

# Theoretical Overview

## TEACHING: ITS NATURE AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENT TEACHERS

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### Abstract

Teacher education program naturally covers both theoretical and practical components. The theoretical component is aimed at expanding the pedagogic and professional horizons of student teachers; meanwhile, the practical component is aimed at providing student teachers with an in-depth exposure to real classroom settings. The latter – the practical component – which usually includes Micro Teaching and Teaching Practice is apparently needed as there ought to be practices to develop student teachers' competencies.

Student teachers who have carried out their Micro Teaching and Teaching Practice might have shaped their own nature of teaching. This study seeks to understand student teachers' working principles of teaching in its own terms and in ways teaching is understood by student teachers. In other words, it explores student teachers' voice – an insider's perspective by scrutinizing their perspective of teaching hence a small component of teacher cognition. The three issues on how they view themselves as a teacher, how they see their role as a teacher in the classroom and what they consider as a successful teaching might in the long run reveal student teachers' motivation for their decisions and actions – revealing somewhat implicit nature of teaching.

**Key words:** Micro Teaching, nature of teaching, student teachers, teacher cognition. Teaching Practice,

## Introduction

Not only is teacher education program theory-oriented but it is also practice-oriented (Yusuf 2006 in Dweikat (n.d)). Through theory and practice student teachers are provided with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to acquire the basic components of teacher education. Both the theoretical and practical knowledge are considered necessary.

The practice-oriented experience prevalently includes microteaching and teaching practice. Teaching practice has turned out to be a fundamental component of most teacher education programs (Quoted in Perry 1997 Lambert 1992; MacNaughton & Clyde 1990; Posner 1993; Tisher 1987). As Teaching Practice is a course in which students are given opportunities to teach real students in schools, it can be viewed as one of the most essential means of assisting student teachers to become real teachers. It is in fact believed, pointed out by Wright (2010), that real classroom experience can result in a transformative effect on student teachers' beliefs.

At the English Department of Teacher Training and Pedagogy Faculty of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya, this 4-credit program which lasts for 36 effective working days requires various activities to be performed by the students. One of the most essential activities is teaching English in real classes to apply their English teaching skills.

Student teachers who have got this particular practice-oriented experience might have shaped their own nature of teaching. This study then seeks to understand student teachers' working principles of teaching in its own terms and in ways teaching is understood by student teachers. Prior to revealing the main issue, the paper initiates the brief discussion on theory of teaching, teaching cognition, and Teaching Practice.

## Theory of Teaching

Various definitions of teaching have been developed through ages. Two polarized perspectives about the goal of teaching have dominated the professional literature. On one pole is the *traditional view* promoting a strong commitment to academic learning and compliance to conservative social norms stressing the strong discipline and orderly behavior in schools. On the other pole is *humanistic view* promoting personal and social development (Cole & Chan 1987). Taking the positive values of both views, Cole and Chan (1987:2) argue, "... *effective teaching is defined as that which is in accord with established principles and which promotes student*

*learning and enhances the cognitive, personal and social development of students."*

Meanwhile, another set of polarized perspectives about teaching is alleged: the *didactic* vs. *discovery* views (Richards 1998) or Traditional model: Behaviorism vs. Experiential Model: Constructivism (Nunan 1999). On one pole is the didactic or traditional model promoting that teaching equals knowledge transmitting through teacher's clear explanation. On the other pole is discovery or experiential model promoting that students can develop knowledge themselves through active participation with minimum teacher's explanation – with a teacher as "learner among learners" (Nunan 1999:7). Derived from these two polarized view, an *interactionist* view emerges. It necessitates interaction between the students' own ideas, their empirical observations, and the curriculum content in order that well-formed ideas are obtained (Richards 1998).

It is not uncommon to describe the quality of someone's teaching by referring to the issues of technique or presentation, and content. However, there is something beyond the issues to further elucidate it. Hasset (2000:10) for instance claims that good teachers:

- have a *sense of purpose*;
- have *expectations of success* for all students;
- tolerate *ambiguity*;
- demonstrate a *willingness to adapt and change* to meet student needs;
- are *comfortable with not knowing*;
- *reflect* on their work;
- learn from a *variety of models*;
- *enjoy* their work and their students.

Thomas (2011) similarly argues there are ten traits of a great teacher. They cover being humble, being patient, being kind and showing respect, having enthusiasm for the subject matter, showing instead of telling, learning from their students, being positive, smiling, engaging students, having high expectations, and providing a warm environment and allowing students to make mistakes. Among the ten traits, only two are in fact associated with the technique or presentation, and content – the prevailing perceived term for a teacher's doing his/her job, which is to teach as opposed to educate.

## Teacher Cognition

This small study belongs to a teacher cognition research as it is concerned with understanding what teachers think, know and believe (Borg 2003; 2009). To be more precise, the primary concern of this study lies with – what student teachers think about teaching principles in the way teaching is understood by them.

Student teachers' cognitions are influenced by various factors. Borg (2003) adopting his previous idea (Borg 1997) reveals that teacher cognition is affected by four variables and that there is some sorts of interdependence among the variables of schooling, professional coursework, teacher cognition, contextual factors and classroom practice. Similarly, Wright (2010) asserts that some prominent factors influencing student teachers' cognitions include the learning experiences which teacher education program provides, together with the pedagogies that are modeled, the relationships between all participants, and the emotional conditions under which teacher education program is carried out.

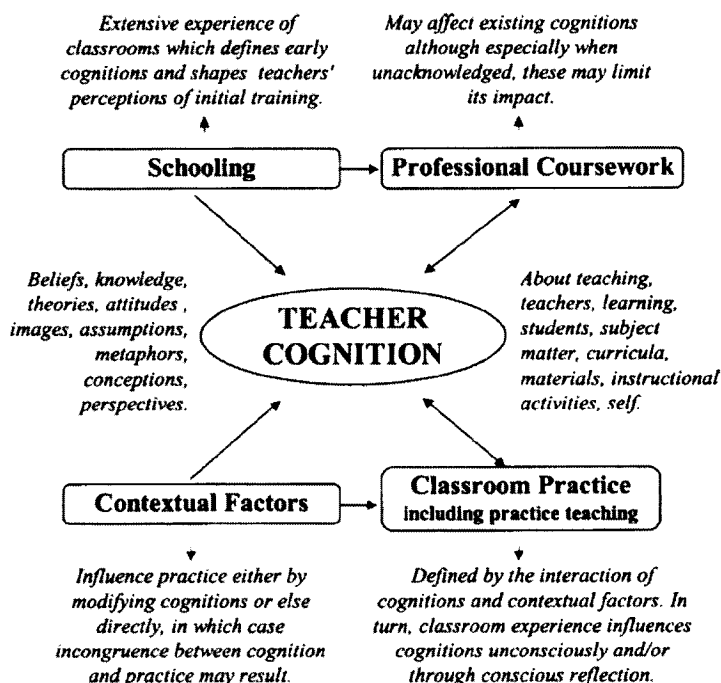


Figure I: Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Borg 1997 in Borg 2003:82)

Borg (2009:3) further elaborates such interrelationship as follows:



- teachers' cognitions can be powerfully influenced by their own experiences as learners;
- these cognitions influence what and how teachers learn during teacher education;
- they act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experience;
- they may outweigh the effects of teacher education in influencing what teachers do in the classroom;
- they can be deep-rooted and resistant to change;
- they can exert a persistent long-term influence on teachers' instructional practices;
- they are, at the same time, not always reflected in what teachers do in the classroom;
- they interact bi-directionally with experience (i.e. beliefs influence practices but practices can also lead to changes in beliefs).

## Teaching Practice

Prevalently, Teaching Practice is provided at teacher training institutions. At the English Department of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Pedagogy of Widya Mandala Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia, Teaching Practice is a 4-credit-course offered in semester 7. It is popularly named *PPL* which stands for *Program Pengalaman Lapangan*. It is a program to provide students who have passed their on-campus Micro Teaching and other required courses to have teaching experience in school field, outside campus.

Students programming Teaching Practice are registered as Teaching Practice participants. The students are placed in schools – elementary, junior high and senior high schools. At school the students are well-known as *Mahasiswa PPL* or *PPL* students but they are treated as real teachers. They are required to be practicing teachers for 36 effective working days and to perform various activities related to both administrative and non-administrative responsibilities (Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya 2002).

One of the student teachers' non-administrative responsibilities is being in real classes to apply their English teaching skills. Carrying out this teaching in real classrooms at schools, each of the student teachers is assisted

by the supervising teacher – elsewhere, the terms used are the ‘school-based’ teacher, or the ‘resident’ teacher (Perry 1997) or the ‘cooperating’ teacher (as used in Wilson 2006; Wright 2010) – and the lecturer assigned by the university.

The student teachers are required to make a Lesson Plan prior to their teaching. They consult both the supervising teacher and the lecturer assigned when preparing it. Based on the Lesson Plan, the student teachers then implement it in the classroom scheduled for their teaching evaluation which is done twice or three times. In due course, the student teachers get their scores and also some feedback to their teaching from both the supervising teacher and the lecturer.

## **The Nature of Teaching As Perceived By Student Teachers**

To obtain the data, the writer made use of a questionnaire in which three items were formulated: (1) How do you view yourself as a teacher (e.g. how good or bad you were as a teacher), (2) When do you feel you have achieved a successful teaching?, and (3) How do you see your role as a teacher in the classroom?

The three open questions above were in fact inserted in the ending part of a set of questionnaires which became the instrument of a bigger research related with student teachers’ perspective on their teaching practice (see Tamah 2012). Having been tried out, the questionnaire was distributed to 38 students who programmed Teaching Practice in the odd semester of 2011/2012 academic year at the English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya, Indonesia. However, only 32 completed questionnaires were returned. Among the returned questionnaires, 1 questionnaire was dropped (refer to Tamah 2012). The 31 questionnaires were then the ones analyzed as the source of data in this study. They were obtained from 31 student teachers who had their Teaching Practice in elementary schools (5 student teachers), junior high schools (11 student teachers) and senior high schools (15 student teachers).

### *How student teachers view themselves as a teacher*

Of 31, eleven (35.5%) student teachers perceived themselves as good teachers. Their complete comments are as follows:

1. What can I say, I am good at explaining and I have the authority that make the students obeying everything what I said.
2. I can teach/explain the material clearly but I rarely use the media or improve the way of teaching.
3. Good teacher. Good teacher tidak selalu pandai dalam pelajaran tetapi dalam memanfaatkan situasi dan kondisi lapangan dan menguasainya [translation: Good teacher is good not only at the subject matter but also at controlling the class]
4. I am good in teaching children. I love providing colorful materials and give them reward if they can do/answer the problems very well.
5. As a teacher I am pretty good enough. I do all my best when I teach.
6. For the time being, I am learning how to be a good teacher or even great teacher. Now I am quite good as a teacher but I wanna learn more and more to be the great one.
7. I think I'm good enough in being a teacher, but still, I need improvements to be better and better.
8. In my opinion, I'm good enough as a teacher because I can apply what I learned in my university especially in Micro Teaching.
9. If I may say, not bad, but not really good either and could not handle naughty student.
10. I am quite good and I guess with children, not with high school students.
11. Saya bisa mentolerir keramaian anak-anak [translation: I can tolerate the noisiness of the class].

Of 31, five (16.1%) student teachers perceived themselves as a bad teacher. Their recorded answers are noted below:

1. I think I'm not quite good in being a teacher because I am not able to handle the students when they are naughty and noisy in the class. It isn't easy to calm them down because sometimes they don't want to listen to what I am saying.
2. To be honest, I'm not that good for being a teacher. Because I have a problem when facing the crowds. It makes me nervous.

3. I think I am not really suitable to be a teacher because I can't handle students well.
4. I teach adults better than I do with children. I am not really creative, I am bad at managing time.
5. I am not a good teacher because I'm not patient enough.

Of 3I, six (19.4%) student teachers perceived themselves as both a good and bad teacher. Here are their responses:

1. I think I can manage the class well. I can attract the students' attention [good teacher]. I have difficulty to remember the students' names [bad teacher].
2. Saya bisa menghafal nama murid lebih cepat (hanya 2x meeting), bisa menjadi teman bagi murid. Saya masih belum bisa memnange kelas dengan baik, menggunakan teknik mengajar dan mengaplikasikannya di kelas dengan menyesuaikan keadaan kelas [translation: I can remember students' names very quickly in 2 meetings only, become friends to my students [good teacher]. I still cannot manage the class well, implement and adapt teaching techniques in class [bad teacher]].
3. I am good at answering students' questions and how to balance seriousness and fun. I'm actually a bit temperamental. That's what makes me a bad teacher sometimes.
4. As a teacher I'm not good enough in managing the class. Sometimes I just not ready with my materials for teaching. But I'm good enough in explaining to them.
5. I place myself as a friend who knows better and want to support them so a friend can be good and sometimes can be bad.
6. I was a patient one but I was so angry once because of a very naughty student.

Of 3I, nine (29%) student teachers had miscellaneous perceptions stated as follows:

1. I am not perfect. I still have to learn a lot to improve my teaching skill.
2. I need to learn how to deal with noisy student.
3. I still need more experience to improve my teaching.

4. I should be assertive and should give more attention to each student when I teach them because I thought that I was so patient in teaching them.
5. I'm still learning as a teacher. My big weakness is about class management. I still cannot handle my students.
6. I'm a discipline teacher. I do not like when my students are lazy or do not do the work that I gave. I always encourage my students to learn discipline and timely. On the other hand I also have some shortcomings that I am impatient teacher especially when I am educating a naughty student.
7. Most of all, I am still nervous while I was teaching.
8. I think now I am more able to understand their [students'] behavior better and knowing what kind of method should I use.
9. I think I can transfer the knowledge and skills I got from on-campus Micro Teaching in my *PPL* evaluation in real classes.

### *When student teachers feel they have achieved a successful teaching*

Two students misunderstood the second question 'When do you feel you have achieved a successful teaching?' They focused on the 'when' which they literally responded with 'When I did my second evaluation'. Two other students misunderstood it as a 'how' question which they responded with 'very happy' and 'relieved' respectively. Two others replied they never felt satisfied with their teaching. One of them, as an illustration, wrote, "Frankly, I never feel satisfied during my teaching practice." The remaining 25 student teachers' answers were then the main ones to analyze further.

Nine (36%) student teachers emphasized the student-oriented cognitive domain as the criterion of successful teaching. Their comments, among others, "*When the students understand the materials I teach*", "*When the students can do the exercises given by me and answer questions*" and "*When my students can respond whenever I have questions for them and understand what I have taught to them*" indicate that they thought the students' understanding to a lesson taught was of prime importance and hence that it was as an indication of successful teaching.

Likewise, three (12%) also emphasized the student-oriented cognitive domain of learning but added the teacher-oriented cognitive domain of teaching. More particularly, they respectively asserted: "*When I have prepared all the material well and I can deliver it clearly and the students*

*understand the lesson”, “When I can deliver the lesson well. When 85% students understand and can answer the question”, and “I feel I have achieved a successful teaching when I can apply my ideas in teaching and the students can understand”.*

One (4%) student teacher considered the long-term result of teaching as the evidence of successful teaching. He/she noted down, “When I see my students can use English in their everyday life.” It is then found that the cognitive oriented success amounts to 52%.

Ten (40%) student teachers accentuated the affective domain of learning as an indication of successful teaching. Some student teachers’ comments worth exemplifying are *“When the students wanted to listen to what I was teaching to them”, “When the students are still asking me further questions about things being discussed although the time is up already. In my view, they ask because they want to know more, not because they don’t understand”, “When students enjoy the activity. When they are eager to learn. And when they respond my teaching well”, and “When I can motivate my students to study harder and they get good mark because they love the lesson.”* These particular students realized that learning was driven by the affective domain more than the cognitive one.

Two (8%) student teachers maintained *“When my student gets high score because they really comprehend the material not because of cheating. And when they can be a polite person” and “When all the students understand the lessons and they behave well in my class”* respectively.

### *How student teachers see their role as a teacher in the classroom*

With regard to the third question “How do you see your role as a teacher in the classroom?”, it is found that only 21 answers can be analyzed. The other 11 answers are excluded. One student teacher left it unanswered; the other 10 student teachers misunderstood it – the unexpected answer ‘average’ being a typical one.

Of 21, four (19.1%) student teachers alleged that their role was ‘a friend’; three (14.3%) ‘a friend and a parent’. Three others (14.3%) claimed they became ‘a facilitator’; three others (14.3%) ‘a moderator’. Two (9.5%) student teachers simply maintained the role of ‘a model’. One (4.8%) pointed out that his/her role was ‘a helper’ to assist students to gain knowledge.

Responding to the respective question, one (4.8%) student teacher wrote, “A person who needs to make the students feel fun in the process of

‘transferring’ the knowledge”. One (4.8%) noted, “Well, I see that I am the captain of the class and I have to responsible with the class”.

Two (9.5%) responded quite elaborately. *“I become the source/center of the students because they will trust and listen to all the explanations of my teaching. In addition I become their guide in order to calm them down and control their bad behaviors”* and *“As someone who manages the students, makes them behave nicely, and someone who transfers essential knowledge”* are their detailed responses.

Surprisingly, a quite different perspective is obtained from one (4.8%) student teacher. His/her elaborate reply *“My role as teacher is to teach, to help my students who have difficulties in learning. In addition, my role is also instructive in terms of morale, so the child has a good moral education”* indicates the additional point argued as the role of a teacher: a morale keeper.

## Discussion

The three classifications of the answers indicating how student teachers view themselves as a teacher include the good, the bad, and the good and bad teachers. The overall responses depicted above, however, reveal that the traditional view of teaching principles has by and large shaped student teachers’ behavior. Most student teachers feel unable to give up the center stage of continuous control over each and every classroom activity. Some responses worth reciting are: *“... I am good at explaining and I have the authority that make the students obeying everything what I said”* (from the ‘good teacher’), *“I think I’m not quite good in being a teacher because I am not able to handle the students when they are naughty and noisy in the class. It isn’t easy to calm them down because sometimes they don’t want to listen to what I am saying”* (from the ‘bad teacher’), *“I think I can manage the class well. I can attract the students’ attention* (from the ‘good and bad’ teacher).

This particular finding might be due to the brief span of teaching experienced by the student teachers. It might also be due to the evaluation-oriented teaching where they are scored to see how well the theoretical knowledge is implemented. They are still so ‘fresh’ having limited teaching experience that they are very much absorbed to the idea of how to teach methodically.

It is interesting to find that some student teachers have indicated critical reflection as some responses obtained include words showing the necessity to learn more. Out of 9, 5 (55.6%) responses from the student teachers having ‘miscellaneous perceptions’. They stated, *“... I still have to*

*learn a lot to improve my teaching skill", "I need to learn how to deal with noisy student", "I still need more experience to improve my teaching, "I should be assertive and should give more attention to each student when I teach them because I thought that I was so patient in teaching them", and "I'm still learning ..."*

Even two student teachers having perceived themselves as good teachers insisted the necessity to learn more. Here are the assertions they kept: *"For the time being, I am learning how to be a good teacher or even great teacher. Now I am quite good as a teacher but I wanna learn more and more to be the great one", and "I think I'm good enough in being a teacher, but still, I need improvements to be better and better".*

The finding of 52% for cognitive oriented success vs. 48% for affective oriented success seems to support – though merely very slightly – the dominance of traditional view perceived. Still, an interesting thing is depicted. Though the traditional view of teaching principles has primarily shaped student teachers' behavior, the study finds that most student teachers felt that they were more of 'a friend' to their students.

Overall, the student teachers have had language teaching experience that they recall with pleasure or distaste, or with their own personal satisfactions or dissatisfaction – shaping their behavior in real classroom settings, hence shaping some of teaching concepts. With regard to teacher cognition, this small study has indicated to a certain extent what student teachers think about teachers, what they think about the role of a teacher and what they think about a successful teaching.

## Conclusion

This paper has briefly presented the theory of teaching and teaching practice. The paper eventually depicts the student teachers' responses to the three items in the questionnaire which is intended to obtain some insights of teaching.

This paper reveals that Teaching Practice which is provided for student teachers to gain first-hand experience of working with students in real classroom settings and to provide numerous opportunities for developing professional understanding and teaching skills has its own merit in the light of student teachers' specialized knowledge and understanding of effective teaching practices. The responses having been analyzed indicate the nature of teaching in student teachers' own terms and in ways teaching is understood by student teachers. Fundamentally, the paper indicates the dominance of



traditional view perceived by student teachers – though only slightly above 50% – as they feel they should occupy the center stage of continuous control over each and every classroom activity.

The study reported in this paper suggests that student teachers – answering the questions posed in the questionnaire – are engaged in reflective thinking (Farrell, 2004 uses the term RPA standing for Reflective Practice in Action) as they are encouraged to develop important skills for their profession, such as reflecting on teaching experiences that enhances learning, understanding instructional issues, and supervising their own professional development. To maximize this critical analysis on their teaching practice, student teachers should be encouraged to take similar reflective stand after each teaching evaluation they carry out – not only after the teaching practice is over – in order to gain awareness about the changes and developments they themselves undergo. This then implies the need to have another research to scrutinize how student teachers' teaching develops through their 'short life' in real classrooms in schools.

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