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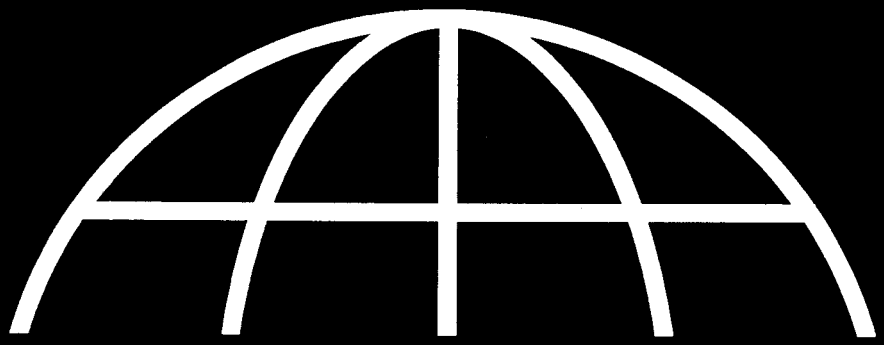

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English Language Teachers Reflecting on Reflections: A Malaysian Experience

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Key characteristics of an efficient and effective English language teacher are fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding, awareness of meaningful classroom practices, linguistic capabilities, and positive attitudes and skills. Nurturing these traits among preservice teachers is difficult, especially when preservice teachers are working in a nonnative English language learning and teaching environment and when they have insufficient pedagogical and linguistic knowledge. One way of overcoming these difficulties is by facilitating activities that enable these future teachers to develop a critical and reflective awareness of their classroom practices. This article reports the practice of reflecting on reflections by future English language teachers in the Malaysian context. In the first phase, they (a) self-examine their practices (by writing their own reflections and reading others' critiques of their practices) and (b) examine others' practices (by critiquing others' practices and providing suggestions). These activities have inspired among future teachers an awareness of their own development and of current professional knowledge. Also, participants were able to identify the changes they need to make to become more effective teachers. In the next phase, reflecting on their reflections, the teachers were able to internalize pedagogical knowledge and practices that were useful to them.

In a nonnative English language teaching and learning environment, the teacher is responsible for espousing effective teaching practices. But when the teacher's own linguistic competency and proficiency are limited, it undermines the teacher's efforts to improve learners' achievement in English language learning. In Malaysia, for example, the teacher may be the only source of English language speaking, especially in rural and remote areas. In a country where the emphases on English as an academic subject and as a tool for economic attainment are so strong, Malaysian teachers' proficiency in the language are constantly and closely monitored. Occasionally, they are even debated in the parliament. In his 2001 Malaysian budget speech, Finance Minister of Malaysia Tun Daim Zainuddin called for Malaysian students to be more proficient

in English so that the demands of a knowledge-based society (the *k-economy*) can be met (Daim, 2000).

Though the English language is seen as an overarching element in Malaysia's ambition as the third world's economic vanguard, several major problems affect the teaching and learning of English. Immediate and concrete solutions for those problems are seemingly unavailable. One problem that needs to be stressed is the inadequate supply of quality English language teachers. Not many Malaysians are interested in becoming English language teachers. Furthermore, students with excellent English capabilities and achievements tend to move into other, higher paying professions. Some of them go abroad to further their education in other fields of study. The shortage of qualified English language teachers has become so acute at some schools that teachers have been "forced" to teach English (Kabilan, 2001, p. 57).

According to my observation and direct interaction with a cohort of future teachers, they seem to lack certain important qualities, identified by many researchers as indispensable factors in becoming an efficient and effective English language teacher. Some of the identified factors are fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding (Clarridge, 1990), awareness of meaningful classroom practices (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2000), linguistic capabilities (Haja Mohideen, 1995), positive attitudes (Protherough & Atkinson, 1992; White, 1995), and relevant skills (Lee, 1996).

The absence of these crucial qualities also explains some of my own students' uncritical ideas and uninspiring suggestions offered during tutorial discussions. More worrying, they seem to be content with their existing knowledge rather than validating the ideas or generating new knowledge. Such tendencies might be identified among beginning teachers as well. Afonso (2001) and Shannon and Crawford (1998) discovered that the beginning teachers they studied preferred to fall back on preconceived understandings of how they and their pupils should conduct themselves rather than reflect critically and constructively on their teaching practices. The beginning teachers felt this way even though they appreciated the value of reflective practices. Therefore, merely instilling in teachers the value of reflective practices does not guarantee that they will change in positive ways.

These observations motivated me to examine how teaching my students to engage in more rigorous reflective practice might contribute to their professionalization. I found from Moore and Ash's (2002) study that students were able to "reflect on their reflection" (p. 21). From such a practice, the students

> saw a value in reflecting on practice in both 'structured' and 'unstructured', 'timetabled' and 'ad hoc' ways, and were enthusiastic about de-

veloping this aspect of their professionalism in future years. They were aware of the impact of previous and on-going life experiences on the manner and effectiveness of reflection in the professional context. (p. 21)

Hence, I experimented with a pedagogical tool of reflecting on reflections that consisted of two levels of reflection process (explained thoroughly in the Method section). The first level is reflecting on practices, and the second level is reflecting on the first level of reflections. The second level would help my students view and understand their own and others' abilities, classroom practices, knowledge, limitations, perceptions, and beliefs regarding their development as future English language teachers. These new understandings may stimulate the students to develop more meaningful learning and teaching practices.

This article's main objective is to evaluate the outcomes of reflecting on reflections and, subsequently, ascertain if the pedagogical tool can (a) enhance the student teachers' fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding, (b) heighten their awareness of meaningful and effective classroom practices, (c) improve their linguistic capabilities, (d) elevate their readiness to practice positive attitudes toward teaching and learning, and (e) provide them with relevant skills.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICES AND REFLECTING ON REFLECTIONS

It is generally accepted that the practice of reflection is deeply rooted in critical thinking and is connected to external realities, enfolded with the practitioner's inner feelings. Bullock and Muschamp's (2004) model of teachers' reflection mirrors "the practice of thinking analytically about an experience or an activity" (p. 32). This model is shaped by feelings and understandings that may be tacit. Davis (2005) concurs by specifying that reflection is not "merely recognizing the linear step" that presents itself but a conscious practice to open teachers' "thinking to all possibilities" (p. 9) and to move teachers so that they "step outside of their own definitions of the world and see new perspectives" (p. 18). According to Newell (1996), "the essence of reflection is the interaction of experiences with analysis of beliefs about those experiences" that occurs in a "collegial environment encouraging social responsibility, flexibility, consciousness, and efficacy" (p. 568).

How do teachers reflect on their practices? Quoting Van Manen (1995), whose approach is influenced by Dewey (1933), Labercane, Last, Nichols, & Johnson (1998), identified three steps of reflecting:

1. Perplexity, confusion, doubt due to the nature of the situation in which one finds oneself.

2. Conjectural anticipation and tentative interpretation of given elements or meanings of the situation and their possible consequences.
3. Deciding on a plan of action or doing something about a desired result. (p. 192)

The teachers must learn to practice these steps naturally and successfully but within a well-planned framework in an educational system that is not "culturally resistant to educational change" (Leonard & Gleeson, 1999, p. 63). More specifically, the system must not be antithetical to the idea that teachers' professional growth is an important aspect of effective educational change. It is also imperative that novice and student teachers understand the significance of this process. As underscored by Penso, Shoham, and Shiloah (2001), reflective practice would subject them "to their own critical analysis in order to improve their work and make it professional" (p. 323). Critical analysis should focus on practical experience, learning from colleagues, practicing teaching skills, and adopting useful work habits. Ellis (1993) experimented with a similar procedure involving in-service English language teachers in Poland. As a result, the Polish teachers became not only more "aware of what they do, but also why they do it" (p. 112). The teachers benefited from a framework for reflective practice that was firmly in place and widely used.

Reflection is a subjective yet structured intellectual practice that can engage teachers' self-examination and enhance their understanding of teaching and learning in ways that are fresh, stimulating, and challenging. Schön (1983) mentions of the need for the process of reflection to endure a vigorous testing protocol in a socially supportive environment. The process is upheld through "a dialogue of words or actions with other participants in the teaching-learning context" (Corcoran & Leahy, 2003, p. 32). The term *dialogue* here is not limited to the literal meaning of conversation or the action of speaking and listening; it connotes communication between two individuals (e.g., a teacher–learner relationship in a classroom) using words, emotions, and actions in a genuine two-way relationship in which both parties learn from each other (Freire, 1973). To draw from Ellis's (1993) findings, the dialogue must encourage individuals not only to be aware of what they do but also to be aware of why they do it.

If reflection is a subjective yet structured intellectual practice, what does the process of reflecting on reflections entail? Literature indicates that the practice of reflecting on reflections is very much the same as the notion of reflection, but it is different in the sense that it gives some additional insights into the success (or failure), clarity (or uncertainties), and difficulties, issues, and challenges that are foreseen for future endeavors (or faced in the initial reflecting process). *Reflecting on reflections* allows the practitioner to internalize the ideas and knowledge that were

conceived and constructed in the reflecting process and thus critically think about its functions for future applications. Ramasamy (2002), for instance, engages the postsecondary students in his English communication and academic writing course in *reflective dialogues*. His reflections reveal some challenges that are bound to be of paramount concern to students as well as educators in that course, creating more uncertainties than concrete solutions:

> Such reflective dialogue often takes a back seat when the overriding concern is to complete the task or assignment, regardless of whether it entailed reflective thinking and learning. This challenge or dilemma is further compounded when lecturers deal with learners who are low performing ESL students. . . . When lecturers have to struggle with learners' language inadequacy and at the same time face the pressure of completing course content, how does one engage learners in reflective thinking and learning? Should we be less content driven and go by the dictum that "less is more"? (p. 3)

Such self-questioning scrutinizes new lines of thought, creating possibilities for constructing new knowledge and reconstructing existing knowledge. Ramasamy undoubtedly intends his reflections on reflective practices to necessitate further critical thoughts and actions, which aim at isolating the identified struggles and simultaneously encouraging the proliferation of new ideas to revitalize the unproductive and unrewarding practices. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) extend their reflections on reflective practices within peer observation to include re-examination of existing teaching and learning practices so that the quality and meaningfulness of the learning environment can be enhanced, specifically by the means of widening academic debate and allowing academics to consider their roles as professional educators. Likewise, Hunt, Edwards, McKay, and Taylor's (1994) examination of self-reflections on establishing a reflective practice tutor group prompted more confusion than resolution of the issues at hand for the researchers who were directly involved. Nevertheless, their reflective practice did help clarify their process of sharing ideas when they became

> enmeshed in our own mess of ideas and experiences, and of sometimes meeting up with others with whom we temporarily became entangled. . . . At the time of writing we have not resolved this issue but it has made us sensitive to the differences in our own backgrounds and the impact of these on the requirements we make of students. We sense, too, that reflective practices undertaken at individual basis may merely reinforce habits and prejudices. (p. 5)

Clegg's (1996) study of using journals as a reflective tool in collaboration with colleagues is another instance where reflecting on reflections asks more questions than it provides straightforward answers. She becomes

"acutely aware that there is a dilemma" (p. 9) in adopting reflective practice as a model to improve student supervision because no mechanism is available to assess whether reflective practice affects the educational outcomes.

Though the studies just discussed question the usefulness of reflecting on reflective practices, Macpherson's (2005) study of students reflecting on their reflective writing and their writing process showed that students achieved definite improvement. In her analysis, she sought to decide objectively which ideas to adopt in future classes by distinguishing "what works—and why" (p. 3). In addition, it allowed her to see where perhaps she needed "to ensure more guidance, or more clearly explain reasons behind particular tasks" (p. 3). Brown and McCartney (1995) investigated master's level business administration students' reflections on their reflections about articles the students had written during the previous term. Brown and McCartney identify three theoretical strands that emerged out of reflecting on reflections: reflecting as an act of meditation, reflecting as mirroring self, and reflecting as a form of assessment or self-evaluation. They conclude that such explicit practice of reflection has pedagogical value because it helps "students to get self-knowledge of themselves and of their practices, and to take an informed position on knowledge and action" (p. 18).

The literature suggests that sharing is a key element in reflecting on reflections. According to Irvin (2002), sharing reflections may stir the persons involved to "reconstitute a more complex and synthetic understanding" (p. 9). Pope (1999) calls this process *refraction*, which describes a movement beyond reflection where "the same activity is seen but from a different angle," and suggests that it is "an added way of seeing" (p. 180). Pope uses the metaphor of multiple mirrors to describe this process. Sharing, in Pope's sense, is also an integral feature of this investigation.

METHOD

The 18 participants in this study were students in the bachelor of education (TESOL) degree program. The group consisted of preservice teachers and in-service teachers who were pursuing their first degree. In the first semester of the 2004–2005 academic year, they were enrolled in a compulsory course called English Language Teaching Methods I (PPG 215). Focusing on the "range of procedures for planning and executing classroom instruction," the PPG 215 course aimed at helping the students

> understand the fundamental concepts of English language teaching and be familiar with the principles of teaching English to speakers of other

languages (TESOL) . . . [and] to equip teachers with knowledge and skills for teaching English to Malaysian students to meet the demands of English in the local and global context. (School of Educational Studies, 2004, p. 1)

The study was carried out during the tutorials, which ran for 11 weeks. In the first tutorial, I presented ideas relating to critical reflective practices and what the concept meant in terms of enhancing one's awareness. Based on Duke (1990), I realized that to increase the students' awareness, the concept of critical reflective practices had to be scaffolded by the following activities: breaking routines, changing perspectives, and examining assumptions. In the tutorial, I introduced the writing and reading of reflective forms as routine-breaking activities, and the students' perspectives were changed with their fresh understanding of the critical reflective practice (explicated later). As for examining assumptions, the students were reminded of the need to be critical of their own and others' classroom practices.

The students were asked to embrace Richards and Lockhart's (1994) suggestion that "the process of reflecting upon one's own teaching is . . . an essential component in developing knowledge and theories of teaching and hence is a key element in one's professional development" (p. 202). They understood that to be reflective and critical, they need to monitor, critique, and defend their actions in planning, implementing, and evaluating the microteaching session (Nunan & Lamb, 1996). The students were also encouraged to be reflective and critical in examining the microteaching session as a basis for evaluation and decision making and as a source of change (Bartlett, 1990; Wallace, 1991).

During each tutorial, a pair of students presented a mock teaching session, or *microteaching*, for about 40 minutes. One week prior to their actual presentations, they met with me to give a summary of their presentation, particularly their content, teaching strategies adopted, and their understanding of the requirements of their topic. As a tutor, I facilitated their understanding and encouraged creativity and critical thinking but did not interfere with their planned presentation, as long as their direction was clear and in line with the topic. The topics of presentation included incorporating listening and speaking, incorporating speaking and reading, incorporating writing and grammar, incorporating literature and writing, and incorporating literature and speaking. Each pair was asked to provide complete notes of their microteaching to other students. The notes included the microteaching lesson plan, teaching aids and materials used (e.g., handouts, worksheets, etc.), and references or citations.

The presentations were followed by a 20-minute question-and-answer session, during which other students asked questions and commented on the presentation. This session was structured in a way so that the pre-

senters would not feel threatened, intimidated, or overwhelmed. I facilitated and managed the session by starting with questions regarding aspects of the presentations that were not clear to me. Subsequently, I explicitly encouraged the students to ask similar questions. By this time, the presenters are at ease and the tension and adrenaline rush of presenting has subsided considerably. Only then were the other students given the opportunity to critique and give comments, opinions, and suggestions concerning the presentation and its content. The role of the tutor was crucial at this stage. Sometimes the discussions were charged, and when the parties disagreed, I defused the situations by outlining all the key points made. I wanted to ensure that the students saw all perspectives so that they could make an informed decision. At the same time, I kept my distance by not giving away my own beliefs but encouraged the students to formulate their own opinions. When the discussions began to show signs of saturation, I highlighted key points of the presentation that the students had not discussed to bring out new issues that were worth exploring. The question-and-answer session was ended by, again, highlighting key points that had been discussed and agreed on and, at the same time, giving credit to the presenters on facets of the presentations that had contributed to new knowledge and learning experiences for the whole group.[1]

At the end of each tutorial, students were given a form to encourage them to use critical reflective practices to think about each microteaching presentation (see Appendix). Using the form, the students were asked to answer two questions:

1. What interesting concepts or ideas of teaching, learning, or education in general have you learnt and internalized? Elaborate why.
2. If you were to present on the same topic as today, would you have done it similarly or differently? Why?

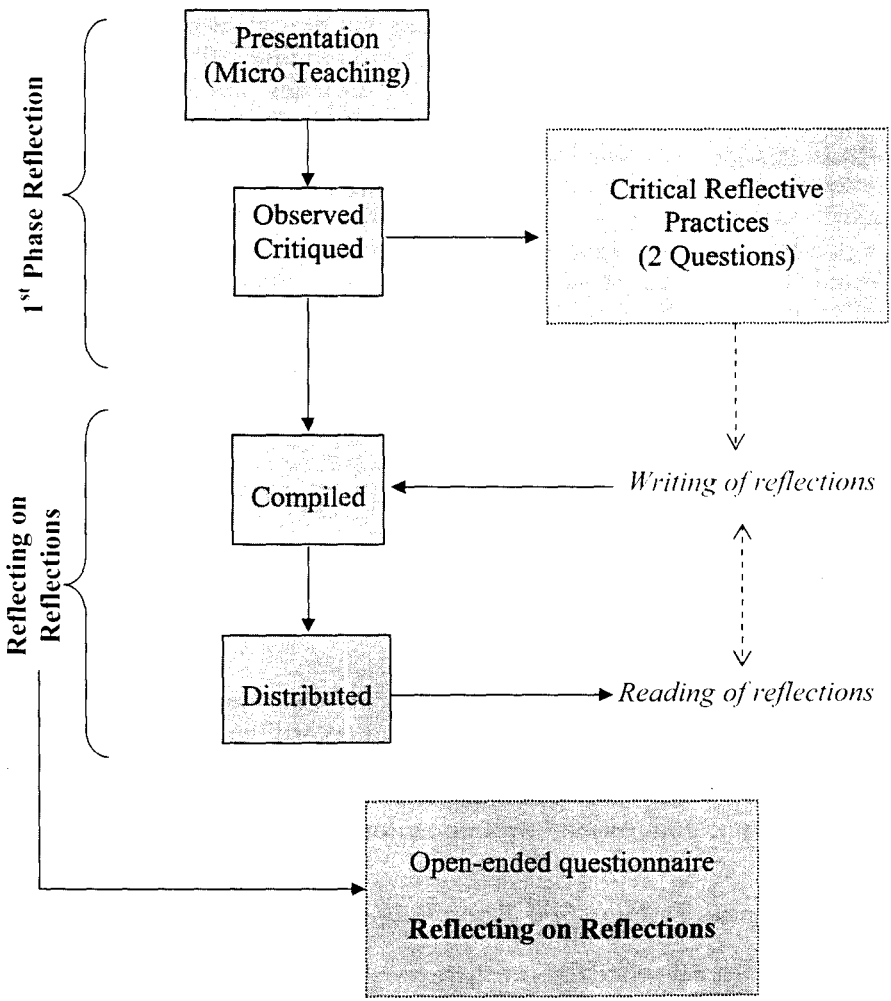
These two questions helped guide the students, who did not have much experience in reflective practice and did not fully understand how to proceed (Corcoran & Leahy, 2003). To give them more time to make meaningful, critical reflections, the students were asked to reflect on the presentations as individual assignments outside the tutorial hours. The forms were then photocopied, compiled, and distributed in the following tutorial to all the students, who were then encouraged to read what others had written and consider whether what they had written corroborated or contradicted what others had written. At the same time, they

[1] Note, this 20-minute session touched on a wide range of matters like body language, eye contact, class control, language abilities or mistakes, pedagogical implications, time management, content of the lesson, and even dress code.

were also expected to be critical in comprehending, accepting, and adopting ideas suggested by others.

At the end of the semester, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to all the students, requiring them to reflect on the writing of reflections and reading of others' reflections. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the students' perceptions and beliefs about the effectiveness of reflecting on reflections in terms of their overall awareness, pedagogical growth, and positive changes in their professional practice. Figure 1 depicts the entire process of reflecting on reflections.

FIGURE 1
Process of Reflecting on Reflections



In the final phase of reflecting on reflections, three open-ended questions were used to develop insights into the students' process of reflecting on reflections:

1. What effects did the reflections have on you as a teacher trainee?
2. Has writing the reflections been helpful to you as a future teacher? How?
3. Has reading the reflections of others helped you in any way as a future teacher? How?

All the students were coded S1–S18, respectively, and the qualitative data obtained were coded to enable sorting by topic. For the purpose of this study, the data were assigned *situation codes* and *activity codes*. The situation codes were assigned to units of data that described how the student defined and perceived the act of writing and reading reflections and how he or she connected the reflections to his or her practices as a future English language teacher. The situation codes were used to identify the situations of professional practice in which the act of writing and reading reflections would be important and meaningful for the teachers. The activity codes were assigned to units of data that described the students' regularly occurring behavior, such as professional practices and projected changes, that occurred as a consequence of writing and reading reflections (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Table 1 shows the schema used to code and organize the data. Five themes emerged from the data analysis:

1. Fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding
2. Awareness of meaningful and effective classroom practices
3. Teachers' linguistic capabilities
4. Positive attitudes toward teaching and learning
5. Relevant skills

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in the students' own voices. The outcomes of the students' reflections are categorized according to the five themes (when applicable). Nevertheless, the richness of the data means that some excerpts may indicate more than one theme or may contain themes that are intertwined with one another.

Fundamental Pedagogical Knowledge and Understanding

Writing critical reflections of their own practices and reading others' reflections formed the preservice teachers' fundamental pedagogical

TABLE 1

Sample Schema to Code and Organize Data According to the Themes

Example excerpts (student)	Analyses (Note/comment)	Themes
To do the reflective paper, I referred quite a lot of books, journals. When read through the articles, I learned a lot of knowledge I can't get if I don't read those materials. Through reflective article, it helps me think critically and able to learn more to become a good teacher. (S18) [Activity Code]	Students' awareness and self-realization for the need to acquire fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding in order to become a good teacher is elevated	**Fundamental Pedagogical Knowledge and Understanding:** A prerequisite to become good teacher.
. . . make me more careful and alert on what we must and must not do. Writing the reflection also make me remember all the rules in teaching and try to be a good teacher and student in proper and appropriate way as a teacher should be. (S12) [Situation Code]	The practice of reflecting on reflections made immediate and ongoing influence in reinforcing and reaffirming effective classroom practices and the general rule of thumb of becoming a good teacher.	**Awareness of Meaningful and Effectual Classroom Practices:** Reinforce and reaffirm effective classroom practices.
. . . the process of writing (the reflections) helps me to improve and 'upgrade' my vocabulary as I have to 'search' for appropriate words to convey my message. (S8) [Activity Code]	By identifying and understanding their strengths and weaknesses, the students can improve themselves as teachers in terms of their linguistic capabilities.	**Linguistic Capabilities:** Enhance vocabulary
It was a meaningful moment for me because I realized that all the ideas which I had I can share with the others. . . . . (S11) [Situation Code]	Sharing trait as one of the key elements of a successful and meaningful procedure of reflecting on reflections as it aided them in exploring new ideas and how those ideas can be helpful and meaningful to others too.	**Embrace and Practice Positive Attitudes toward Teaching and Learning:** Sharing trait
I also learnt new techniques and methods that will be very helpful and useful in future. Even so, some reflections made by peers make no sense. I do have to adapt and adjust peer comment . . . (S17) [Activity Code].	The activity of adopting ideas by the students is not rampant and senseless, but is systematic with appropriate and logical reasoning and judging.	**Relevant skills:** Creative and critical thinking

knowledge and understanding, which is necessary to "learn the appropriate way to teach in future" (S1), particularly in aspects of which they have little or no knowledge. For instance, S1's experience with reflecting on reflections facilitates the gaining of knowledge and ideas from others:

> For example, the topic of assessing writing, as I do not have any experiences in testing before, therefore, I do not know the appropriate way to assess the students' essay. When I write the reflections, it will encourage me to think back what it is done and what did I learn from the presentations.[2] (S1)

Similarly, S2 points out that by reflecting and reading others' reflections, she has "learnt a lot of ways that will help me in expanding my knowledge of teaching." Also, she has gained "some useful ideas that will help in my future teaching in school" (S2). S5 discusses how such practice equips her with pedagogical knowledge and ideas,

> Yes, for example, from today's group presentation, I learned how to assess writing. There are criteria what we can follow when grading an essay. Sometimes, I will rethink of what others have written on reflection forms. This is because they might think of some concepts of ideas that I've never thought of. It's fun when seeing all comments using different methods in teaching. I'll have to learn from them, equipping myself with various kinds of methods . . . . at least I can think of other ways that can be done if I'm given the chance to perform the same task. (S5)

It's clear that some of the students see fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding as a prerequisite to becoming a good teacher. S18 confirms this view:

> To do the reflective paper, I referred quite a lot of books, journals. When read through the articles, I learned a lot of knowledge I can't get if I don't read those materials. Through reflective paper, it helps me think critically and able to learn more to become a good teacher. (S18)

The act of reflecting on reflections triggered some of the students' creativity—they believe they are now capable of generating new teaching methods and ideas (S11) based on the pedagogical knowledge they gained from their own and others' presentations. The presentations stimulated their creativity because "all of us have different views about teaching and learning process" (S11). These new ideas and methods will be "better and proper" (S16) and "effective" (S2). It is interesting to note that the students are actively, creatively, and critically thinking about what others have presented (topics) and thought (in the guise of written

[2] All excerpts in this article are quoted as they were written by the students. The data may feature occasional grammatical errors and/or incomplete sentences because of the informal nature of expression.

reflections). According to S3, the writing of reflections stimulates her "to think critically about the teaching methods used" by her peers. Such thinking processes lead the teacher to continuously question the issues and thereby acquire or reconstruct his or her knowledge and practices, leading to the reification of new knowledge on teaching practice:

> After reading [the reflections of others], I would compare with my own reflection. I would gain some idea from the reflections about the different way to teach the different topics. (S1)

Awareness of Meaningful and Effective Classroom Practices

Excerpts dealing with the previous theme show that the teachers have gained a knowledge of the fundamentals. When they critically think about the knowledge, scrutinize how they can use that knowledge, and critically and constantly examine their classroom practices, the students also attain a critical knowledge:

> If I need to write the reflections, it means that I will have to pay attention thoroughly to every single point that presenters present: the way they present their particular topics, their presentation contents, the time management, their English pronunciation, their emotion state, attitude when they are doing their presentation and so on. If I can notice their strategies and weaknesses, I will be able to notice mine too. (S13)

> I will try to learn the strengths of other presenter. When I find weaknesses of other presenter, I will take it as an experience, and not repeat the same mistake. (S6)

> I won't make the same mistakes made by my peers. So it is an advantage to learn from others' mistakes. (S17)

> Before this, I do not know where are my mistakes when I presenting any topics. But after my friends gave comments on me, now I know what are my mistakes. I think same might goes on with my friends (other teacher trainees). (S15)

This self-examination, as evident in the preceding excerpts, helps students improve themselves and encourages them to learn from others. As another student narrates, it also has immediate and ongoing influence on her practices, particularly in reaffirming her existing knowledge and beliefs about good teaching:

> [The processes] make me more careful and alert on what we must and must not do. Writing the reflection also make me remember all the rules in teaching and try to be a good teacher and student in proper and appropriate way as a teacher should be. (S12)

S1's, S12's, and S14's elaborations are further evidence that the students have become very much aware of meaningful and effective classroom practices as a result of reflecting on reflections.

> I did learn the techniques that can be used in the teaching, which will make the teaching more interesting and more effectively. (S1)

> It makes me remember on how to be a good teacher, a good way to teach and control class. Why? Because as a teacher we sometimes forget that our students are not the of the same levels in a classroom. (S12)

> The reflections given would serve as a guideline in future presentations or in carrying out activities in the classroom. (S14).

The self-examination, which stems from reflecting on reflections, also helps the students identify meaningful and effective classroom practices:

> Well from my view, reading the reflections of others helped much. As I had mentioned earlier, we need to share and work as a team. It is not wrong to hear or read others' reflections. It is our responsibility to decide which one should be brought into practice. (S10)

> It helps me to identify effective ways and methods for teaching later on. Besides that, it is useful for me to learn how to assess students appropriately as there are several ways and activities being suggested by the presenters. (S2)

Eventually, the students' confidence increases as they progress from one stage to another. They progress from noticing their weaknesses and strengths to learning from others, and from improving their teaching to becoming "confident in classroom environment" and "confident in teaching" (S7).

Teachers' Linguistic Capabilities

Reflecting on reflections made some of the students realize that they have greatly enhanced their linguistic capabilities and their skills related to language learning:

> As a teacher trainee, the process of writing helps me to improve and 'upgrade' my vocabulary as I have to 'search' for appropriate words to convey my message. (S8)

> Writing reflections not only helps the students to respond in writing which would therefore improve one's writing skills but also would make it easier for people who are reluctant to speak openly in the class to voice their opinions. (S14)

Along with improvements in vocabulary and writing skills, students also mentioned improvement in pronunciation (S13) and assessing and evaluating writing (S1).

Positive Attitudes Toward Teaching and Learning

Some students identified sharing as one of the key elements of reflecting on reflections because it helped them in exploring new ideas.

> As for me, writing the reflections really help me to get more ideas which I can use when I am in school in future. It was a meaningful moment for me because I realized that all the ideas which I had I can share with the others. (S11)

> Whatever we think relevant should be shared to others. Good thinking and good learning are linked through our experiences of what we are doing. Through the reflections we could adjust ourselves. We need to increase our own knowledge before we increase our students' knowledge .... It is not wrong to hear or read others' reflections. It is our responsibility to decide which one should be brought into practice.... [We ought to] share because teachers are the sole model of the future generations. To adjust teaching to students', teacher first needs to increase their knowledge of learners. (S10)

Though S10 implies that sharing reflections is vital, what to share and with whom to share is equally important so as to ensure that the reflections can be transferred meaningfully into classroom practice. S10's argument that fundamental pedagogical knowledge is not limited to the actual process of teaching, but that teachers "first need to increase their knowledge of learners, that is knowledge of students," demonstrates that she has developed deep yet fundamental pedagogical understanding of what constitutes a good teacher. Such a response also shows that she has embraced a very constructive and positive approach to teaching and learning.

It is evident that reflecting on reflections actually strengthens the students' positive feelings and attitudes toward improving their teaching and learning. It clarifies their mistakes, which in turn allows them to rectify the mistakes and improve their practices. The following excerpts highlight the concepts of learning from strengths and weaknesses, and learning from one's own and from others' mistakes:

> When I get comments from the group I would know where I have gone wrong. The reflections given would serve as a guideline in future presentations or in carrying out activities in the classroom.... Reflections writing is also a way to solve problems in a sense that we take note of our strengths & weaknesses from time to time. Therefore, this will surely help everyone to improve oneself. (S14)

> Reading the reflections of others helped me to realize my mistakes. I also can learn from mistakes being made by others. Thus, I will not repeat that particular mistakes again. The most important thing is it let me think carefully why that mistakes happened and how to solve it. (S3)

> By reading through the reflections of others, it helps me always to improve myself in presentation. Always remind myself not to repeat the same mistakes. Sometimes, it is very interesting to look through others' might think about us. Therefore, through reading the reflections of others, it helps us to improve ourselves and learn from mistakes. (S18)

The reading of reflections spurs S8 to improve herself because it gives her ideas of "what is expected by others in teaching and learning process." S3's and S8's responses indicate an integral element of reflecting on reflections, that is, thinking about the content and context of the reflection. S9 explains:

> By reading, other people's weaknesses and strengths indirectly helped me in choosing which method to use, what kind of mistakes need to be avoided and also how to bring myself in front of older audience. (S9)

Relevant Skills

Most of the students said that they would improve themselves as teachers by acquiring new skills. The improvements that are highlighted by the students are "teaching approach" (S7), "teaching skills" (S15), "teaching technique" (S17), and "presentation" (S18). Some of the improvements mentioned have immediate impact on vocabulary, writing skills, and presentation, while others provide more long-term benefits that will contribute to the students' future undertaking as teachers.

One skill that is obvious and profitable from reflecting on reflections is thinking. Generally, writing and reading reflections enable students to obtain immediate "feedback from the audience" and simultaneously "improve or increase [their] strength while [they] correct their weaknesses" (S4). They believe that by reflecting, they "can try to correct it & do it in another or different way" (S4). Changing their behavior certainly requires the students to creatively and critically think of their practices. S5 and S9 concur and note how the writing of reflections actually gives them the space and time to carefully analyze others' practices and relate them to their own development.

> Most of the time, I'll be "drowning" into their presentation till I don't being critical thinking as their activities are all interesting. Somehow, writing reflections can let me see clearer the weaknesses and strengths of each presentation and I can learn from them as I'm not experienced in teaching. (S5)

> Yes, definitely it helps a lot, especially in detecting my weaknesses and strengths . . . by reading, other people's weaknesses and strengths indirectly helped me in choosing which method to use, what kind of mistakes need to be avoided. (S9)

S5's and S9's comments denote that adapting and adopting ideas are not random and unsubstantiated acts but are systematic, with appropriate logical reasoning and the very precise aim of solving problems. Critical thinking is evident in the following comments:

> I also learnt new techniques and methods that will be very helpful and useful in future. Even so, some reflections made by peers make no sense. I do have to adapt and adjust peer comment. (S17)

> I can really learn strengths and weaknesses from [teaching methods used by my friends] after thinking carefully . . . The most important thing is it let me think carefully why that mistake happened and how to solve it. (S1)

> This is regarding to the ideas of writing comments which helps me in critical thinking as I have to be very 'fair' in judging. (S8)

All these statements indicate that reflecting on writing and reading reflections contributes to the teachers' ability to think critically when they are faced with significant issues pertinent to selecting, comprehending, and reconstructing knowledge for very specific uses—in this case, new ideas and methods of teaching. The reflective practice permits the students to identify their weaknesses and overcome them. Reflecting on her writing of reflections, S16 notes her ability "to detect, understand and overcome my weaknesses," whereas S17, by reflecting on his reading of reflections, manages "to discover my weaknesses and overcome it."

DISCUSSION

The students in this study reflect as they write and read about their reflections. The entire procedure has aroused the students' awareness of their own development, of what is happening around them in terms of specific pedagogical activities, and of the changes the process reveals as necessary. These changes, they believe, would further strengthen their abilities as teachers. The students' analyses confirm that reflecting on reflections enhances the students' awareness of fundamental pedagogical knowledge and their understanding of the knowledge. It also heightens their awareness of meaningful and effective classroom practices and eventually contributes to their confidence as future teachers. Through reflecting on reflections, the students demonstrate their readiness to embrace positive attitudes toward teaching and learning. In addition,

they display creative and critical thinking skills in terms of the content and context of the reflections. However, in terms of improving linguistic capabilities, the students did not make great progress, though some did acknowledge the enrichment of their vocabulary.

The findings imply that observing the strengths and weaknesses of others and reflecting on them via writing and reading allow the students to be aware of their own practices, avoid possible mistakes, and, thus, develop a set of strategies to implant positive classroom changes or practices. Such learning by observation, as Estebaranz, Mingorance and Marcelo (2000) have noted, would enable students to "generate and regulate patterns of behavior, and thus has a great effect in the practice of teaching" (p. 135). For reflective practice to have any meaningful impact on the students, it must occur in a learning community and not be carried out as an individual endeavor. Though reflecting is basically a personal and individual procedure, when shared with other members of a learning community, the individual's thoughts and experiences are collaboratively maximized. According to Putnam and Borko (2000), this sort of sharing that takes place in a learning community can assist both the educators and students to "engage in rich discourse about important ideas" (p. 11). In essence, the students regard the writing and reading of reflections as tools to discover, understand, and overcome pedagogical and educational weaknesses and, eventually, solve related problems. These acts define what critically reflecting teachers do: examine frames and attempt to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice, and question the assumptions and values that they bring to teaching (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

This study also suggests that sharing of critical reflective practices, which in this study occurred via the reading of others' reflections, serves as a vital link between the students' theoretical knowledge and their ability to translate that knowledge into meaningful classroom engagements. In a study of peer coaching, Swafford (2000) found that reflective support provided to teachers enabled them to focus on the strengths of their colleagues' choices of materials and questioning strategies. The teachers also thought critically of future lessons and the changes they would make. The current study's findings, however, add a new dimension to Swafford's conclusion. The students explicitly point to the fact that critical reflective practices not only made them think critically of their and others' classroom practices, but also led them to the realization that such practices are meaningful and, therefore, ought to be shared with others (as indicated by S10 and S11). This deep insight, if nurtured appropriately, could lead them to treat critical reflective practice as an enduring force of amelioration in their development as teachers.

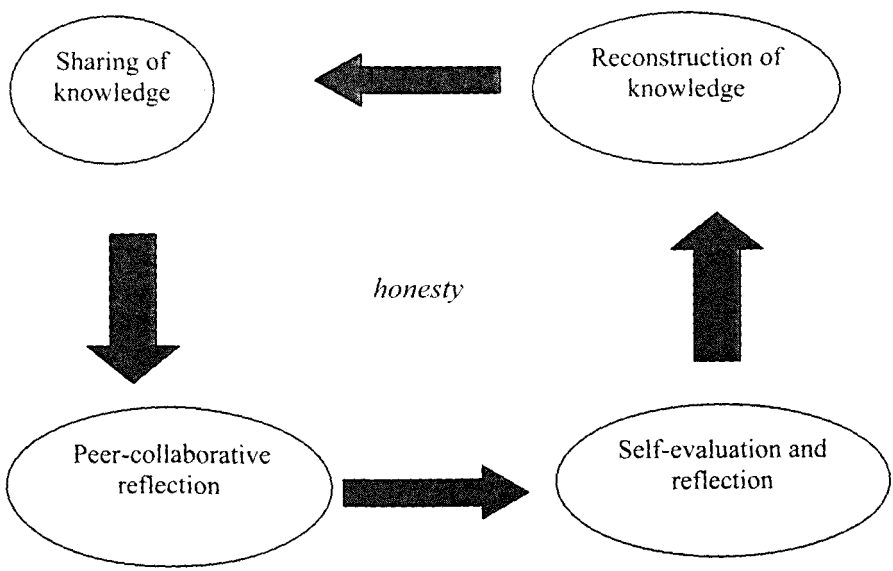
Sharing of knowledge is the key element to becoming a practicing reflective teacher. Sharing permits teachers to venture into a peer-cum-

collaborative initiative to reflect on the knowledge and thus further elevate the credibility of the knowledge through a rigorous process of evaluating and reflecting. This process paves the way for the reconstruction of knowledge, which subsequently reifies itself into a new shared knowledge (see Figure 2). This whole process, considered as a profound engagement of reflective practices, may contribute to the enrichment and divergence of existing knowledge, if conducted in a climate of honesty (see Kabilan, 2004). In addition to honesty, a reflective teacher should possess open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness (Dewey, 1933; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

IMPLICATIONS

This study has three implications for the way we train and educate future English language teachers. First, critical reflective practices ought to be integrated into the curriculum, especially in courses that seriously demand student teachers to observe, inquire, acquire, construct and reconstruct, and practice critical pedagogical awareness and knowledge. This recommendation is neither new nor innovative; many researchers have adopted and recommended it (see Allen & Casbergue, 1997; Brownlee, Dart, Boulton-Lewis, & McCrindle, 1998; Freese, 1999; Hatton

FIGURE 2
Sharing Practices of a Critical Teacher (Adapted from Kabilan, 2004)



& Smith, 1995; Mills & Satterthwait, 2000). But, as Swartz (2004) suggests, a conscious focus on critical thinking is necessary to facilitate such integration. She goes on to identify teacher educators' effective modeling of critical thinking as a powerful and effective method. When teachers have the opportunity to think critically about any pedagogical knowledge, they can develop awareness of meaningful and effective classroom practices, which eventually leads to innovative ideas that can be beneficial to the learners. So, Swartz contends, the prevalence and incorporation of critical reflection into teacher education programs ought to be accompanied by the teacher educators' competent modeling of creative and critical thinking to encourage their students to relinquish the "traditional role of receiving and reiterating the knowledge of others" and develop into "self-reflective thinkers able to produce knowledge that is more critical" (p. 59). Inherently, this suggestion implies that teacher educators should critically question and reflect on whether the programs offered are

1. based on knowledge and materials that emphasize and facilitate critical inquiry.
2. practiced and observed in a critical manner.
3. facilitated and navigated by critical personnel.

These criteria would enable preservice teachers to reflect critically on their own and others' classroom beliefs, understandings, perceptions, and practices so that, as future teachers, they would be better prepared to respond to "unexpected questions, to students' errors, [and] to learning opportunities that arise" (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001, p. 37).

Second, students ought to have opportunities to share their critical reflections with other students to help them dissect perceived and existing knowledge, challenge and question their assumptions about teaching and classroom practices, and reflect on how their thinking about pedagogy could influence their future classrooms practices. To further exploit the idea of sharing and move to the stage of peer collaboration, the initiatives proposed by Kabilan (2004) are complex and would require collegial participation at every level of the faculty, but the rewards would be worthwhile. Such initiatives may include interclass or tutorial peer observation and reflections on microteaching sessions as well as peer review of teaching journals, and others. These initiatives are part of the first level of reflecting, which, when reflections are shared, as Morgan (2005) advocates, may later evolve into a process of reflecting on reflections.

Third, a higher level of reflecting, which is reflecting on the entire initial reflection program or process, should also be incorporated into teacher education programs. The second round of reflecting essentially

strengthens and improves whatever concepts, opinions, and ideas were conceived at the first level. Self-realization and self-awareness may also occur, as two participants in this study recognized and noted that sharing was also a vital component to their successful and meaningful reflection procedures. Although sharing was not discussed explicitly during the first phase of reflection, most participants were literally sharing their thoughts, views, and ideas with others. Self-realization and self-awareness of their sharing mannerisms were not palpable until they reflected on their earlier reflections. These senses of self-realization and self-awareness contribute more to teachers' critically refined pedagogical awareness and knowledge than any other aspects.

CONCLUSION

From my observations and students' statements, it is clear that my students have grasped some of the fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding that are required of them as future English language teachers. Their awareness of some of the important pedagogical concepts and effective classroom practices are also heightened. What impressed me the most, however, was their readiness to embrace and practice positive attitudes toward teaching and learning, and their keenness to learn new skills as well as to practice the skills they already have. Unfortunately, they were unable to expand their linguistic capabilities in the very limited amount of time we had available. Their responses in the findings suggest that they need to work harder to improve their linguistic capabilities. Nevertheless, they are more receptive to ideas and suggestions that would elevate their confidence and motivation in becoming effective English language teachers. Perhaps this energy and focus can be channeled toward improving their language competency and proficiency.

Walker and Cheng (1996) stress that before any professional development can lead to educational change, the professional development must "be broad based, more completely understood and conceptualized, properly supported and be seen as an integral part of the change process" (p. 199). Therefore, to further develop this approach, I strongly feel that other studies are needed to explore its broader applicability, not limited to a few specific students, courses, conditions, and other determinants. Perhaps the next concentration should be on a comparative study, which might examine English teachers from different cultural contexts and backgrounds, and discern where and when they have indistinct or distinct practices on reflecting on reflections. Also important is a study looking into how the students learn to cope with these changes

and how they perceive those changes in light of their own development as teachers, functioning in a larger community of practicing teachers. In addition, the question of the sustainability of those inherent changes should also be addressed.

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APPENDIX

A SAMPLE OF REFLECTION (S2)

STUDENT	2
DATE	3 September 2004
TOPIC	Incorporating Literature and Speaking
PRESENTERS	1. Alita*
	2. Kohila*

Based on today's presentation of micro teaching:

1. What interesting concepts or ideas of teaching or learning or education in general have you learnt and internalized? Elaborate why.

It is good to get students involved in the discussion. Students are able to give opinions about the subject matter. In fact, students should be given the opportunities to participate in the process of teaching and learning. In other words, the learning should be student-centred. Thus I think I have learnt to try to get students involved more in activity class.

2. If you were to present on the same topic as today, would you have done it similarly or differently? Why?

I think I will use more methods to carry out the lesson. Besides asking students to give their opinions, I think I will provide more visuals such as picture for students to have better understanding of the subject matter. It is because literature is the study of language beyond linguistic aspect. Thus, it has to be taught by providing students more concrete and clear pictures of what they have to learn.

* Pseudonyms