University mentors' views on reflective practice in microteaching: building trust and genuine feedback

Paulus Kuswandono[a]

[a] Sanata Dharma University, English Education Study Program, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Published online: 13 Aug 2014.

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University mentors' views on reflective practice in microteaching: building trust and genuine feedback

Paulus Kuswandono*

Sanata Dharma University, English Education Study Program, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Reflective practice is claimed by many teacher education scholars to have benefited pre-service teachers (PSTs) in their professional learning to become teachers. One of the cited advantages is the affective nature of reflection which delves into the emotional feeling of one's personal experiences. However, emotional feeling is often influenced by the prevailing culture and history which inevitably affect the ways in which PSTs view and enact reflection. Using a focus group discussion to elicit the views of six university mentors in Indonesia, this study seeks to investigate their experiences in guiding PSTs' reflective practice which is integrated in microteaching practice. The findings reveal that some problematic implementation of reflective practice relates with PSTs' prevailing cultural practice, namely the tension of harmony in a collectivist society. This brings forward the issue of superficial reflection, a level of trust and genuine feedback from peers. This study takes a position that reflective practice cannot be effectively implemented unless the imbedded values of collectivist culture are revisited and educated together with the values of reflective practice.

Keywords: reflective practice; microteaching; pre-service teachers (PSTs); culture

Introduction

Teaching is undeniably a complex process which involves awareness of the emotional psychology of young people, including social, political, and cultural aspects which mediate the learning. To help PSTs understand the multifaceted problems in teaching, therefore, education scholars, such as Dewey (1916) and Schön (1983, 1987) suggest reflection or reflective practice whereby PSTs are guided to evaluate their teaching and clarify their thoughts and actions. The case of encouraging open-mindedness in learning as suggested by Dewey (1916) also acknowledges the fact that many PSTs enter teacher education with numerous variations of beliefs, attitudes, skills, and passions which may not be supportive of reflection happening (cf. Merseth, Sommer, & Dickstein, 2008). These issues need to be addressed along with the implementation of reflective practice.

Following the values of reflective practice in teacher education, educational practitioners have undertaken studies investigating the impacts of reflective practice in microteaching, particularly, in western countries (e.g., Amobi, 2005; Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2011; Fernández, 2005; I'Anson, Rodrigues, & Wilson, 2003). These authors, for example, claim that the benefit of this approach is the feedback and the

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*Email: kuspbi@gmail.com

dialogue provided by critical observers and other peers for the *praktikans*[1] in micro-teaching practice which can engender further reflection. Microteaching itself is claimed to help PSTs understand the complexity of teaching learned gradually through segregated skills (Allen & Eve, 1968). However, since the concept of micro-teaching practice is often limited to only 'provide for more focused practice than real teaching' (Richards & Crookes, 1988, p. 17), this often becomes too mechanical and prescriptive.

The underlying argument of this study is based on the various claims that reflec-tive practice in microteaching is an essential support for PSTs to better connect the theory and practice of teaching and evaluate their professional learning. However, such claims can sometimes oversimplify the idiosyncratic and changing situation of classroom teaching when reflective practice is situated within a particular culture (cf. Minnis, 1999). For example, since emotion is constructed and rooted within cultures (Zembylas, 2004), asking some PSTs in Southeast Asia, such as in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, to deeply engage their emotion through reflection can be quite challenging due to some prevailing cultural attitudes (cf. Dardjowidjojo, 2001; Minnis, 1999). One reason for this relates to cultural norms in Indonesia which implicitly regulate the extent to which a person can be open about his/her feeling with others.

Following the previous studies of reflective practice in microteaching as men-tioned above, this study seeks to explore the challenges of reflective practice imple-mentation in Indonesian context when it is utilised as a means to understand the professional development of pre-service English teachers in a microteaching subject called 'Practice Teaching 1' (which is subsequently referred to as PT1). This study is carried out under the bigger research scheme which investigated the implementa-tion of reflective practice in Guru University, Indonesia. While the focus of this lar-ger study is on PSTs' reflections on their professional identity and professional learning in becoming a teacher, this paper will not discuss the implementation of reflective practice from their perspectives (this is to be published in a separated jour-nal article). Rather, this paper specifically examines the responses of the university teachers who implemented the reflective practice in Microteaching classes.

Reflective practice in teacher education

Although it is difficult to pin down the definition and the operationalisation of reflective practice for PSTs (Collin, Karsenti, & Komis, 2012; Jay & Johnson, 2002), the significance of reflective practice in teacher education is widely accepted. For example, Russell (2005) has argued that reflection in teacher education is funda-mental because it constitutes an 'element of professional preparation' (p. 199) where PSTs can relate to and make sense of theories in the university courses during their classroom teaching (Joseph & Heading, 2010). Thus, most proponents of reflective practice suggest that PSTs learn the skills of, and knowledge about, reflection to evaluate, reconfirm, and adjust their teaching practices, as well as negotiating new meanings they encounter during the practice. The other reason regularly put forward by those who advocate reflective practice relates with the PSTs' identity develop-ment of becoming a teacher. Engaging in reflective practice is considered to be essential for PSTs in order that they can continue shaping their professional development during the education program and after they graduate. Joseph and Heading (2010) and Russell (2005) describe reflection as a key quality, not just for

professional preparation, but also for shaping professional development and identity throughout one's professional life. In this regard, they see self-reflection in particular as important in teacher education, especially when PSTs confront, as they invariably do, new situations and unfamiliar experiences. In order to make sense of and negotiate new meanings in these new situations, many writers advocate reflection that is enacted deeply and thoroughly (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Since reflection to a great extent can represent a deconstruction of beliefs and changes of teaching and learning styles which may have already been long established (Palmer, 2003), reflection may entail an emotionally painful process to realise oneself as having some weak points. This idea is congruent with Graham and Phelps' (2003) perspectives, who remind readers that reflection has usually been understood as involving an internal and personal process. Thus, they point out, PSTs may find it uncomfortable to reflect on their emotional feelings, particularly when their beliefs are challenged by confronting experiences (Walkington, 2005). This view is congruent with the idea of Graham and Phelps (2003):

> [We] think that some people might resist a reflective approach as they do not want to look too deeply at their emotions as they might not like what they find – they may find their actions were not as 'perfect' as they would like to believe themselves to be…and are resistant to change. (p. 9)

Thus, it is clear that over time, reflection can become associated with uncomfortable feeling in the minds of PSTs which can cause their reflections to become superficial. This implies that although PSTs may intellectually appreciate the benefits of reflection, they may have to apply themselves to work 'harder' when they come to engage in honest reflection.

Clearly, there is much literature which suggests that reflective practice is an 'instrument' or 'tool' that helps PSTs learn to become teachers. Nonetheless, those suggestions should be treated with caution, not only because the concept of reflective practice is still highly contested (and therefore it cannot be seen as a single tool), but also because its implementation has proven to be particularly problematic in Indonesia as will be discussed in this study. Associated with this is the concern with the way such talk of tools or instruments ignores the issue of cultural differences (cf. Boud & Walker, 1998; Brookfield, 1995). As Hickson (2011) points out: 'reflective practice is an activity that is Western-oriented and has no cultural translation' (p. 832). Therefore, several studies on reflective practice in education (e.g., Minnis, 1999) have demonstrated that reflection cannot be simply implemented without looking into the social and cultural contexts. These areas are the scopes of discussion from the perspectives of the teacher educators.

Research settings: practicum learning

The data of the study is based on the responses of teacher educators at Guru University (pseudonym) in Indonesia who teach an approach known as microteaching practice. In this study, the microteaching practice is known as a unit course called *Practice Teaching 1* (PT1). PT1 is one component of the campus-based teaching and learning in the English Education Study Program curriculum (EESP) for pre-service English-language teachers enrolled at Guru University. The PT1 course is mandatory and 'central' to the students' learning and development as PSTs, weighted as two credits with four contact hours weekly and 14 meetings in the

course of a single semester, with around 23 students in each class. This unit course serves as the threshold through which PSTs gain entry to the course of school-based practicum.

My investigation engages with data generated from a focus group discussion (FGD) with the six lecturers of PT1, carried out in the English Education Study Program of Guru University which lasted for 1.5 hours. The names (pseudonyms) and details of the lecturers who took part in this focus group discussion can be seen in Appendix 2. For this FGD, a list of guiding questions that focused on the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of PT1 was sent to all participating lecturers one week before the FGD (see Appendix 3). Although overall, the questions cover the whole evaluation of microteaching, the discussion in this paper is outlined within two major themes, namely reflective practice implementation in PT1 class and peers' feedback in PT1 class. These themes are demarcated and used as a framework for analysing the lecturers' responses on their educational experiences of teaching PT1.

Reflective practice implementation in PT1 class

This section explores how reflection is and might be integrated into all PT1 teaching and learning. In the study program, reflection activities are to help PSTs form a habit of learning by examining their thoughts and behaviour, so that they can still practice it in the future when they teach in schools. In this PT1 course, reflective practice is implemented as an assessment part or assignments which contribute to PSTs' final grade. In this part of the assessment, all PSTs are assigned to write one individual reflection based on some guided questions and submit it to the lecturers every week. The guided questions include some questions as follows:

(1) What was the most important thing you learned during the class?
(2) What was something you already knew or had learned but it was reinforced?
(3) Write down questions or queries you have concerning the topic(s).
(4) What worked well for you in class?
(5) What did not work well for you in class?

Early in the first meeting of this course, the role of the lecturers is to explain these guided questions and the aim of reflection for PSTs' professional development and learning. In addition, after PSTs' individual reflections are read and commented on by the lecturers, their reflections are subsequently shared and verbally discussed in group reflections in the subsequent Microteaching class. The role of the lecturers in providing comments on PSTs' reflections and group reflection is central, since this is the crucial time to highlight PSTs' understanding on the elements of professional experiences which can improve their teaching practice. Details of how quality reflections are determined and differing opinions from the lecturers as to how they evaluate PSTs' reflections are presented in the following section.

All lecturers of PT1 agreed that, as exemplified by the comment from Caroline, the main aim of reflection is to promote learning and this helps the PSTs better understand what being a teacher is like. Some lecturers also explain that PSTs' reflections are essential to stimulate discussion on their professional experiences in PT1 class. Besides the aim of reflection, the lecturer participants also narrate important views concerning the ways reflection is perceived by PSTs, which accounts for

the depth of reflection, as well as how reflection is undertaken in the unit course. This explains how individual and group reflections are carried out. These two aspects are analysed in the sections below.

'I fully understand if PSTs' reflections are superficial': quality of individual reflection

The lecturer participants expressed during FGD that reflection is an integral part of PT1 which serves as an important dimension of the learning journey of a PST to becoming a teacher. They are all concerned with the two issues: the first one relates to the superficial level of PSTs' individual reflection, and the second one is the opportunity to deepen the reflection through group reflection which to some extent implies the lecturers' responses in the light of the pervasive cultural practices of the PSTs.

Most lecturers agreed that the potential for written reflection to be a valuable or helpful experience is directly related to the level of PSTs' willingness and seriousness in thinking again about their experiences. The PT1 lecturers voiced concern with reflection being perceived by most PSTs as another form of assignment or an imposed learning requirement that they must complete (e.g., in order to officially remain listed as the student in the PT1 class) rather than seeing it as an opportunity for their learning and professional development.

Cynthia and Patrick admitted that from 22 PSTs in their class, they only saw a few of them 'taking their written reflections seriously'; while for the rest, reflection is just viewed as an assignment. Therefore, according to Fiona, 'the content of the reflection is very minimal' as evidenced by the minimal amount that they actually wrote. Fiona related the minimal content of reflection with the absence of reflections on their learning based on what happened in the class:

> I observed that there were really some good qualities of teaching from [previous] three *praktikans*. However, I found that there is no written reflection which refers to these good examples from other PSTs. I understand that those who are serious [in writing reflections] are those who are completely aware that their reflections are contributing to their final mark. (Fiona)

The lecturers admitted that the aim of marking the reflections is to induce PSTs' motivation to produce better reflections. It was not surprising that the discussion in the lecturers' focus group came around to the issue of how to give marks for this aspect. It emerged that there are actually two types of grading which the lecturers use. The first type is only checking whether or not PSTs have written the reflection and submitted this to the lecturer. This form of assessment only checks that the requirement to write the reflection has been fulfilled; it does not assess the quality of the reflective writing. Meanwhile, the second type is focusing on the quality of the PSTs' written reflection, as Nancy explained, 'I will give a special mark if PSTs can describe what they have learnt in the class'. The quality of the reflective writing is determined from the content, whether or not it is simply recording or retelling an event or describing what they have learnt. Nevertheless, it cannot be withdrawn from the lecturers' responses why there is no clear rubric or framework provided for the lecturers to determine quality reflections in PT1 course.

A different perspective on the nature of the PSTs' reflection was offered by Cynthia, who reported that in her experience PSTs tend to proceed in a form of

step-by-step levels of reflection. For Cynthia, if her students' reflection is not deep, it is still completely all right:

> For me, reflection assumes stages. The first stage might be only narrating stories. In the next stage, probably one could come up to an analysis [of the stories] and begins to synthesise what they have been doing. I personally see at this stage that reflection is an obligation or a requirement. I fully understand if PSTs' reflections are superficial. It may be because they are not used to it. However, one day, they can extend themselves to the next stages. (Cynthia)

Cynthia believed that reflection can be seen firstly as one of the rituals that one has to develop in becoming a teacher, thus she believes that introducing reflection as an obligation is reasonable. Cynthia said she could accept if at the outset PSTs' reflection involved just cognitive aspects. Nevertheless, the PSTs' seemingly superficial levels of reflection may corroborate with the time factor that many lecturer participants repeatedly spoke about. Each PT1 session must be tightly scheduled because the demand in the Faculty of Education for the PT1 classroom (laboratory) is very high. Guiding PSTs on how to reflect, or commenting on their reflections, tends to take up a great deal of time in any session. Fiona admitted that guiding how reflection should be done is important and ideal, 'but we have no time if we discuss this for too long'. She felt obliged to comply with schedules because if she ran late, this negatively affected other classes which would be using the classroom.

As explained above, the value of reflection among most PSTs appears to be reduced when it is seen as a mere assignment. Being externally driven in the form of assignments for assessments, the reflective practice which PSTs wrote is characterised by the limited amount of what they write or by the superficiality of their reflection on various experiences. The superficiality of reflection is evident when PSTs simply retell their experiences rather than seeking the meaningfulness of their teaching experiences. Nevertheless, it would seem that some of the lecturers think of the reflection that PSTs undertake as an obligation or a task that is required as an assessment. When they hold these views, and present the reflection tasks in particular ways, it should be no surprise that many PSTs do not take seriously the written reflection as a component of their teacher education studies. On the other hand, it is also worthwhile to consider Cynthia's view that reflections consist of stages where initially PSTs view reflection as narrating events. The next step, as she believes, is making meaning of the events.

The lecturers' views of mandating reflection in PT1 course may be influenced to some extent by the prevailing cultural practices that have long existed in Indonesian society. There is a famous old saying in original Javanese culture (where this study was undertaken), '*witing tresno jalaran soko kulino*' which means a love of someone or something can possibly grow as a result of routine conditioning. This proverb often becomes the rationale of introducing new things or values in Javanese society which are considered beneficial for other people, sometimes by making it compulsory. This is ostensibly congruent with the belief of one lecture-participant (Cynthia) that it is acceptable to view reflection initially as an obligation because the intention is, above all, for the conditioning. Afterwards, she felt PSTs could learn how to analyse or synthesise their reflection, particularly later when they became teachers.

The introduction of PSTs to reflection by a form of conditioning can be seen in the ways reflection is integrated as a compulsory part of assessment. This is consistent with Hobbs' (2007) observation, from her study of TESOL teacher education in

the UK, that many teacher educators now include reflective practice as an integral and assessable part in their courses. The lecturers in Guru University might have expected that students would be more motivated to work hard, although it is externally driven, if their reflections are graded, as Fiona said, 'those who are serious are those who are completely aware that their reflections are contributing to their final mark'. Unlike Fiona's experience, though, Cynthia reported that regardless of PSTs' understanding that their reflections would affect their marks, not all of PSTs 'take their written reflections seriously'. Hobbs (2007) also doubts whether these kinds of reflective practice are likely to encourage authentic reflection in PSTs. Hobbs refers to this phenomenon as PSTs' tendency for a 'strategic response' by making an impression that their reflection is of a 'high quality' (see also, Schoffner, 2008). As PSTs may be aware that their reflection would be read by their lecturers whom they often view as an 'assessor' rather than 'facilitator' (cf. Calderhead & Gates, 1993), it is not surprising that PSTs may 'perform their reflection' in the hope of receiving better marks or responses which may benefit the evaluation. However, such a 'strategic' response compromises the authenticity of thoughts which is actually the basis of and sought after in reflection. This cultural practice of 'performing' reflection does not support the implementation of meaningful reflective practice because PSTs need to bring to the fore their experiences of hesitation, perplexity, uncertainties, and even dissatisfaction into the reflection (Boud & Walker, 1998; Dewey, 1933). As shown in the range of studies as referenced above, this cultural practice of 'performing reflection' is not peculiar to Indonesia.

Apart from viewing reflection as an obligation which results in superficial reflection, PSTs' collectivist cultural practice that is sometimes associated with Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, also contributes to this tendency. Ariyanto, Hornsey, and Gallois (2006) explain that 'people in collectivist cultures are warned against drawing attention to themselves in a way that might disrupt the harmony of the group' (p. 97). This often implies superficiality and formality in various social traditions. For example, when it is contextualised in PSTs' individual reflection, this could mean they are enacting their individual reflection minimally, viewing it as yet another assignment that has to be formally completed, or simply emulating the thoughts and actions of other PSTs. In other words, Indonesian PSTs could be worried about generating deep and critical reflection which is not common to other people's knowledge, which would mean risking themselves to appear 'stands out' and being distinct from other commonalities. Therefore, rather than investing serious effort in articulating their genuine reflection, they may prefer to write reflective comments which appear 'normal' in the eyes of other peers. PSTs within a collectivist culture may believe that things which are not common are contrary to acceptable norms and thus unacceptable. Realising that some PSTs' reflections are superficial, the lecturers used group or collaborative reflection to help PSTs look more deeply into their professional learning as critically evaluated in the section below.

Group reflection in collectivist culture

The lecturers of PT1 reported that they undertake two ways of reflection. Firstly, they expect PSTs to reflect individually (as previously analysed) and this is followed by a reflection in groups. Caroline, for example, believed that PSTs should make their own reflection first and share this in groups later:

> I read all reflective journals and I make a note to comment on some reflective journals in front of the class to prompt further discussion. Next in [my] class, PSTs read other reflective journals in small groups and their own reflective journals with my comments which they submitted previously to me. (Caroline)

Caroline highlighted that the group reflection involved the exchange of views on others' teaching performance and provided feedback reciprocally based on individual reflection. Furthermore, her students could also review the other written reflections from their own weekly reflective journals. In this way, their own individual reflections were intended to trigger further reflection on the part of their peers.

The lecturers appear to highly value this group or collaborative reflection because they believe PSTs can learn more through different voices, both from their peers and from the lecturer. If viewed from socio-cultural theory, collaborative reflection is a means of communication 'through which an object of reflection is constructed and expanded by the participants'(Ottesen, 2007, p. 31). The presence of dialogue in group reflection is the main factor which can shape and construct more meaningful understanding in PSTs' experiences because PSTs can perceive their experiences from different viewpoints through 'multiple mirrors' (Pope, 1999, p. 180). In the literature, and to some extent amongst the lecturers, this dialogic reflection is believed to improve PSTs' critical thinking (cf. Fazio, 2009; Sweet, 2010). Lecturers' predisposition to value collaborative reflection as an extension of PSTs' individual reflection is arguably helpful in developing a good practice of reflection. However, this does not mean that individual reflection is less valuable than group reflection in a collectivist culture. The role of individual reflection contributes meaningfully to the ways in which PSTs make meaning their professional learning in a collectivist society, how they should think and behave according to the norms, i.e., professional norms of being a teacher. The combination of individual and collaborative reflection in Guru University seems to be strategic since, if this collectivist culture is as powerful as it is often assumed to be, then it guides the tendency of PSTs to attend to the wellbeing and interests of the group rather than their own (Ariyanto et al., 2006; G. Hofstede, 2004; Noel, 2008). But it is worth considering that such collaborative reflection, which is arguably enhanced in collectivist culture, seems evident also across other cultures. For example, a number of researchers find that reflection through collaborative group discussion can facilitate professional learning (e.g., Fazio, 2009; Ottesen, 2007; Schoffner, 2008).

However, just as a collectivist culture can result in superficial individual reflection, it also influences collaborative reflection in the same manner since the act of reflection can potentially engender uncomfortable feeling for PSTs (cf. Graham & Phelps, 2003). In this case, PSTs may find it uncomfortable to voice their critical thoughts and feelings because they are not used to articulating aloud their own personal opinions due to cultural norms. According to Minnis (1999), some shared values within Southeast Asian countries are characterised by 'equilibrium' and 'communitarianism' (p. 4), which views community or the collective as a priority over the individual. Therefore, some people prefer consultation, and even indecision, rather than provoking conflict, debate, or legal action. This last measure is avoided as far as possible because the value of 'harmony' is more prominent than facing the conflict (cf. Ariyanto et al., 2006; Noel, 2008). Cases of discomfort are most evident when peer observers provide valuable feedback for the *praktikans* during collaborative reflection as analysed in the following section.

'Being an observer is problematic': peer feedback in PT1 class

The discussion of peer feedback begins with the assumption that the provision of feedback is a fundamental part of the learning process, as the *praktikans* are assisted to see themselves from others' perspectives and become more valuable when they focus on this feedback when reflecting on their teaching experiences (cf. Subramaniam, 2006). The process of feedback provision is also important for the peers themselves because this is a crucial opportunity to help them make sense of the teaching theories they previously learnt. Peer observers can mull over the teaching skills employed by the *praktikans* and can reflect on their own skills, thereby building up their teaching competences (Mergler & Tangen, 2010; Schön, 1987). During the peer feedback, therefore, there is a mutual reflective process in that both the *praktikans* and the *observers* look into the principles of teaching and make sense of the practice which is just carried out. As a follow-up, the feedback for the observers and the responses from the *praktikans* can serve as valuable points for their individual written reflections, for both the observers and the *praktikans*.

The *praktikans* receive feedback in the form of an evaluative score from peers through peer observation. The observation sheets (a pro forma with qualitative feedback or just a checklist) are provided to the PSTs who will not be teaching in that lesson at the start of a PT1 lesson. Through this, PSTs are encouraged to learn how to teach both by observing their peers' teaching and by identifying the elements of that teaching as specified in the observation sheet (see Appendix 1 as an example). However, during the interview, many lecturers revealed that peer observation and assessment cannot be implemented properly as there are social relationship and cultural issues among PSTs. Therefore, the *praktikans* prefer to have lecturers' feedback rather than that of their peers.

Firstly, some PSTs have told their lecturer that they feel uncomfortable giving feedback to some *praktikans*. As Fiona says, this problem is particularly difficult when they are required to give a written evaluation (on one of the observation sheets) to their friend:

> Initially, peer observation may have positive influence to their teaching practice. However, after I read some of their reflections, they expressed that being an observer is problematic. They could not give genuine feedback to their friends' who practiced teaching. Once, it happened that some observers openly and honestly gave feedback about some *praktikans'* weaknesses. For the *praktikans* who are open-minded, they can accept the feedback; however, for those who are not, they become defensive. (Fiona)

Fiona tends to feel that *praktikans* need to be more open-minded and willing to learn from others rather than confronting the feedback provider defensively. She regretted the fact that some *praktikans* may have wrongly perceived the value of open feedback.

The potential for providing just polite feedback is heightened if the observation sheet is identified with the name of the observer. It is evident from the type of vague feedback given to the *praktikans*, as expressed by Patrick, 'when the observer's name is written on the observation paper, I can read obviously on top of the paper: "Good", "well done" [but insincerely]'. According to Cynthia, anonymity can enhance authentic feedback, although it presents another problem. She reasoned that identifying the name of the observer is important as it constitutes responsibility of voicing a particular feedback:

> Identifying the peer evaluator's name on the observation sheet is a form of responsibility. It means that what they say should be accountable. If they perceive the teaching is inferior in quality, they must be able to point out which area needs improvement. This also tests the responsibility of the observer. Well, all ways [anonymous or not] have positive and negative sides. (Cynthia)

Peers' vague feedback to the *praktikans* clearly emerged as a central issue during the FGD. The lecturers of PT1 classes were aware that such a situation arose because PSTs did not want to have personal tensions with their classmates; they were aware that by providing feedback which is too critical, the *praktikans* who were being observed might lose face. The evidence of such vague feedback is frequently reflected in their comments after their peers' teaching practice by mechanically complimenting on the observation paper (e.g., 'well done'). Such comments in the context of providing constructive feedback often denies what the observers actually intended to communicate with the *praktikans*. The lecturer-participants reported that some PSTs may experience that providing feedback is disconcerting and threatening, not only to the *praktikans* being observed, but also to the peers. The *praktikans* may see that the observers are untrustworthy for some reason, viewed from their daily behaviour or academic achievement.

On the other hand, the 'culture' assumption of PSTs may also influence the way in which they provide thoughtful (or not so thoughtful) feedback. Feedback provision in this study apparently is influenced by two cultural factors, namely collectivist-oriented learning and the teacher's charisma with his/her students, as Dardjowidjojo (2001) calls it '*manut lan miturut*' (p. 314) which means obedience.

These two cultural phenomena are common in microteaching classes in Guru University as evidence of the *ewuh pekewuh* cultural attitude, which means having an uncomfortable feeling in telling the truth because this can potentially make others feel hurt or offended (Dardjowidjojo, 2001; Suseno, 1997). This wisdom is corroborated by the other Javanese wisdom, *mikul dhuwur mendhem jero* which means carrying others' good deeds high and burying others' bad deeds deep (Sarsito, 2006, p. 451). Groomed in such a culture, PSTs are eventually accustomed to speaking out about only good qualities in others and they may refuse to talk about other things that are not so positive. Minnis (1999) has identified this phenomenon in his research on Malay-Islamic values in Brunei Darussalam (which shares cultural similarities to Indonesia), and calls it an 'unwillingness to confront issues openly' (p. 180). This, he believes, is the result of the low-level individualism that could inhibit PSTs from critically reflecting on their teaching performance. And yet this unwillingness to voice different arguments in teacher preparation according to US-based Feiman-Nemser (2001) reflects 'a culture of politeness and consensus' (p. 1021) in countries across the whole world; such a culture places the desire for harmony as a priority, but which engenders 'additional barriers for effective mentoring' (p. 1033).

Beyond these cultural issues, however, the problem becomes more complicated when peer observers need to provide feedback in the form of an evaluative score for each indicator. Meanwhile, evidence from other studies outside of Indonesia suggest that peer observation is more effective when it is a non-evaluative process (cf. Goker, 2006; Skinner & Welch, 1996). It seems that peers observers feel uncomfortable providing such an assessment due to their equal and collegial position. Their experiences of discomfort may be congruent with those reported on by Skinner and Welch (1996) who argue that peer observation, or as they term 'peer coaching', is

supposed to be non-evaluative because 'evaluative coaching destroys the collegial collaboration that is the heart of the process' (p. 154). Furthermore, evaluative assessment may apply in a performance model where a supervisor's observation may be used to judge the *praktikans*' teaching skills. Under this model, the observation serves as a remedial function to locate some problems in teaching (Bell, 2002).

Secondly, related to the above concerns for maintaining 'harmony' among the *praktikans*, the problem also relates to PSTs' inclination to defer to the judgement of the lecturer rather than sharing responsibility for peer feedback. PSTs often distrust their peers' feedback but believe implicitly in their lecturer's feedback, as Patrick, a lecturer with 14 years' experience in university, remarked:

> PSTs believe more what their lecturers say rather than what their friends say. I think the cause is rooted in their *culture* [emphasis added]. Although what peers say is reasonable and thus valuable, the *praktikans* refuse to accept the feedback if the feedback comes from their friends, particularly from friends who are known to have such a behaviour '*yang kayak gitu*' [notorious manner]. Therefore, they focus more on 'who' says rather than 'what' is said. (Patrick)

Cynthia similarly identified that ignoring peers' feedback in favour of the lecturer's judgement occurs because peers are all novice learners in the world of teaching; therefore, they believe that no PST is knowledgeable enough to give reliable feedback. PSTs may have a perception built from their education experiences that there is a clear border line between 'experts' and 'non-experts' whereby the role of extending the knowledge of the 'non-experts' is preserved for the 'experts'(Dardjowidjojo, 2001). For this reason, Fiona further wondered whether it might be possible for PSTs to give their observation sheets directly to the lecturer, so that s/he could deliver the feedback from his or her side, rather than from the peers' side. By doing this, the feedback from the peer observers could be disguised, as well as mixed with the feedback from the lecturer. The lecturers in the focus group were aware that PSTs trust the feedback from the lecturers more than that of the peers.

The preference for lecturers' feedback over peers' feedback relates to a prevalent culture of obedience in much of Indonesia. This is certainly what Liem, Martin, Nair, Bernardo, and Prasetya (2009) believe. They investigated how Southeast Asian students tend to conform to what the teacher says, as well as to what the majority of the class say. Rarely are students willing to challenge ideas of other peers, let alone their teachers whom they consider as experts (cf. Noel, 2008). This study seems to corroborate the previously held belief that Asian students tend to, according to G. H. Hofstede (2001), maintain obedience due to a high power distance. However, sending peers' feedback to lecturers so that they can summarise it with their own can run the risk of devaluing the authenticity of PSTs' feedback and their engagement in class and can potentially shut down the potential for dialogue and trust among peers.

Conclusion

This study has described and analysed the issues of reflective practice implementation in PT1 which can both support and hinder the development of PSTs' professional learning from the lecturers' perspectives. The support comes from the awareness of the lecturers about the values of reflection in microteaching. Although some lecturers view that PSTs' individual reflection is also parts of assignment which results in superficial reflection, the collaborative reflection appears to be a good alternative to deepen their reflection by opening up more views from both the

lecturers and peers. Within a collectivist culture, for instance, the interest of the groups is prioritised over individuals. This cultural practice can be helpful for PSTs as they will likely be motivated to congregate in groups doing collaborative reflection rather than merely practicing it individually. Following the values of reflective practice, collaborative reflection with peers and the lecturers is preferable as PSTs can actively engage in the construction of meaning and can hone PSTs' understanding of their own teaching practices.

Nevertheless, collaborative reflection can also become problematic when it is associated with providing feedback to the *praktikans*. It is a problem as the lecturers strived to encourage more genuine feedback and trust from peers. Some cultural practices, i.e., collectivist culture, may have influenced the ways in which PSTs provide clear feedback which can actually contribute to meaningful reflection. For example, there is a strong tendency that feedback is given vaguely to maintain the 'harmony' of the groups. The lecturers viewed that the role of peers as observers is problematic because observers often experience a dilemma as to whether to provide clear or 'polite' feedback. Although feedback is fundamental for the professional development of the *praktikans* as a teacher, some observers fail to give clear feedback as a matter of sympathy or they are afraid that the feedback can end up in a disconcerting situation because of the *praktikans'* becoming defensive. These aspects have affected the criticality of Indonesian PSTs in providing feedback to their peers on their microteaching practice. This 'culture' assumption has resulted the limited quantity and quality of PSTs' reflection as it is argued in this paper.

It would seem that practices of providing constructive feedback in Guru University cannot overlook the reality of such powerful social and cultural attitudes. The lecturers' discussion about providing feedback during the FGD was interesting because the participants were all keen to weigh the positive and negative impacts of requiring the PSTs to provide feedback on their peers' teaching – that is to say, whether the feedback should be given solely by the lecturer on behalf of peer observers, and whether the feedback should be given through the observation sheet anonymously to maintain the criticality of the feedback. The lecturers realised that any action to enhance the openness of feedback is always complicated. None of them was able to propose a simple solution to the problem.

In short, although a collectivist culture, in some ways, may constrain some individual reflection in Guru University, this cultural factor can be, at the same time, a means to enhance the quality of PSTs' reflection through group reflection where a sense of collegiality serves the needs of the group. It can promote and foster the quality of reflection. Indeed, some PSTs expressed that communicating their problems verbally with friends or lecturers is easier and more comfortable than writing it down in a reflection paper. This seems to underline that establishing reflective dialogue between university lecturers and students is preferable to the individual mode of reflection. On the other hand, this is also an opportunity to 'counteract culturally defined demands for harmony and conformity' (Ariyanto et al., 2006, p. 101) if collaborative reflection can establish a constructive dialogue which is based on the interests and common goal of the group. This would demand clarifying (or reviving) the term of 'harmony', not just a phrase to cultivate simple peacefulness and conformity to the interest of larger groups, but also understanding that different opinions and critical comments from others are valuable to develop the true meaning of harmony. With regards to the assumed 'culture of politeness', it is equally valuable to slowly and tactfully introduce the 'democratic' concept in western societies,

which is often characterised by exchanging opinions and defending arguments, to develop PSTs' quality reflection. This understanding of 'democratic' concept can arguably help PSTs to develop their critical inquiry and responses and to voice different opinions, particularly in group reflection. This requires conscious efforts on the part of teacher educators to educate the values of critical feedback inherent in reflective practice and the concept of harmony in a collectivist culture. In so doing, PSTs are expected to build more trust on their peers so that they can provide more genuine feedback for their professional learning.

Note

1. The word 'praktikans' (originally 'praktikan' in Indonesian) is used to emphasise the practicing teachers and to differentiate them with the other PSTs as peers.

Notes on contributor

Paulus Kuswandono is a lecturer at the English Language Education Study Program, Sanata Dharma University, Indonesia. He has been teaching in the study program for 18 years. He earned a Master of Education degree in TESOL in 2001 and a Ph.D. degree in 2013, both from Monash University, Australia. His research interests include critical pedagogy, teacher professional development and identity, and the education of pre-service teachers.

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Appendix 1.   Observation Sheet (Set Induction and Closure)

OBSERVATION SHEET
SET INDUCTION AND SET CLOSURE

Name   : _____   Date: _____
Student No   : _____

No	Practice Components	Score	Comment
1	Getting Students' attention and drawing students' interest a. Teaching style enthusiasm b. Interesting media used to draw students' attention	1 2 3 4 5	
2	Motivating students a. Drawing curiosity b. Utilizing students' interests	1 2 3 4 5	
3	Giving references a. Explaining objectives b. Explaining steps of activities	1 2 3 4 5	
4	Presenting relevance a. Making apperception b. Showing clear relation between introduction and content	1 2 3 4 5	
5	Making a review a. Making a spoken summary b. Making a written summary	1 2 3 4 5	
6	Giving psychological/social encouragement a. Giving positive reinforcement b. Showing other learning sources	1 2 3 4 5	
7	Giving feedback a. Asking students to answer questions to check indicator attainment b. Giving time to students to reflect what they have learnt	1 2 3 4 5	

General Comments:

Observer /Student No: ………………/………

_____

Score	Notes
1	Two indicators do not exist
2	One indicator exists, not optimal
3	One indicator exists, optimal
4	Two indicators exist, not optimal
5	Two indicators exist, optimal

Appendix 2. A description of the lecturer participants

No	Name	Age	Sex	Years of Teaching Experience	Position (and, where appropriate, Former Position)
1	Cynthia	35 - 40	F	> 16	Chairperson of EESP
2	Nancy	30 - 35	F	> 12	Practicum Coordinator at the faculty level
3	Caroline	35 - 40	F	> 16	Practicum Coordinator at the EESP level
4	Vincentia	45 - 50	F	> 16	Vice Dean of Academic Affairs
5	Patrick	35 - 40	M	> 14	(Former Chairperson of EESP)
6	Fiona	35 - 40	F	> 14	(Former Practicum Coordinator at the study program level)

Appendix 3. Interview Questions for FGD Lecturers

Guiding Questions

1. Is reflective practices/s introduced to students through English Education Study Program curriculum?
2. Do you integrate reflective practice in "Practice Teaching 1"? If so, how do you use it?
3. In what ways are the students prepared to be reflective practitioners? (E.g. via action research, integrated in courses, portfolios, etc.)
4. How are peers involved in the communication of feedback?
5. In what ways are the pre-service teachers provided with opportunities or encouraged to engage in selfreflection during or after teaching?
6. What could be done in the future to make the students' learning more successful?
7. Are there any other problems and challenges of the campus-based practicum?