Reflection as the Homebase of Teacher Education

Andrias Tri Susanto

susanto.andrias.tri@gmail.com

Graduate School

Widya Mandala Catholic University

Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract

Reflection is widely accepted as a process to support, or even underlie, teacher education. However, the concept holds several confusions among education experts and practitioners. This article would then attempt to explain some confusing terms by reviewing relevant literature on this issue and to provide discussions on the benefits and challenges of reflection manifested in various options of reflective practicum.

Keywords: Reflection, teacher education, reflective practicum

Reflection as the Homebase of Teacher Education

In theory, Dewey's seminal work is considered as the cornerstone in attempt to grapple with the term *reflection* (see in Farrell, 2007 & 2008; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Korthagen, 2001). Reflection is introduced as the process in which "teachers become active, persistent, and carefully consider any belief in teaching" (Dewey, 1904, in Korthagen, 2001, p. 54). Reflection is supposed to promote student-teachers to become (more) aware of and engaged in teaching. Dewey (1933, in Farrell, 2008a, p. 1) further suggests "three important attributes to be reflective individuals: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness". In this regard, reflection supposedly gives a way to student teachers to critically analyse problems and find the solutions by questioning what has so far been completed as the basis of the investigation and what possible ways to improve the teaching performance coupled with the eagerness of the student-teachers to be open-minded, responsible and wholehearted in completing the process. Reflection is conceptually a manifestation of student teacher's efforts in solving practical teaching problems raised.

Schön (1987, p. 114) takes the concept further that "the ladder of reflection covers the chain of questioning, answering, advising, listening, demonstrating, observing, imitating, and criticizing while one can trigger or build on another". This is consistent with Dewey's statement (1904, in Korthagen, 2001, p. 54) that "reflection involves a *con-sequence* − a consecutive ordering − in such a way that each idea determines the next as the proper outcome while each outcome leans back on its predecessors". Practically, Schön (1987) develops the term by introducing two types of reflection, namely *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* (p. 26), and proposes the concept of *reflective practicum* (p. 157) with regard to achieving *professional artistry* (p. 22).

Reflection-in-action

Schön (1987) remarks that reflection-in-action takes place when "we can execute smooth sequences of activity, recognition, decision, and adjustment without having to think about it" (p. 26) although it closely "hinges on the experience of surprise and focuses interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action" (p. 56). It is completed "by consciously describing the present situation in the light of a tacit reference to the other" (p. 67). Additionally, Dadds (1997, in Field et al., 1997: 9) states that reflection-in-action may happen when "teachers try to apply their new professional knowledge to an immediate and urgent practical problem". In other words, reflection-in-action requires the student-teachers to tacitly overcome any (un)predictable surprises based on the reflection of previous experiences. Also, it can be understood that the experiences learned may be from personal, other colleagues' and/or teacher educators' experiences from available sources of information such as observation, literature reading, collegial sharing, or else.

Similarly, the concept of reflection-in-action can also be illustrated from the work of Argyris and Schön (1975, in Harrison & Lee, 2011, p. 204) of *double loop learning* which represents teacher's ability to "question ways of working and underlie values of perceptions that might drive the particular action during the incident". In other words, the main focus here is the value of perception expected to be immediately changing and developing in search of professional standard that one has. This happens dialectically; meaning that it is uniquely different in every person and based on one's own experiences without any limitation whether the source of the experiences is personal or from others.

This concept of reflection-in-action is comparable with Ur's (1991, p. 319) *personal reflection* which is referred to be "quite spontaneous and informal, and happens without any

conscious intention". Both are similar, but not the same, one another as they require student-teachers to be unconsciously and instantaneously able to overcome surprises or problems that happen in the classrooms but one significant difference is that Schön's reflection-in-action does not limit the source of experience at the personal level only while Ur's limits it at the personal level only.

Interestingly, the concept of reflection-in-action, double loop learning, and personal reflection are linked in a way that professional development can be achieved through spontaneously employing a mental process and applying it through learning the available experiences. However the difference fundamentally lies on the source of experiences that the student-teachers may draw upon since reflection-in-action does not limit the sources of experience while personal reflection and double loop learning employ personal experience as the only source.

Reflection-on-action

Reflection-on-action refers to the "thinking back on what we have done in attempt to discover how our knowing-in-action may contribute to an unexpected outcome" (Schön, 1987, p. 26). It is "the result of the previous reflections that can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness" (Schön, 1983, p. 62). It can be understood that reflection-on-action sources are all sorts of experiences from any sources including a collection of reflection-in-actions.

In essence, Hatton and Smith (1995, p. 34) states that the similarities between reflection *in-action* and *on-action* are that the "two forms of reflection involve demanding rational and moral processes in making reasoned judgements about preferable ways to act". However, they are different in the time frames since "reflection-on-action can be referred to the reflection after

an action" (Jonas-Dwyer et. al., 2012, p. 64) while "reflection-in-action happens in an action-present circumstance" (Schön, 1987, p. 28) or "during an action is taken" (Argyris & Schön, 1975, in Harrison & Lee, 2011: 204), reflection-on-action does not have to be completed outside the classroom when the class is dismissed even it may be completed both during and after the teaching as long as it is conducted after an action is completed (Lange, 1990 & Schön, 1983). In other words, both types of reflection are conducted through acknowledging what has been learned or experienced and making future judgements manifested in a reformed way of teaching or solving certain issues in the classroom but they are different in a way that reflection-on-action is completed after an action has been taken while reflection-in-action is completed during the action is taken. This causes overlaps as it is certainly hard to define the length of time for this matter but as long as the teachers reflect upon the completed actions it is considered as reflection-on-action while it is considered to be refection-in-action if the teachers think about what to do next through inferring from what is being completed at the moment.

"Reflection-on-action is expected to lead up to questioning what had been through by asking *What is this?* and *How have I been thinking about it?* back on the teachers' own thought" (Schön, 1987, p. 28). It is "a further level of reflection which brings about more fundamental change in practice or thought by reflecting on what, how, and why" (van Manen, 1990, in Harrison & Lee, 2011, p. 204). Interestingly, this is somehow similar with the notion of *undermind* proposed by Claxton (1997, in Malderez & Wedell, 2007, p. 31) as "the mode of mind which operates on processing experience of all sorts such as memories, feelings, impressions including experiences of thinking in default mode". The concept of reflection-on-action and undermind point to a single notion that professional development can be undergone through continuous learning that occurs by evaluating what has been experienced previously and

taking decisions on what to do and not to do in the future. All in all, these understandings initiate the practical approach of reflection called *reflective practicum* (Schön, 1987) or *reflective practice* (Day, 1991; Farrell, 2007; 2008 & 2011; Harrison & Lee, 2011; Otienoh, 2011) or *reflective action* (Burton, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Reflective practicum

Reflective practicum implies that "teachers must subject their own teaching beliefs and practices to critical examination by conducting practical work such as classroom observations as part of their professional development" (Farrell, 2011, p. 265). It is argued that reflective practicum may deal with the activity of "designing beliefs which is learned by doing something" (Schön, 1987, p. 157). Reflective practicum is the body of the process coupled with reflection as the soul. Schön further added that "the student-teachers need help to learn to design and be provided interventions which tend to be coaching than teaching" (ibid.). This is interesting as the statement contrasts the concept of teaching and coaching with coaching as the more suitable approach. Personally, I would agree with that as conducting the teaching of reflection is hard to be completed without longitudinal continuous supervision from the teacher-educator so that the student-teachers be able to complete reflective practicum acceptably and accordingly. In regard to this, Farrell (2007) explains that "reflective teaching may be completed by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences" (p. 9). In practice, there is then a need to identify what possible activities to do if one wants to conduct a professional development process through reflection. There are various forms of reflective practicum suggested and some of them are *action research* (Farrell, 2007 & 2008a; Ur, 1991), *teaching journals* (Farrell, 2007, 2008a) which is also called *journal writing* (Borg, 2006 and Ur, 1991), *teacher development groups* (Farrell, 2007, 2008a) or *sharing* (Ur, 1991), *role play* (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999) or

microteaching (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Teaching artistry

Reflection is employed for "promoting the art in teaching" (Schön, 1987, p. 67). Schön (ibid.) further remarks that "practitioners, including teachers here, need to cope with different situations requiring them to use their tacit knowledge attained from experiences in achieving *professional artistry*". He adds that professional artistry could be referred to as "the kinds of competence practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice ... featured by a high-powered, esoteric variant of the more familiar sorts of competence exhibited every day in countless acts of recognition" (p. 22).

From the citation above, it is conclusive that professional artistry, or teaching artistry, is the ultimate goal of professional development. Here, I would disagree with that as teaching artistry is only half of the ultimate goal since the other half is possessed by the craft of teaching as proposed by Eisner (1983) and Lange (1990). Eisner (1983) suggests that *artistry in teaching* involves "the *craft* and *art* of teaching". The former is "repertoire and is a skill enabling teachers to perform well" while the latter is "the invention of modes of teaching practices which are not plentiful and require ingenuity involving teachers' other skills" (p. 9). Similarly, Lange (1990) also explains that "the craft of teaching is teachers' specific knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge on teaching that subject matter, and knowledge in teaching in general...and the art of teaching involves the combination of knowledge and experience in the many decisions that teachers make as they interact with learners" (p. 248).

However, the craft of teaching is not discussed further as it is not the focus of this article. The illustration in Figure 1 summarises the concept explained by Schön (1983, 1987).
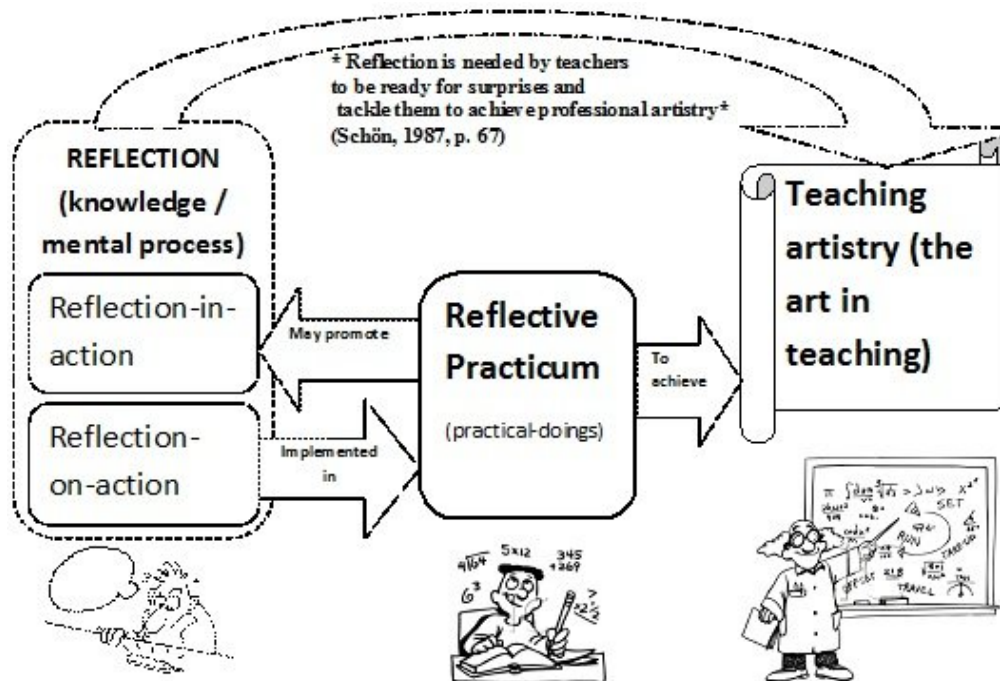
Figure 1. The Illustration of Reflection according to Schön (1983, 1987)

The Value of Reflection in Teacher Education

First, Dewey (1938, in Roberts, 1998, p. 49) suggests that "reflection contributes to personal growth because it frees us from a single view of situation restricting us in defining problems and so the resulting solutions". Hence, it is noticeable that the conception of reflection is not only from personal reflection but also from various viewpoints thus it more essentially helps student-teachers to think how to deal with surprises and problems by reflecting from others' experiences. Secondly, Roberts (1998, p. 49) adds that "its [reflection's] development in a long-term goal of teacher education may foster teacher autonomy and self determination". This supports an idea that reflection is one possible way towards teaching artistry although it does not necessarily lead to the craft of teaching in particular. Thirdly, Farrell (2007, p. 9) states that "systematic reflections support teachers to become free from making too many impulsive decisions promoting actions in a more deliberate and intentional manner". It is then suggested

that reflection sharpen the student-teachers' mental and rational state (manifested in the decisions, attitudes and behaviours) so that the decisions made be deliberately and responsibly succinct. In short, reflection is then strongly suggested to be the answer for both personal and professional development. In accordance to this, the following paragraphs represent how reflection can be beneficial for both experienced and novice language teachers.

There are many examples of successful implementation of reflection in TE worldwide conducted by experienced language teachers: such as those in the USA (Brown, 2002; Cormany et al., 2005, in Tedick, 2005; Freeman & Johnson in Tedick, 2005; Spalding & Wilson, 2002), in Taiwan (Hsu, 2008), in the Netherlands (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005), and in Australia (Swan, 1993). Additionally, there are also some reported successful attempts in promoting reflection to novice teachers. Farrell (2008b) investigated a Singaporean teacher who "reflected on his teaching methods and on the socio-historical contexts by conducting action research and class discussions" (p. 53). The teacher became "better prepared to make a smooth transition from his teacher education programme into the real world of language classroom" (p. 54). Next, Feiman-Nemser (1990) reported how apprenticeship programmes in Alaska had a good impact for novice teachers. "Student-teachers were able to analyse the cases from different vantage points and imagine a range of possible actions and their consequences" (p. 11).

Hitherto, it is understood how reflection may promote self-efficacies of thinking and learning. Reflection gives a way for teachers' previous experiences either as a teacher or student to contemplate their practices towards professional/teaching artistry. So to say, being in the same vein with Wallace (1991), I strongly agree that teachers have some sort of knowledge called *experiential knowledge* which came from the notion of reflection in the sense that "experiential knowledge allows teachers to identify what works for the class and what does not" (pp. 12-13).

Teachers may collect some points on the spots provided by the surprises happening in the classroom and put them into consideration in the future to avoid "impulsive decisions which may bring unexpected outcomes" (Farrell, 2007, p. 9). This is by nature is in the same path of reflection under a different term.

Nevertheless, a dilemma occurs regarding the viewpoint which considers reflection as the one and only thing that teachers can do to achieve teaching artistry. If reflection is then put in the highest position, TE should just be in the form of coaching, guiding, providing pre-service and in-service trainings which merely promote reflective practicum such as teaching journal writing, classroom observations, action research, etc. Here, I would argue that reflection is limited to promoting the *experiential learning* and puts aside the *received knowledge* (see Wallace, 1991) or only supports the *practice-based reasons* and *ethical/political justifications* with less support on *theory-based reasons* (Handal & Lauvås, 1987). After all, reflection only promotes *the art of teaching* and puts less consideration on *the craft of teaching* which in fact both are complementary instead of substitutionary in achieving *teaching artistry* (Eisner, 1983; Lange, 1990). Hence, I would argue that reflection is fundamentally essential for TE but it must not be the only focus in TE as there are other essential things not covered under the umbrella of reflection. Referring back to what has been said by Eisner (1983) that *artistry in teaching* involves 'the *craft* and *art* of teaching', reflection can help teachers to improve the art of teaching but it will not be sufficient for achieving teaching artistry as the craft of teaching is another thing that needs building up. That is the reason why some theorists try to limit reflection so that it be conducted by practitioners only (such as Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Moon & Lopez, 1997; Schön, 1983, 1987; Wyatt, 2010). This is supported by other research reports from different fields of study such as those in social work education (Wilson, 2013) and medical work

like nursing education (Grant, 2007; Jonas-Dwyer et al., 2012; Kuiper & Pesut, 2004; Vachon &

LeBlanc, 2011).

The Challenges of Reflection in Teacher Education

Borg (1997, in Moons & Lopez, 1997, p. 69) posits that "student teachers who come

from a traditional training environment, and whose knowledge comes from 'tips for teachers'

and 'received knowledge', are likely to experience frustration, disorientation and conflict when

confronted with a reflective approach". This suggests a challenge towards the teaching of

reflection to novice teachers. Furthermore, there are some research findings worldwide which

report that even promoting reflection to experienced teachers is not always successful like that in

Tanzania (Otienoh, 2011) due to the unclear introduction making the tasks too vague and too

philosophical to conceptualise, in Oman (A'Dhahab, 2009 & Al-Jabri, 2009) due to the lack of

understandings on the concept of and negative attitudes towards reflection, as well as in Spain

(Moon & Lopez, 1997) due to the reluctance towards the involvement in the process, and in

Malaysia (Ting, 2007) due to the inadequate teaching knowledge of the student teachers. On the

other hand, any report regarding the unsuccessful attempts of introducing reflection to novice

teachers was not found by the time this article is written. However, there are several reasons

identified from some reports suggesting why reflection is more suitable for experienced teachers

than for novice ones. Mustafa (2009, in Al-Jabri, 2009, p. 17) posits that "reflection may be less

suited to novice teachers given that they have less experience to explore or draw on". Thus, the

lack of experience is an important aspect to consider. Supporting this, Erkmen (2010, p. ii) states

that "although novice teacher beliefs are dynamic, they are reluctant to reflect on their teaching

since they were not always able to do what they believed would be effective". This suggests an

idea that the novice student-teachers' reluctance is one main factor that may fail the attempt of

introducing reflection to them. This is relevant to what is implied in the Dewey's statement that reflection could only be suitable for teachers who are "active, persistent, and carefully consider any belief in teaching" (Dewey, 1904, in Korthagen, 2001, p. 54). Furthermore, Farrell (2008b) claims that "research in general education has indicated that the professional culture of each school can present many challenges for first-years teachers thus ... these novice teachers require support from teacher education programmes and the schools where they are placed." (p. 53)

From the citation above, it is obvious that one possible factor that may promote the failure of introducing reflection to novice teachers is, in fact, the institution where they work.

In a nutshell, although reflection may be valued as "one key element in strategies to raise the quality of educational profession" (Hayes, 1997, p. 1) and "the first and most important basis for professional progress on daily classroom events" (Ur, 1991, p. 319), careful considerations should be provided since "reflection in teacher education deals with complex issues such as attitude, skills, and knowledge" (Wyatt, 2010, p. 236) and "complex interplay of contextual diverse problems" (Otienoh, 2011, p. 741). Reflection quite often, if not always, challenges the student teachers' personal state of mind mentally and emotionally if it is not introduced appropriately and accordingly. The success of planning, implementing and evaluating the concept of reflection lead to a promising land of the art of teaching which later needs to be coupled with other professional development materials that promote the craft of teaching to achieve professional/teaching artistry.

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