CULTIVATING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS THROUGH TEACHING PRACTICUM: A REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract: Classroom management is believed to be “The key to the whole success of a course” (Scrivener, 2005: 79). Conversely, many student-teachers and beginning teachers have found it very worrisome especially in their first-years teaching (Arends, 2012, and Goh and Matthews, 2011). It is, therefore, necessary to advance their professional practice in the context of a real classroom such as through teaching practicum and reflective practice. This paper is aimed at identifying the student-teachers’ classroom management problems as revealed in their reflective journal entries and to illustrate how such journal can help them develop their classroom management skills. The participants were 10 student-teachers of the English Department, Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, who underwent their teaching practicum at SMP 2 Salatiga. Through the participants’ journals, it was found that the problems lie in managing critical moments (38.3%), activity (29.7%), techniques (14.9%), grouping and seating (8.5%), authority (8.5%), tools (8.5%), and working with people (4.25%). Further in this paper, both pre- and in-service tertiary teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers will be taken to deeply examine how reflective practice can help cultivate the pre-service’s classroom management skills and to consider the implication for pedagogical practices and innovations in curriculum development.

Keywords: Classroom management, Reflective journal, and pre-service teacher.

Complexities in establishing and managing classroom have been reported by many pre-service student-teachers to be the most difficult and worrisome aspect of their first-years teaching Arends (2012); Goh and Matthews (2011); and Monroe, Blackwell, and Pepper (2010). Therefore, helping them improve their skills in managing classroom is crucial since this matter plays significant roles in the teaching and learning process. As argued by Scrivener, classroom management is “The key to the whole success of a course” (2005: 79). Furthermore, it is a pivotal aspect in teaching for achieving an effective instruction (Kagan, 1992, cited by Sakui: 2007).

Areas of Classroom Management
Scrivener (2005) classified teacher’s classroom management into six areas: grouping and seating; managing activities and giving instructions (e.g. preparing and sequencing activities, setting up activities, monitoring activities, timing activities, until bringing activities to an end), managing authority; managing critical moments; managing tools or variety of teaching aids and techniques (e.g. the use of gestures, language, silence) and working with people (e.g. eliciting ideas from students, spreading attention appropriately).

Teaching Practicum
Teaching practicum, often used interchangeably with teaching practice, is aimed at providing opportunities to the trainee [in this case the pre-service teacher] to build up and to advance her/his professional practice in the context of a real classroom, usually under some kinds of guidance or supervision (Wallace, 1991). More clearly, Kennedy (1996) explains that the opportunities allow such pre-service teachers to experience and ‘experiment’ their knowledge and skills in a real world of teaching and learning (as cited by Goh and Matthews, 2011).

Reflective Practice through Reflective Journal
In teaching and learning context, reflective practice basically encourages us to step back certain situation in our teaching and then plan what to do next (Wolf &Siu-Runyan, 1996). This is what Dewey called as reviewing and thinking about our own thoughts and actions. It is a conscious self-examination that evaluates events that have occurred and gives meaning to feelings, thoughts and actions by questioning motives (as cited by Goh and Matthews, 2011).

To accommodate such reflective thinking above, reflective journal has been widely promoted to use since it can “record student-teachers’ thinking through narration and so by writing about experiences, actions and events, they will reflect on and learn from those episodes” (Loughran, 1996: 8). Additionally, it enables them to reflect on socialization and professional growth issues that they would not normally be aware of (Hall and Bowman, 1989). Looking at the great opportunity of using reflective journal to build up student-teacher’s
classroom management skill, I am interested to find out what the student-teachers’ classroom management problems are revealed in the pre-service teachers’ reflective journal entries during their teaching practicum and how such reflective journal practice can help build their classroom management skills (as cited by Goh and Matthews, 2011).

Research Method

The subjects in this study were ten (10) student-teachers enrolled in the final year of their bachelor degree program at the faculty of English Language and Literature, majoring in English Language Teaching, at Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia. The research was conducted at SMPN 2 (State Junior High School 2), Salatiga, Indonesia, where the subjects did their teaching practicum for three months and underwent a six-time-teaching for grade seven, eight, and nine spread over the three-month period. The research instrument used was the student-teachers’ journal. Throughout their teaching practicum, they were required to write a narrative journal every time they finish teaching. Therefore, there were sixty (60) journal entries to be analyzed.

The data were collected through the following steps. First, the subjects were required to write a journal and to submit it soon after they finished teaching. Secondly, after all journals were collected, the data were analyzed. It was done by scrutinizing problems related to classroom management appeared in the journal and then classifying them into the areas of classroom management. The third step is analyzing student-teachers’ reflection to see how they dealt with their classroom management problems and to see how their reflection could help them improve their classroom management skills.

Finding and Discussion

This section discusses the finding of the research questions. The first one is what the student-teachers’ classroom management problems are revealed in their reflective journal entries? and the second one is how can reflective journal practice help build their classroom management skills.

What the student-teachers’ classroom management problems are revealed in their reflective journal entries?

The finding reveals that problems in managing classroom based on the order of occurrence is managing critical moments (38,3%), activity (29,7%), techniques (14,9%), grouping and seating (8,5%), authority (8,5%), tools (8,5%), and working with people (4,25%).

How can reflective journals help the students-teacher’ improve their classroom management skills?

The second objective of this paper is to see how reflective journals can help the pre-service teachers reflect on their problems in managing classroom and improve their classroom management skills. The illustration of such reflective practice can be seen below but for the sake of efficiency, only the top three of the findings will be discussed.

The student-teachers’ problems in managing critical moments

As revealed in the participants’ journals, one of the problems in this area is handling student’s noise. As seen below, Student 2, for example, looked back her teaching and recalled on how the students were boisterous when she explained the rule of the game. It happened again in the next teaching even though she had given engaging materials.

I found out that the class is noisy, some students kept busy with their own business even though I had attractive materials for them. I didn’t remember how many times I reminded certain students to pay attention and listen to their friends’ performance, but those certain students kept busy until the class almost over (participant 2, journal entry 3).

In respond to the problems, the participant told them to be silent. This effort seemed to be done many times but failed. Probably because she found it unsuccessful, again, she tried out another way:

…. Looking at how I have managed the classroom, I learn about to be patient and calm to deal with various kinds of students. Specifically, I have understood what I should do in dealing with passive and active students and noisy classroom as well. Besides, personally it gives me maturity to detain my temper in dealing the annoying and noisy students (student 2, journal entry 6).

What to be interesting in this finding is how the participants’ techniques to stop disruptive behavior come close to Scrivener’s suggestions. For example, clearly state an order to stop, wait for the students to do what we have asked, not immediately respond it with louder response, and finally repeat the original order as calmly as the initial order (2005). In conclusion, this reflection illustrates how the participant finally realized that being patient and calm worked better than aggressive shouting. She also realized that choosing this strategy leads her into improvement.
The student-teachers’ problems in managing activities

One of the frequent problems in managing classroom activities found in the journals is developing classroom activities into fun and enjoyable activities. Below are the reflections of student 4 toward the problem:

I found a little confusion to arrange the lesson plan, to make a cool and interesting or fun activities or ways to explain simple present tense… (student 4, journal entry 1).

Starting from preparing lesson plan, for example, participant 4 felt perplexed in designing fun activities. As a reaction of the problems above, she did series of effort to design fun classroom activities and kept reflecting on them as illustrated in her journal entry 2 until 5 below:

When teaching descriptive text, firstly she tried to grab her students’ attention by discussing an Indonesian famous comedian, Sule. In her opinion, it worked but less engaging since she did not use pictures for visualizing the figure. Therefore, in her next teaching, she came up with the picture of someone that the students know well. For this technique, she found it much more attractive. The second effort to create fun learning and teaching is by making use of power point. She reflected that this is helpful for the teaching and learning process although the picture and animation in the power point could distract the students’ attention. More to that, as her last effort, she provided a video about like and dislike in English. Her reflection showed that she learned good things from using video such as promoting fun learning and enhancing students’ participation and speaking skill.

In short, this participant examined her teaching problem in creating fun classroom activities and tried out some ways to make her classroom enjoyable. From all options that she has tried, she learns that pictures, power point, video and things closely related to them can be used to create fun learning activities. In this way, we can see there is an improvement in the way she manages classroom activities.

The student-teachers’ problems in managing teaching techniques

The common classroom management problems in teaching techniques are dealing with the language use and speech rate. Below is the illustration of problems in managing speech rate.

Another thing I need to improve is on the way I communicate because I think sometimes I speak too fast so that the students maybe do not really understand with my explanation (Student 5, journal entry 1).

The student-teacher 5 realized that he had a tendency to speak fast. More to that, he got realized that his fast rate of speech made his students not understand his explanation. Such reflection is quite realistic. As evidenced by the research on a group of EFL learners in Indonesia about Teacher talk, teacher’s rapid explanation can make students confused and difficult to internalize the teacher input (Ragawanti: 2007)

In response to this shortcoming, he did try to improve it but seemed not too easy. In journal entry 4 below, he examined his good progress on this but still his mentor teacher found him sometimes too fast in explaining. However, tried again until in the end of his teaching practicum, he found himself well improved:

However, there is still some basic problems that I need to pay attention on, such as, the communication skills, …still, I need to improve on the way I communicate because I think I still speak too fast so that the students maybe do not really understand with my explanation (Student 5, journal entry 4).

Besides, I also felt that I could communicate and interact with the class better….. (Student 5, journal entry 5).

Conclusion and Suggestion

The finding and discussion above obviously demonstrate that managing classroom can put the student-teachers into difficulty in handling students’ disruptive behaviors, classroom activities, teaching techniques, tools. As the implication for pedagogical practices, the teachers and/or syllabus designers need to give more knowledge and practices in classroom management, or classroom management course. The other point revealed from the finding is the effectiveness of reflective journal practice in helping the student-teachers examine the episodes of their teaching, find the pattern of the problems, and decide what to do to cope with the problems. By so doing the student-teachers’ skills in managing classroom get improved. The proposition for pedagogical practices is for teachers and/or syllabus designers to put emphasis on reflective practice in as many courses as possible. Accordingly, many more aspects or problems in teaching and learning can be found or improved.

References


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