

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Sri Widayati

Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Negeri Malang, Jl. Surabaya 6 Malang, e-mail: engdep@indo.net.id

**Abstract:** This article argues that teachers as professionals should be aware of the importance of professional development since professional development is a key tool that keeps teachers abreast of current issues in education, helps them implement innovation, and refines their practice. Reflective practice, one of which is compiling teaching portfolio, could be the basis for professional development. By assembling the teaching portfolio teachers can reflect on their past and plan for their future action. Teaching portfolio could be assembled for the purpose of promotion or self assessment.

**Keywords:** professional development, reflective practice, teaching portfolio.

Teacher Certification and portfolio could be the words of the hottest issue in the current daily conversations among teachers in Indonesia. That is quite true because in order to be entitled certified teachers, they have to send their professional portfolios to be assessed by authorized assessors.

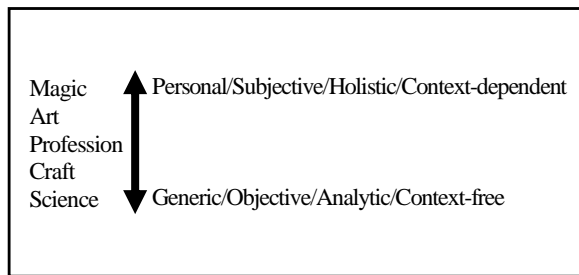
Teachers have been enthusiastically and busily collecting documents compiled in the form of portfolios indicating what academic activities they have been doing throughout their teaching career. They include in their portfolios documents giving evidence of academic qualification, professional trainings they have taken, term of services, samples of lesson plan, evaluation by supervisors, academic achievements and products, academic forums they have attended, additional tasks and social activities they have served, and tokens of appreciation they have obtained due to their excellence. The portfolio compilation ranges in thickness from one or two centimetres to approximately 30 centimetres (which makes it even too hard for the assessors to open!). It takes one up to two hours to score each portfolio. Mathematical calculation will result in a logical estimation of how many portfolios an assessor can handle in a day. It seems to reflect the hard work to do on the part of both the teachers who compile the portfolios and the assessors who are responsible for the assessment.

The above description of what has been going on in the world of teaching career in Indonesia seems to be an effort of the government to show its serious concern about teacher's welfare because the

certified teachers will be paid approximately two folds higher than those who are not yet certified. Hard working and professional teachers might benefit from this approach to teacher certification. Some negative impacts, however, have been sensed and the concern of those who deal with the portfolio assessment. The biggest concern is that higher salary could possibly be the sole inducement of collecting the portfolios. Some say that at the present moment portfolio assessment is the most likely procedure of teacher certification. Considering Indonesia's condition, this could be reasonably acceptable. However, for the future necessities, there should emerge awareness that higher salary should not be the only reason for teachers to assemble portfolios. Teachers need to possess a better understanding of portfolio in a wider context and they have to view teaching portfolio as a reflection for their professional development.

## TEACHING AS PROFESSION

There have been a number of views upon the conceptions of teaching. These conceptions could be represented in a continuum with two extreme opposite positions in which teaching-as-magic at one extreme position and teaching-as-science at the other extreme end. In this continuum teaching-as-profession emerges as intermediary between two extremes of 'mystical' and scientific views of teaching. Pennington (1989:20) has developed this continuum as that in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The Conception of Teaching**

The conception of teaching-as-magic views teaching as a mysterious or mystical act situated within a complex context whose characteristics are dependent on personal and individual factors that can never be fully known or described and stresses the individuality and the importance of ‘natural gifts’ and ‘personality’ as qualifications for teaching. It also stresses that teaching acts are highly contextualized and so indescribable outside the various layers of contexts within which they occur. In contrast, the conception of teaching-as-science views teaching as an act whose defining features are repeated in different contexts and can be revealed through empirical observation and analysis. From this perspective, teaching contexts can be described generically and analytically, in terms of their individual elements, and teacher knowledge is objective and rational. This conception also seeks to provide a universal base for teaching in a given field, to find the elements which all teaching contexts have in common, and to exhaustively describe and analyze these so that a body of knowledge can be built up and passed on to new teachers. It also emphasizes the objective qualifications for teaching based on skills that can be trained and knowledge that can be tested outside a classroom context (Pennington in Lomax, 2001: 100-101). Since teaching-as-magic ignores its universal element, this conception does not provide a realistic model of teaching.

Viewed as intermediary between the two extreme conceptions of teaching (teaching-as-magic and teaching-as-science), teaching-as-profession can then be described as bridging these two polarizations. In the ‘professional’ conception, teacher’s knowledge includes a universal component which must be (a) situated in and adapted to specific teaching context and (b) given a personal interpretation as part of an individual teacher’s schema for thinking and acting.

In the model of teaching conception Pennington has elaborates it can be seen that the keys to success of teaching profession are personality and

intelligence while the bases for change are a combination of introspection and observation. Thus, reflection becomes crucial for mediating between internal and external sources of knowledge.

### **WHY IS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NECESSARY?**

The need for teacher development arises from the inadequacy of training courses, which alone cannot fully enable teachers to be dynamic and competent in their job. The lack of training courses portrays the real condition facing teachers in most parts of Indonesia which comprises over 13.000 islands. Therefore, along with teacher training, teacher development must be a vital component in teacher education. Development fills the gap in training by giving teachers opportunities to reflect on classroom practice, gain insight into teaching experiences, view education as a long-term process, and deal with change and divergence.

England (1998:18) asserts five critical reasons for professional development in English language teaching as follows. (1) The role of English in the world has grown so much that the spread of English requires many more teachers and English teachers need to be able to manage a much broader range of teaching responsibility and increasingly diverse learner needs; (2) We know much more to do about language learning and language teaching than we have done before; (3) Training paradigms in academic and professional circles are changing: the lines between academic and professional preparation are fading; (4) Effective English language teachers are obliged to look carefully at their professional development in order to improve their experiences in classroom and to minimize burnout; (5) ELT programs benefit from teachers who are current with the field. Program directors need to guide teachers in setting goals for professional improvement and support the teachers in meeting those goals.

Pennington in Farrell (2003:14) says that teacher change and development require an awareness of a need to change. She defines teacher development as “a metastable system of context-interactive change involving a continual cycle of innovative behavior and adjustment to circumstances.” She sees two key component soft change: innovation and critical reflection. In light of the importance of reflection, Farrell also cites that Richards views reflection as a key component of teacher development. Freeman’s in Okwen (2003:30) defines development as a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that come

with complex, integrated aspects of teaching. Freeman further states that the purpose of development is to generate change through increasing or shifting his/her (teacher's) awareness.

### REFLECTION ON TEACHING

A fundamental concept in professional development is reframing; teachers are more likely to learn when reflecting on and testing personal theories. As cited by Al-Arishi (1994,2) John Locke classifies sources of knowledge involved in human understanding into sensation, intuition, and reflection. He further notifies that reflection is the source of knowledge that he feels present-day language teaching has, to an extent, ignored. Moon and Boullón (1997) in Blázquez (2007:26) states that reflective thinking can be viewed as the thoughtful, self-questioning of teachers' actions, experience, or attitudes. If for example, teachers are not satisfied with the learning success of their students or question their own role in the classroom or the value of their procedures, adherents of reflective thinking would argue that the teachers should plan and organize acts or processes to help them address such concerns.

Central to the findings of educational research is the recognition that those who are going to be responsible for implementing change must be participants in deciding the nature and extent of change and the development of the process of change. There is a growing recognition that change is an acutely personal process and that, in order for teachers to cope with the increasing demands placed on them, change needs to be associated with reflection (Murdoch, 1993: 101).

Gilpin (2001:109) lists some of his colleagues' definitions of reflection. Among those definitions include (1) structured and critical thinking about a previous experience or action with a view to understanding better the processes that shaped it, possibly to shape future action; (2) thinking about the strategies to be used to change a situation, innovate etc. and using the results to inform the on-going process.

Concerning the importance of reflection, Blázquez (2007:34) concludes from her study as follows: "I learned that if we teachers explore what occurs in our classrooms, if we reflect critically on the theories and beliefs that underlie our practice, and we share our findings, then fundamental changes in classroom practices can be accomplished."

### APPROACHES TO CLASSROOM REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Teachers sometimes fail to exploit classroom events that they can use to develop a deeper understanding of teaching. However, teachers can use their classroom and professional experiences as the basis for critical reflection if teachers can find ways to capture the thoughts of and reactions to these events, as well as ways to gather fuller information about the events themselves. From this basis, teachers can develop strategies for intervention or change, depending on their needs (Richards, 1995:6). A number of procedures, such as teaching journal, lesson reports, surveys and questionnaires, observation, and teaching portfolio are commonly employed in classroom reflective investigation. Throughout the rest of this article, teaching portfolio would be the focus of discussion.

### WHAT AND WHY IS TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

Portfolio has become a more common practice among teachers, but they usually employ portfolio to assess their students' performance as an alternative to traditional methods of assessment. Therefore, most of the existing literature discusses portfolio limited only to instructional contexts.

Currently, there has been a shift in topic of discussion among teachers in Indonesia concerning the use of portfolio, but what teachers perceive of portfolios is that they are documents of what they have done throughout their teaching career to be submitted as the requirement for teaching certificate. This could be an acceptable reason. In this regard, Wolf (1996:34) says that experienced teachers construct portfolios to become eligible for bonuses and advanced certification. This could be a very motivating start. In the long run, teachers need to be invited to create portfolios in order to become architects of their own professional development based on individual growth plans and they should consider teaching portfolio as growth experience.

Portfolios mean different things to different people; there is no single definition of portfolios that suit everyone. Farrell (2002:4) defines teaching portfolios as a collection of any aspect of teacher's work that tells a story of the teacher's efforts, skills, abilities, achievement, and contributions to his or her students, colleagues, institution, academic discipline or community. They can include such things as, lesson plans, student assignments, teachers' written descriptions of their instruction, and formal evaluation by supervisors. The goal of a teaching

portfolio is to describe, through documentation over an extended period of time, the full range of teacher's abilities. Farrell (2002) reminds that teaching portfolio is not a one time snap shot of where the teacher is at present, it is an evolving collection of carefully selected professional experiences, thoughts and goals. Wolf (1996:34) states that not only are portfolios an effective way to assess teaching quality, but they also provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and collegial interactions based on documented episodes of their own teaching.

Concerning the content of portfolio, what the Indonesian government requires teachers to include in their portfolios is already much in line with what Farrell (2002) mentions. What should then be the teacher's concern is their understanding of Farrell's idea that portfolio is not a one time snap shot of where the teacher is at present. According to Urbach (1994:3), there are seven dimensions of teaching abilities to be documented: what you (teachers) teach, how you (teachers) teach, changes in your (teachers') teaching activities, rigor in your (teachers') academic standards, student impressions of your (teachers') teaching, efforts at developing your (teachers') teaching skills, and assessments of your (teachers') teaching by colleagues.

Two metaphors, *mirror* and *map*, are used by Farrell (2002) to give the reason why assembling teaching portfolio is important for teachers. The *mirror* metaphor captures the reflective nature of a developmental portfolio as it allows teachers to 'see' themselves over time. The *map* metaphor symbolizes creating plan and setting goals. Teachers can use teaching portfolios for assessment or career development. After reviewing the evidence collected over time, teachers can hopefully reflect on where they were, where they are now, and, most importantly, where they want to go. Portfolios can capture the complexity of professional practice in ways that no other approach can. Compiling portfolios gives teachers some advantages, as the following: (1) it cultivates reflection and self assessment; (2) it provides self-renewal, (3) it promotes collaboration, and it encourages ownership and empowerment.

In compiling teaching portfolio teachers must choose only those documents that are critical to the purpose of assembling portfolios because having too many documents can make any review a difficult task for the reviewer.

Any teaching portfolio with any purpose should contain the following parts: (1) knowledge of subject matter which outlines what you know about the subject you teach and how this impacts the class-

room you teach in; (2) planning, delivery and assessing instruction which reflects who you are as a teacher; and (3) professionalism which shows who you are as a teacher in a wider community.

While classroom observation as one method of reflection on teaching is considered less favourable since it is commonly associated with teaching evaluation, the use of portfolio could be more favourable due to its more personal nature in the sense that teachers can use it merely as self-assessment techniques.

## WHAT DOES A TEACHING PORTFOLIO LOOK LIKE?

Although the format and use of portfolio may vary from one institution or discipline to another, there should be a degree of uniformity. The following is one model outline of teaching portfolio.

### A. Goals

In this section the teacher states her/his compact but thoughtful intentions and aspirations in teaching, especially for the near future. This might be a good place to mention obstacles the teacher has encountered, such as inadequate facilities, inadequate library resources, excessive class size, excessive workload, etc.

### B. Responsibilities

(The following list might be extended or modified)

1. Amount of time devoted to teaching
2. Subject or grade(s) currently taught
3. Work with individual students, for example guidance of independent study
4. Advising, for example advising student competing for a championship or scholarship and an approximate numbers of students advice, etc
5. Instructional innovation, for example novel use of instructional technology, adoption of such methods as collaborative learning, use of case studies, etc.
6. Extraordinary efforts with special group of students
7. Use of disciplinary research in teaching
8. Out-of-class evaluation activities
9. Service on school or other committees
10. Learning more about teaching
11. Project and potential projects requiring non-government funding

### C. Evaluations

This consists of (1) student evaluations, (2) measure of student learning (3) peer evaluation, (4) letter from student or alumni, (5) teaching awards, and (6) other awards

### D. Results

In this part the teacher includes (1) student successes, (2) instructional materials he/she develops, (3) Contribution to the scholarship of teaching, e.g. oral presentation, papers in appropriate journals, etc., and (4) other results

### E. Appendix or Exhibits

**Figure 2. Outline of Teaching Portfolio**

## CONCLUDING REMARK

Indonesian government's effort to increase teacher's welfare through teacher certification, by which teachers are required to compile their teaching portfolios, should be viewed as the impetus for teachers to be more professional rather than to get higher salary. There should also be a better understanding that professional development is not necessarily carried out through formal in-service trainings which could hardly be accessible in our context. Through the compilation of teaching portfolio teachers are expected to be able to reflect on their past and plan for a better future. Although teaching

portfolio may vary from institution or discipline to another, teachers should include in their portfolio such part as (1) knowledge of subject matter which outlines what teachers know about the subject they teach and how this impacts the classroom they teach in, (2) planning, delivery and assessing instruction which reflects who you are as a teacher, and (3) professionalism which shows who you are as a teacher in a wider community. There should appear stronger awareness among teachers that assembling teaching portfolio throughout their teaching career is an internally-driven need by which they can assess their teaching performance.

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