. By utilizing the positive outcomes of this study, it indicates that it is important for mentors and mentees to engage in reflective practices and reflective journal-writing. These two components should be a major component to be included of the teacher training program and emphasized throughout the teacher practicum.*

KEYWORD: *Mentoring process, reflective practices, mentors, mentees, interpersonal skills, and reflective journals.*

IKHTISAR: *Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi amalan reflektif oleh mentor dan mentee dalam proses pementoran semasa praktikum pengajaran. Kajian ini telah dijalankan di dua buah sekolah menengah di Sabah, Malaysia. Sembilan orang mentee dan dua belas orang mentor guru terlibat dalam kajian ini. Satu kajian kes kualitatif telah digunakan untuk meneroka pengalaman mentor dan mentee yang terlibat dalam amalan reflektif. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesan keseluruhan terlibat dalam amalan reflektif adalah pelbagai, tetapi pada umumnya adalah positif bagi kedua-dua mentee dan mentor. Dengan menggunakan hasil positif daripada kajian ini, ia menunjukkan bahawa adalah penting untuk mentor dan mentee melibatkan diri dalam amalan reflektif dan penulisan jurnal reflektif. Kedua-dua komponen ini harus dimasukkan ke program latihan perguruan dan ditekankan sepanjang praktikum guru.*

KATA KUNCI: *Proses pementoran, amalan reflektif, mentor, mentee, kemahiran interpersonal, dan jurnal reflektif.*

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INTRODUCTION

Reflective practices are seen as an important feature of an effective mentoring process. Engaging in reflective practices is seen to have many benefits for both mentors and mentees; and should, therefore, be incorporated into the mentoring program. The concept of reflective practice is embedded to varying degrees in most mentoring models. Reflective practice provides a way for teachers to become conscious of how their own knowledge and skills are shaped by experience (Head & Taylor, 1997; and Yost, 2002). It is argued that reflection will lead to greater awareness among student teachers of what constitutes appropriate pedagogic practice and will lay the foundation for development, a process which will be ongoing throughout their teaching career. Critical reflection of one's teaching is necessary for personal efficacy and ongoing growth (Danielson, 2002). It is also considered to be one of the most important components in developing autonomy and expertise of novice teachers (Furlong, 2000).

The reflective process requires a holistic understanding as the basis for professional practice, collaboration, communication and empathy, and self-reflection (Elliot, 1991). Consequently, student teachers need to be guided to reflect on their actions, to form concepts of practical knowledge and educational values, in order to give them greater control and power over their own learning and practice (Furlong & Maynard, 1995). In this process, experiential learning occurs. D.A. Kolb (1984) believed that learning to teach through experiential learning is the core of the reflective model.

R. Yost's study (2002) suggested that teacher mentors became more aware of their teaching and of the responsibilities they have to their student teachers. In other studies, there are reports that mentoring has forced teacher mentors to be reflective practitioners in terms of their own beliefs about teaching, students, learning, and teaching as a career and has also validated the experience they have gained over the years (Huling & Resta, 2001). Teacher mentors who are reflective practitioners find that they are more focused in their mentoring relationships (Tomlinson, 1995). One of the most effective ways for a mentor to help develop mentees' teaching skills is to demonstrate a reflective approach to teaching, self-evaluation, and implementing of new ideas. Mentoring leads both teacher mentors and mentees to reflect on and analyze their successes and failures, helping to enhance their effectiveness.

Through the reflection process, the opinions are further honed and subsequent decisions are facilitated. B. Comiskey and M. Cotson (1997)

pointed out that sufficient time is vital in order to become reflective. It is important to note that the mentoring process provides the mentee the opportunity to express needs, wants, opinions, beliefs, and feelings in direct, honest, and appropriate ways (Brockbank & McGill, 2006). Further, B.G. Barnett (1995) believed that reflective questions enable mentees to explore deeper meanings, alternatives, and conclusions, force them to be precise and clear in describing their thoughts, feelings, and actions. In order for the mentor to develop the trust in the mentee to reveal their innermost thoughts and feelings, the mentor must strive not to be judgmental and remain neutral as far as possible in responding to the mentee's reflections.

The reflective model has been widely used in teacher education and has been very influential in enhancing teaching and learning processes, especially in the supervision of student teachers (Brooks & Sikes, 1997). Different terms such as *inquiry-oriented teacher education*, teacher as a *decision-maker*, teacher as a *professional*, and teacher as a *problem solver* are related to the model.

D. Schön (1987) indicated that there are two approaches in reflection. "Reflection-in-action" is embedded in automatic, tacit knowledge; and "reflection-on-action" takes place when professionals stand back and reflect on their practices through feedback from other people as well as themselves. He emphasized the importance of using relevant previous experiences and contextual knowledge rather than relying on present knowledge acquired during initial training.

Similar to D. Schön's approaches to reflective practices, A. Ghaye and K. Ghaye (1998) defined two types of reflections: reflection-on-practice and knowing-in-action. Reflection-on-practice is reflection after the event primarily designed to improve further action. It is a natural process of making sense of professional action; it is about using and learning from experience. Not only is this necessary for good teaching, it is also a fundamental human necessity. It helps us to make sense of teaching and learning. Reflection-on-practice helps also teachers make wise and principled decisions. It is about making meaning of what is happening in their classroom and school. In this sense, it is a creative process which involves reflections, providing teachers with the courage and intellectual capacity to turn insight into improved action. It is not just about learning from experience but enlightening and empowering teachers to be creative in building their knowledge. This process helps them envision, nourish, and imagine the complexity of improved teaching and learning situations (Schön, 1987; and Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998).

Knowing-in-action is another important idea and is about the professional knowledge that we use in our daily practice. It begins with reflecting on what we actually do in our own teaching and this generates a rich and detailed knowledge because it is based on hands-on practice. This knowledge is, then, used in our own teaching. It becomes knowledge or knowing-in-action. Our knowledge is reflected in what we do, how we teach, and this is revealed in our teaching actions (Schön, 1987; and Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998).

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study was carried out by one of the local public universities during the practicum in two secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. Mentoring of mentees in the practicum is conceived as essentially an interactive process which is generally concerned with achieving the objectives specified for the practicum. More particularly, it is concerned with facilitating the learning and development of mentees in planning and improving teaching performances. This is where the mentees are able to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice which makes the university very much aware of the importance of providing mentoring support from both university supervisors and teacher mentors. A mentoring program was implemented to improve and enhance current mentoring practices in schools during the teaching practicum.

On the Research Methodology. This study employed a qualitative, case study approach to obtain the perceptions of the mentors and mentees by using semi-structured individual interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews were the primary data collection methods used to examine and analyze the experiences of the reflective practices by mentors and mentees during the teaching practicum. Constant comparison approach was used to code the data and triangulation of the different data sources from in depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews were employed to discover commonalities and differences and the consistency of the findings. A purposive sampling comprising 12 teacher mentors and 9 mentees was used so that to get more specific, relevant, rich, and valuable data from the mentors and mentees.

The theoretical framework of this study was based on selected, relevant reflective theories underpinning the different mentoring models and programs such as reflective mentoring model (Furlong & Maynard, 1995) and reflective practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The final analysis resulted in the identification of the two main categories: reflective practices and reflective journals. Themes that emerged from the data: reflective practices, self-awareness in reflective discussions, interpersonal skills, availability for reflective practices, time for reflective practices, and reflective journals.

First, on the Reflective Practices. Reflective practices were incorporated as one of the crucially important aspects of the mentoring program. Two forms of reflective practices were conducted in the program: face-to-face reflective practices with mentors and reflective journal writing. The mentors and mentees were provided with information on reflective practices and some reflective practice skills activities were conducted focusing on one-to-one discussions, guidelines on questions that would steer both mentee's and mentor's thinking, interpersonal communicative skills, and problem-solving skills in teaching practice.

Reflective practices in this study involved reflecting on their teaching practice together with teacher mentors face-to-face and this was typically intended to occur after each mentee's lesson and to include mentees' writing self-reflections on their experiences in their reflective journal throughout the mentoring program. In this mentoring program, elements of supervision, including teaching observations, pre-and-post discussion, were incorporated together with reflective practices.

Most mentees (7 of 9) were satisfied with the reflective practices with their mentors even though they faced some difficulties, especially in the initial practice phase. Two mentees, however, reported that they were not satisfied because of the way reflection was conducted, because the findings also show that the mentees generally believed that the quality of reflective practices varied.

Second, on the Self-Awareness in Reflective Discussions. The mentees (in focus groups and interviews) generally agreed that one of the most important things they gained through reflective practices was self-awareness of weaknesses, strengths, and their surroundings. One of the mentees realized the importance of reflective practices in the mentoring program:

Reflective practice is essential. It is important because I realized that without it, we would not know our faults, why things went wrong in our teaching, and what we did exceptionally well. We discovered that we actually have the potentials to be good teachers.

She also said that reflective practices helped her to see her weaknesses more than her strengths in her teaching practice. She welcomed the suggestions and recommendations on how to improve herself as a teacher and that said they gave her new ideas on to teach well as how to manage the classroom and students while teaching. She said, *“I thought that I already knew a lot of things but I discovered that I still have a lot of things to learn. This made me realize a lot of things about myself”*.

Another mentee, who was initially hesitant to carry out the reflective practices with her teacher mentor, said:

I was not keen to do the reflective practices initially. I felt that there were just too many things to do during the practicum. But I realized that there were benefits from doing reflections. I found myself better in doing things after finding out my weaknesses, what I did wrong, and finding solutions to rectify them.

The majority of the mentees (7 of 9) agreed that doing reflective practices with teacher mentors taught them to use as well as to improve various teaching skills. It also gave them opportunities to ponder and helped them to make decisions to use different approaches in their teaching. One of them said, *“Listening and sharing with my teacher mentors helped me to explore more ideas in teaching”*.

For one of the mentees, the reflective awareness increased her ability to anticipate problems in teaching:

I could apply all the reflective practices tips, ideas, and skills I did in the mentoring workshops. I am aware that it was helpful which enabled me to anticipate, thus making it so much easier.

Mentees were generally satisfied with their teacher mentors' abilities to conduct reflective practice by using probing questions which steered the mentees to think creatively and critically, to assess their teaching. As one of the mentees said:

I liked the way my teacher mentor asked me to do reflections. The questions he asked me made me think critically and creatively. Doing the reflective practice together helped me to look at things from all perspectives and come up with alternatives, especially in my teaching. It improved my problem-solving skill. It was really an effective way to assess oneself too.

Some of the mentees (5 of 9) stated that after a few sessions of reflective practices, they became more confident and comfortable in asking lots of questions of their mentors. One mentee said that her increased self-awareness from reflection enabled her to assess herself

and her approaches in previous lessons and further integrate successful ones in her teaching. She said that, after a few reflections, she was able to assess which areas she was very weak in and to work to fully optimize her strengths.

They also attributed this to the good rapport they had with their mentors. Some mentees (4 of 9) believed that the reflective practices taught them to be more organized in their preparation and teaching. One of the mentees said that reflective awareness helped her to record her work systematically:

The reflective practices helped me to record my work and taught me to do it systematically. Doing this, my work is much more organized. The best thing is I could track my work in case I missed out on something.

Most of the mentees (6 of 9) said that by engaging in reflective practices, they learned much more by listening and accepting criticisms constructively as the mentoring process progressed. One of the mentees said:

It was not easy at first to listen to something negative about yourself, especially when you know you tried your best in the lessons. Sometimes, I felt that they were just telling me things they did not do themselves. However, out of respect and because I am here to learn, I did what he asked me to do.

Some mentees (5 of 6), however, wished that their mentors were even more critical of their work. They believed that they would learn more from this.

Some of the mentees (5 of 9) reported that doing reflective practices in the first phase was not easy, because they said they could only do it superficially by just recalling what had happened in their lessons. Gradually, as they learned to look further, reflection with the mentor enabled them to better integrate and associate things and thus improved their lessons.

Despite encouragement, some mentees (4 of 9) were still hesitant, especially when their teacher mentors had a tendency to dominate the reflective discussions. They pointed out that they just listened most of the time. For example, one mentee said:

I sensed that in the first reflections I did with my major teacher mentor. Like telling you what to do. He did listen to my reflections but I could feel that he only wanted me to do what he suggested. I dared not ask questions too much because he might think that I am arrogant and that I am worried about my grades later.

Two mentees found engaging in reflective practices to be stressful because they believed that their mentors did not provide adequate support in the process. These mentees also indicated that apart from concerns about successful grades, showing their respect for the mentors was another reason for being hesitant to comment or question mentors during reflective practices.

The mentees (in focus group discussion) believed that the way the reflective practices were conducted was important. The most successful and productive reflective discussions were normally conducted in a secluded part of the staff room or classrooms where there were no distractions such as noise. They were conducted in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere. In this study, there were, however, times when reflective practices were held in other venues such as the school canteen, school corridors, and sometimes in the school playing fields.

Reflective practices did not just benefit the mentees but all the mentors were appreciative of the reflective sessions with their mentees. For example, one of the mentors, who had been teaching for more than fifteen years, stated that he learned something new from his mentee and became more attentive to what was going on during the mentoring program. He said:

Normally for us, like we take it for granted. It brought me back to line. After teaching for so many years, to realize this, it is like learning something new. The mentee actually knows new things and I learned a lot from her.

One of the mentors became more aware of his own weaknesses and potentials:

It was good to do the reflective practices together. I found out my strengths and weaknesses, and from this awareness I know better what to do. I improved a lot in mentoring, especially when you make it a point to do the reflective practices. I also learned more about myself.

Another mentor stated:

I learned something new from my mentee and I improved myself. I realize I now must take the initiative to improve myself. I found out that all this while, I had been too complacent with my teaching and by reflecting together I was reminded that I needed to change my teaching strategies and I looked at teaching differently now. I needed to upgrade my teaching techniques.

One of the mentors found out through reflections that the emotional aspects of mentoring are also important:

I am aware of my responsibilities as a teacher mentor, that my duty is very important. It was not just reflecting about teaching but the psychological aspects should be reflected on too and we need to talk and about and know how the mentee felt.

The mentors generally (in focus group discussion) were aware of the importance of reflective practices with their mentees. They believed that a diplomatic approach and questions that made mentees think critically and constructively about their teaching were important elements in effective reflections. Most of the mentors (11 of 12) perceived that the mentees were open to criticism and the mentors were generally satisfied with the reflective practices.

One mentor, however, who was uncertain about his mentee's reaction, said:

She needs to come and see me if she has any problems. This means if she does not come, probably she did not do a good reflection for herself. She needs to write down her reflection and ask herself how she is doing, what her problems are or did she manage to teach well. But she did not come.

The mentor presumed that his mentee's failure to reflect effectively on her lesson prevented from her from coming to see him.

Discussion. Overall, the data show that both mentees and mentor benefited from doing the reflective practices but in different ways. It is apparent that the reflective practices assisted the mentees progressively in improving, enhancing, and upgrading their teaching performance. As suggested by A. Ghaye and K. Ghaye (1998:16), "*reflection-on-practice takes experience and integrates it in particular ways*". The mentees were able to optimize their strengths by being proactive in integrating and using new ideas suggested by and discussed with mentors and was able to anticipate and plan more effectively to overcome difficulties. Planning and organization were enhanced by effective reflective practices with mentors. So too was the ability to accept constructive criticism after initial resistance.

Improved self-reflection was another result of effective reflective practices. Mentees were also able make better sense of their teaching and learning (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) by developing the ability to think critically and creatively about their teaching and problem solving, and decision-making abilities also developed through their reflections. Reflective practices can push novice teachers to look more closely at themselves through reflection and inquiry (Britton, 2006). There was some feeling, however, that mentors asked mentees to do things that they themselves

had not done before, which mentees found hard to accept but, out of respect, tried to accommodate, perhaps not wanting to appear rude. This would not be surprising within this culture.

Mentors also had positive experiences in the reflective practices, putting them back on track in their teaching approaches and strategies, discovering their strengths and weaknesses, and improving themselves in their mentoring. With one exception, the mentors indicated that they were able to carry out the reflective practices and they were satisfied with their performances in them. This finding corresponds with A. Hargreaves and M. Fullan's (2000) and E.D. Britton's (2006) suggestions that mentors learn from their mentees by developing new insights into their own and others' teaching, new relationships, and a renewal of enthusiasm and commitment to their craft and career. Similarly, this finding also supports a finding by K. Balassa, C. Bodoczky and D. Saunders (2003) that mentors gained in their ability to analyze their own teaching.

Mentees' growing awareness through reflective practices enabled them to assess their performances, assisted them to be more organized and systematic, to accept criticism, and to discover their potential, their strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and their abilities to self-reflect. There appeared to be some constraints, especially in initial reflections, in the effectiveness of reflective practices with some mentors.

Third, on the Interpersonal Skills. Most of the mentees (6 of 9) believed that their mentors utilized effective interpersonal skills to interact with them in reflective discussions. For example, one of the mentees stated that her teacher mentor created a friendly atmosphere by just having an informal chat before they really started serious discussions:

My mentor always starts by asking how I am doing and whether I have problems or not. He will then tell me to take things easy and enjoy teaching. Then, we will start discussing my lessons. This made me feel very relaxed.

These mentors indicated that their mentors' ability to listen and attend to mentees was essential in these discussions. Letting the mentee begin the reflection was perceived by some mentees (5 of 9) as one of the effective interpersonal strategies used by mentors in reflective practices. Some of the comments made by the mentees were:

I really admired my major teacher mentor. He spent so much time to sit with me when we reflected together, especially after the first lesson. He had everything written already with suggestions. He always asked me to do my reflections first and he listened to me and wrote some notes.

I really appreciate my mentors. I can prove to you that they truly taught me a lot of things. I know they are busy with their own work, but each time after observing my lessons, they took time to sit with me, and we would do the reflections together. My mentor always let me talk first. We had a chat first before we had serious discussions.

The mentors agreed that such tactics were very effective and made the mentee felt assured, enthusiastic, comfortable, and not intimidated in the reflective discussions. One mentor commented that the psychological aspect must also be taken into account in reflective practices. He said, *"Mentees' feelings have to be taken into account"*. Another mentor commented when doing the reflective practices:

We must not look at the mentees as though they do not know anything. We must appreciate and acknowledge what they have shared. Assurance and motivation must be given so that they will be confident to go to the next step.

Having the capacity to listen, creating a friendly atmosphere to make mentees feel relaxed, spending time together, preparing questions and suggestions to improve teaching in practice, and letting mentees do the reflections first all contributed to successful reflective practices in this study.

One of the mentors said that her mentor made her realize that she needed to work to interact effectively with people, and that she realized she had to adjust her attitude. She learned to use her own interpersonal skills in listening with appropriate body language such as eye contact. She said, *"I really need to humble myself when I talk with mentors. Otherwise how can you discuss receptively with them"*.

Some of the mentees (5 of 9) said that their mentors also talked about their own experience as beginning teachers, letting them know that they too had had feelings of frustration, and had encountered problems during teaching practice. It helped mentees to feel that they were not the first person to go through such experiences, and they felt more confident and assured when their mentors did this. This was a common sharing technique by the majority of the mentors (10 of 12) to motivate the mentees and made them feel more assured.

Effective interpersonal communicative skills in reflective practices were having the capacity to listen, creating a friendly atmosphere to make mentees feel relaxed, spending time with mentees preparing questions and suggestions to improve teaching in practice, and letting mentees initiate reflections were all noted by mentees.

One of the mentors consciously linked the successes of her reflective practices to her mentee's ability to listen and respond:

He was receptive to all the reflective discussions and also other discussions I had with him, although I lacked the teaching experience. I am truly honoured and acknowledged when he showed his willingness to listen to me and that made a difference in my outlook in mentoring someone experienced. I am grateful to be given this opportunity to be a mentor. Sometimes, it may not be what one predicted it to be.

Discussion. In this mentoring program, effective interpersonal skills contributed to successful reflective discussions. By letting the mentees initiate reflections, mentors appear to have empowered and given confidence to mentees. Where the mentor dominated discussion, mentees found reflections less successful. Recounting their own experiences, especially in teaching practices, also strengthened mentees' confidence, motivation, and assurance. The data indicate that effective mentors had the ability to listen to their mentees in reflections.

The importance of interpersonal skills is a recurring theme throughout this study. Some mentees tried to facilitate reflective practices by modifying their own behaviour towards humility, respect, politeness because of cultural influences or perhaps some mentees were more committed than some mentors to the mentoring program guidelines. Some mentors suggested that reflective practices should focus on more than teaching practice and that it is also valuable and meaningful for mentees to reflect on psychological aspects.

Fourth, on the Availability for Reflective Practices. Emphasis on both mentors and mentees being available to conduct face-to-face reflective practices was incorporated in the mentoring program because it is important that these practices have full participation of both parties to be fully effective.

Reflective practices were carried out at least two or three times a week for most of the mentees (5 of 9). Each reflective practice normally took between thirty and forty minutes. The mentees also had to arrange a schedule and inform their teacher mentors of their reflective practice meetings. Two mentees reported they were able to have frequent reflective practices as long as the mentors were free, while two mentees reported that they saw their mentors only once or sometimes not at all each week.

Mentees reported that it was not easy to arrange to meet for reflective practices on a regular basis. They generally agreed (in focus group

discussions) that some of the setbacks to reflective practices were mentors' attendance to school activities, and other classes, time constraints and other demands on mentors.

The majority of mentors (11 of 12) agreed that they tried to be there for the reflective practice meetings during the mentoring program although they agreed with mentees that there were times that they were not available for reflective practices. Such occurrences made some of the mentors (6 of 12) feel guilty and worried about not being available for their mentees. For example, one of the mentors said:

I had to attend a course and I was not available for her. I was worried and it bothered me because I could not be there to provide all the support for her. I was not able to do the reflective discussions. You see, I noticed every time she came out of teaching in the good class, she was very excited and happy but when she came out of the weaker class, she looked frustrated and that was the time I should have been there to provide both emotional and professional support. I know how she feels.

Some mentors (5 of 12) were particular that they made time for reflective discussions. For example, one mentor encouraged the mentee to come at any time for reflective practice meetings as long as he was free.

Some mentees (3 of 9) indicated that the mentor's non-availability impacted negatively on their reflective practices during the mentoring program, preventing them being carried out regularly. One of the mentees stated that because of her mentor's infrequent availability, she took every chance to engage with him:

It is very difficult to meet my major mentor. He is not always around. So sometimes, if I had the chance to meet him, for example, like the other day at the school canteen, I just approached him and asked whether I could discuss my work with him on the spot. It was brief, but at least I could hear some form of feedback. Not all of it though because of the limited time and it was done in a hurry.

Similarly, two mentors also complained that their mentees were also not available for such discussions at times. One of the mentors said her mentee seldom came to see her for discussions or reflective practices as he was not always there. Another mentor said that his mentee did not need to discuss her teaching because she already knew what to do in reflecting.

The availability of both mentors and mentees was crucial to conduct of reflective practices during the mentoring program. Mentees benefited most from frequent sessions of reflection and limitations on the ability of one another participant limited the effectiveness of reflective practices generally.

Discussion. It is evident that some of the mentees were able to have regular sessions for reflective practices; perhaps these mentees shared more positive mentoring relationships. For others, non-availability of mentors was a major constraint, explained on the basis of lack of time and/or other responsibilities and demands. Where this occurred, some mentees adopted the strategy of catching the mentor whenever possible to conduct on the-spot-reflections. E. Arnold (2006) described this as *snatched time* where a lot of mentor-mentee's meetings were rushed and held between lessons.

The data indicate that most of the mentors tried to make it a point to be always there for their mentees, while for other mentees it was difficult to arrange appointments for reflective practice. The mentors admitted that they were not always available for reflective practices citing professional and personal factors beyond their control as reasons. Mentors also indicated mentees' availability is important and assumed that a reason for it may be that some mentees felt no need for reflective practices.

Fifth, on the Time for Reflective Practices. Mentees perceived that the timing of reflective practices discussions was important. They reported in focus groups that reflective practices were normally held after they had been observed by their mentors, sometimes immediately, but there were only brief, with longer, more formal reflections arranged later. Some reflective practices were also incorporated into other daily discussions, sometimes before lessons sometimes less formally, and not always very productively. One mentee said:

I did my reflective practices in other discussions too. Sometimes, it was very brief. It is like an on-going process because sometimes if I missed some points, then, I had to find a chance to talk to him again.

Another issue that impacted on all mentees (in focus group and interviews) was the time given to reflective practices. Some (6 of 9) perceived that their mentors were prepared to spend time with them, and, where this was so, they believed the reflective discussions were most productive.

Other mentees (3 of 9) who were not satisfied with the time spent indicated that their mentors were not committed to spending a longer time because they, said they had to rush to their other classes, were busy with school activities, or had other things to do in the school. Thus, the reflections were carried out very quickly and only provided brief feedback. One mentee said:

Whenever we did reflective practices or any discussions, my minor teacher mentor would tell me that he had something to do later. I felt that when I was doing my reflections, he was not concentrating. He kept saying, "Good", all the time. Then, he gave a brief reflection and some suggestions very quickly. I felt that, half of the time, he was not even listening to me because his body language gave me the signs, like he was in a hurry.

In focus group discussions, mentees emphasized that they would like to have had more time in reflective practices because at these times, they could find out and clarify most about their teaching practice from their mentors' insights.

The mentors agreed that even though they did the reflective practices, that more time should have been spent on them and they believed that reflection improved the mentees' teaching practices. Mentors gave the same reasons for their inability to conduct longer reflective practices as they did for the limits on their availability generally.

Discussion. The timing and duration of reflective discussions varied from brief immediate follow-up of lessons to longer, formally arranged meetings. Time was perceived as an important factor in the effectiveness of reflective practices. Mentees perceived longer discussions as more productive, while some reflective discussions were incorporated in their daily discussions, including lesson preparation.

Insufficient commitment of time to reflective practices by mentors caused dissatisfaction amongst mentees, particularly as other activities seemed to take priority over mentoring. This finding is consistent with findings by L.C. Ehrich, B. Hansford and L. Tennent (2004) who indicated that a lack of time seems to be a common problem faced by mentors and mentees, not just in education but also in business and medical studies.

Sixth, on the Reflective Journals. The reflective journal writing was incorporated within the reflective practices in this mentoring program as another avenue for the mentees to reflect and understand their own teaching experience daily during the mentoring program. Most of the mentees (7 of 9) fully participated in writing reflective journals and stated that the reflective journal writing was beneficial. Some of these (5 of 9) wrote extensive reflective journals of their teaching experiences during the teaching practicum.

Writing their reflections provided mentees more opportunity to reflect deeply on their teaching experiences and enabled them to scrutinize their strengths and weaknesses. Unlike face-to-face reflective practices, they stated that they were able to reflect more in-depth on their daily teaching experiences. It taught them to be more critical and allowed them to make

practical decisions on what they were going to do next in their teaching practice. For example, one of the mentees said:

I was able to look at my teaching more deeply while I was writing. Visualizing my thoughts, I could see my weaknesses and strengths more clearly by asking the questions myself of how I should improve my next lessons. It allowed me to evaluate my overall teaching performances.

One of the mentees said:

I analyzed better in writing what I did every day. It improved my teaching because I always asked the same questions and this formed a direction for me of what to do next in my teaching. The university supervisor knew what happened because she read the journals and we talked about it whenever we met. Suggestions of how to improve the lessons were provided through this way.

Another mentee also pointed out that:

Writing down and being critical and thinking of solutions actually improved my teaching. It is not just teaching but it is a space where you can write your real thoughts. It also improved my writing ability.

One of the mentees preferred the reflective journaling as a good avenue for her to conduct her reflections as she did not have frequent face-to-face reflections with her teacher mentor.

Mentees (7 of 9) expressed that not only did it allow them to analyze their inner feelings but different emotions surfaced and they could express them in writing during the practice. For example, one of them said:

I felt that I am freer to say what I wanted to say in the reflective journal rather than talking. It also enhanced my interactions with the university supervisor when we had our discussions.

Another mentee said:

The most important thing about doing the reflective journal is I can pour out my real feelings. I could confide in it with the university supervisor. Writing my dissatisfactions allowed me to release my stress too and the university supervisor could read how I really felt. Sometimes, it was not easy to talk openly, especially face-to-face. It made me feel uneasy.

Another mentee felt that expressing her thoughts on paper was therapeutic for her: *"You know that expressing myself actually truly consoled me. I loved it because it was the time for me to express my real inner feelings"*.

Two mentees, however, stated that they were not really keen to write the reflective journals. The journals sent in by these mentees were brief and only superficial. They said that time was a constraint on writing a long journal; they needed the time to finish their teaching preparation. They also believed that the reflective practices they did with the mentors adequately covered the requirement for reflection. The other mentees also indicated that it took time to write their journals and sometimes they could not do it properly.

Discussion. The data showed that most mentees benefited from keeping the reflective journals. Such benefits included the feeling of freedom to express themselves, especially when they could not talk openly to their mentors. They also saw the journal as an important means of self-analysis, a means of thinking critically and creatively about their teaching, and as having therapeutic value personally and their professional development and classroom practice. This supports the study by A.T. Degago (2007) that indicated similar benefits.

It seems that the reflective journal was a *sounding board* for the mentees to voice their concerns as well as express their positive and negative emotions to their university supervisor in this study. Disclosing themselves openly to the mentors or with peers may create a feeling of humiliation (*malu*) or being degraded as this is common in this local cultural context (Sendut, Madsen & Thong, 1989).

Trust was established with their university supervisor where they were able to confide their mentoring experience in the journal. The data also demonstrate that this enabled them to build rapport with the mentors during their regular discussions.

Time seemed to be a major factor for all mentees when writing their reflective journals and not all mentees were keen to do so. Several believed that face-to-face reflections with their mentors were adequate and that they wanted to spend more time on their lessons preparation.

CONCLUSION

The overall impact of engaging in reflective practices obviously was varied but generally positive for both mentees and mentors. Where both groups of participants reported effective reflections, they were characterized by positive rapport and constructive outcomes for both participants: mentees reported positive developments in teaching and management skills, self-awareness, critical ability, mentors spoke of increased self-awareness, a sense of renewal and revaluing of their own teaching and

management, and their ability to use questions in probing and guiding mentees to think constructively about their work. This is also consistent with the suggestions of D. Schön (1987) and A. Ghaye and K. Ghaye (1998) that both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action enable mentors and mentees to understand and improve their reflective practices.

Utilizing the positive outcomes of this study, it indicates that it is important for mentors and mentees to engage in reflective practices and reflective journal writing. These two components should be a major component to be included of the teacher training program and emphasized throughout the teacher practicum.

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Picture of Lecturer and Students in Malaysia
(Source: www.google.com, 20 May 2012)

The reflective model has been widely used in teacher education and has been very influential in enhancing teaching and learning processes, especially in the supervision of student teachers.