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USE OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL IN AN IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Dr. Shahid Siddiqui*
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ABSTRACT

A considerable amount of research conducted in Europe and elsewhere except in Pakistan indicates that the in-service teacher education programmes facilitated in the implementation and institutionalization of change at school level geared towards the school improvement process (Dalil et.al, 1992). In the past, the in-service education programmes for teachers in Pakistan received little attention of the government since its focus was on the quantitative expansion rather than qualitative augmentation of education. The teachers who attended in-service education programmes found their experience as a ‘luxury activity’. Most of them seemed to be interested in their traveling and daily allowances (T.A./D.A.) rather than professional development (Warwick and Remiers, 1995). In order to depart from the traditional in-service teacher education programmes, the government sector generally and particularly the private sector have launched some reflective and prاكتical in-service teacher education programmes in Pakistan. These programmes allow teachers to reconceptualize their teaching practice that might lead to equality improvement in their schools. The Institute for Educational Development of the Aga Khan University, organized an eight week in-service teacher education programme for Balochistan primary school teachers from three districts (Quetta, Kallat and Killa Saifulllah) from January 5 – March 6, 1997. This

programme was known as Visiting Teachers (VT) programme. Among other practices and processes used in this programme for the professional development of these teachers leading to school improvement, reflective journal was used to develop their critical thinking which is essential for the effective teaching and learning process. In other contexts, reflective journals have been used effectively in various teaching and learning situations for different purposes. In this case the purpose of using reflective journals was to allow teachers to think critically and analyze their thinking and actions for making necessary modification in their teaching behaviour that is required for improving quality education. Furthermore, reflective journal helped them to see relationship between written account and reasoning and raise critical issues to their learning for their professional development. This paper aims to underline the importance of reflective journal as a useful device for VTs to ‘unfreeze’ their age old notions of their teaching and learning, question the relevance of new ideas to their practical life, initiate ‘change’ and ‘refreeze’ new practices which are required for sustainable change for school improvement (Cheng 1996).

Context of VT Programme

This paper is based on our experience of intimate involvement in the first Visiting Teachers (VT) Programme which was conducted at Institute for Educational Development (IED), the Aga Khan University (AKU), Karachi from January 5 to March 6, 1997. The programme was geared to address the professional needs of the primary school teachers from the three districts (Kalat, Quetta and Kila Saifullah) of Balochistan Province. A conscious effort was made to organize this programme during the school vacation time when the schools of the ‘winter zone’ of Balochistan were closed so that the student learning is not affected. This programme was a result of a series of concerted efforts made by the Balochistan Government for the qualitative improvement of primary education in the province. The principle aim of these efforts is to improve the quality of education in general, and school performance in particular through the reflective professional development of teachers. This eight-week Visiting Teachers (VTs) professional development programme for primary school teachers,
was specially designed to meet the professional needs of primary school teachers. This programme was delivered in Urdu language only. The major components of the programme were:

a) updating content knowledge of Urdu language, Social Studies, Mathematics and Science;

b) enhancing pedagogical skills.

c) developing understanding about classroom management, organization and student assessment;

d) developing mentoring skills including social skills;

e) helping teachers in the effective use of existing textbooks, instructional materials and teaching kits prepared by Balochistan Government; and

f) preparing teachers as “change agents” or “critical mass” in their schools.

Upon the completion of this professional development programme teachers will work as ‘mentors’ with their colleagues in the cluster schools which have already been identified by the Directorate of Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), Balochistan (see Akbar 1997). The mentors, as change agents’ will closely work with PEDP on the agenda of school improvement. This was the first time that IED had organized such VT programme in collaboration and coordination with PEDP, Balochistan. Initially, PEDP had selected 30 primary school teachers on he basis of ‘achievement tests’ in four subjects Urdu, Social Studies, Mathematics and Science followed by in-depth interviews conducted by the IED team.

Structure of VT Programme

The expectations of the programme were set in consonant with the ‘felt needs’ of the course participants who are being referred to as Visiting Teachers (VTs). The IED tutors who had a
good command on Urdu language were cognizant of the fact that
the needs of VTs were two fold: (i) to prepare them as ‘reflective
classroom teachers’ and (ii) as ‘mentors’ in their cluster schools.
The initial two weeks of the programme were devoted to
reconceptualization of teaching practice in order to enable them to
examine their notions and belief system on teaching and their role
as teacher. They were provided with opportunity to look critically
into the issues related to primary education in Pakistan in general
and in Balochistan in particular. The tutors firmly believed that
change in VTs’ teaching practice may not sustain unless change is
occurred at their conceptual, pedagogical and attitudinal (personal
and professional) levels. Thus the first two weeks aimed at
attempting to ‘unfreeze’ their notions of teaching, teaching
profession, adult learning Vs students learning, group work
cooperative learning etc. and exploring further possibilities as to
how far they can bring about attitudinal changes in their personal
perspectives and teaching practices in their classrooms. Following
is a brief description of weekly plans.

Week One

The Participants were asked to look critically at the
following:

a) current teaching practices and processes;
b) aims and issues of primary education;
c) role of a teacher (traditional Vs progressive); and
d) collaborative ways of working and growing together
(focused on peer coaching).

Week Two

Week two focussed on understanding teaching and learning
processes. Under this theme the following topics were discussed.

a) teacher as a reflective practitioner;
b) teaching and learning styles of teachers and students;
c) multi-grade teaching (what? why? how?);
d) planning for real teaching and micro teaching; and
e) teaching in practicing schools/practicum.
It is worth mentioning here that in the beginning of week two, VTs went to the identified multi-grade practicing schools in Malir District, in order to sensitize the context. In this week VTs were further introduced to the concept of reflective practice and were helped to acquire and apply the skills of reflective practice including 'journal writing'.

Week Three

Week three was mostly devoted to the teaching of Social Studies focusing on acquiring a deeper understanding of the nature and goals of Social Studies, understanding and learning map and globe skills, acquiring knowledge about some important and basic concepts of Social Studies from curriculum, 'knowing how' to develop activities inside and outside the classroom and using the environment to make teaching learning process relevant, meaningful.

Week Four

Week four was largely allocated for Urdu language teaching and learning. This component was included for the first time in a VT programme at IED considering the 'felt needs' of the Balochistan VTs. Teaching of Urdu language included themes like; nature of language, issues related to teaching of Urdu language, teaching and learning target language at different age level. (Kacchi Class – Class V). activity based teaching strategies, integrated approach, basic skills of language, and effective use of textbooks and instructional materials/teaching kits.

Week Five and Six

Week five and some days of week six were devoted to teaching of science. The objectives of teaching science included; introducing VT’s to current thinking about teaching and learning in science, improving VT’s content knowledge and teaching methodologies in primary science teaching, giving VT’s experience of hands-on investigation methods of science teaching in the multi-grade classroom, using low cost or no-cost materials
and developing VT’s ability to guide and support science teachers working with them.

Week Seven

The focus of week seven was teaching of mathematics. The objectives of this week were to develop VTs’ own conceptual understanding of mathematics, to recognize the rational nature of mathematics, to question and appreciate the processes in learning mathematics and the needs of learners, to understand the value of collaborative practices and seek support from peers at all levels.

Week Eight

This was the last week of the programme where VTs focused on mentoring and revisited some important notions and strategies including supervision, counseling, consultancy, peer coaching and team teaching etc. This was an important week in the sense that it enabled VTs to make preparations for ‘re-entry’ phase. VTs got ample practice of working together throughout the course and were asked during this week to prepare their action plans for conducting training in their ‘cluster schools’.

The Balochistan VT programme was different from other courses in many ways. For example, (a) it was our first experience of having a group of teachers from Balochistan and we did not have much understanding of their respective context; (b) this course was taught in Urdu medium which was again a unique experience at IED as the other courses are taught in English; (c) most of the teachers in this course had little social exposure and held strong views about various issues; (d) for the female teacher in the course it was perhaps the first experience of sitting with the male teachers in the same class.

Philosophy of Reflective Practice and its Use in VT Programme

‘Learning about how to teach’ effectively is a demanding and complex task since it relates to both thoughts and actions. As
practitioners we all believe that there is no single right approach for ‘learning about how to teach’. In the past, several in-service teacher education programmes emphasized the development of competence of teachers rather than the process involved in the professional development. We agree with Zeichner and Gore (1990) that teacher education has not been successful in influencing teaching practices.

Generally, the teacher education institutes/departments offer quantitatively more theory driven courses as compared to far small component of practicum. This situation encourages the gap between “what is taught” in the teacher education institutes and underlines the need of strengthening the link between theory and practice. In research, for example, we come across terms like ‘reflection’ (Zeichner, 1983; Calderhead, 1989), reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983) ‘reframing’ (Schon, 1987), ‘and ‘knowing in action’ (Schon, 1987; Hewson et.al., 1992). Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) maintained that reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate whether it is helpful in their personal and professional learning. This is our conviction that the school improvement initiatives cannot be successful without effective professional development of implementers who are ultimately responsible for school improvement.

Dewey (1933) considers reflection as a process that helps teachers to make better sense of the information in order to enable them to guide and direct learning in appropriate ways. Thus reflection is seen as an important vehicle for acquisition of professional knowledge that is required for making school initiatives successful.

Literature on reflective practice suggests that it helps teachers and practitioners in many ways. For instance: seeing personal and professional growth; improving teaching practice and understanding it in better ways; doing right things and be able to justify their actions; being creative and innovative in decision
practitioners we all believe that there is no single right approach for ‘learning about how to teach’. In the past, several in-service teacher education programmes emphasized the development of competence of teachers rather than the process involved in the professional development. We agree with Zeichner and Gore (1990) that teacher education has not been successful in influencing teaching practices.

Generally, the teacher education institutes/departments offer quantitatively more theory driven courses as compared to far small component of practicum. This situation encourages the gap between “what is taught” in the teacher education institutes and “what is practised” in schools. There have been a few attempts to underline the need of strengthening the link between theory and practice. In research, for example, we come across terms like ‘reflection’ (Zeichner, 1983; Calderhead, 1989), reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983) ‘reframing’ (Schon, 1987), ‘and ‘knowing in action’ (Schon, 1987; Hewson et.al., 1992). Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) maintained that reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate whether it is helpful in their personal and professional learning. This is our conviction that the school improvement initiatives cannot be successful without effective professional development of implementers who are ultimately responsible for school improvement.

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making, considering fundamental issues in teaching practice and developing viable mechanism for solving these problems; having better relationships with students, colleagues and community at large; understanding own personal philosophy of teaching practice; creating meaningful learning; developing attitude of being reflective practitioner; reviewing one’s own thinking and actions for better teaching practices and developing a deeper understanding for becoming an effective teacher. We agree with Christiansen (1992) reflective practice and teaching involve teachers in an on-going activity for giving meaning to classroom events.

Rationale for the Use of Reflective Journal in VT Programme

In order to document teachers’ thinking and actions about teaching, they are encouraged to write journals. Loughran (1996) mentions that the purpose of the journal writing is to help the writer look back on (or forward to) an event in the hope that it will be a catalyst for reflection. A number of researchers (e.g., Dobbins 1990, Bean and Zulich 1989, Rodderick 1986) consider the use of reflective journal as a powerful tool for reflection required for self evaluation and learning for professional development and school improvement. Reflective journal helps develop thinking about teaching and learning.

The use of reflective journals in teacher education is an attempt to facilitate the participants to think critically and look at the possible ways of doing things. The process of writing itself helps trigger insight about teaching; teaching serves as discovery process; Maintaining reflective journals are integral part of IED’s professional development programmes. The journals of the course participants reflect their conceptual understanding of new ideas and skills and attitudes. Richards and Lockhart (1994) refer to the following potential content for a reflective journal.

i) events and ideas are recorded for the purpose of later reflection;
ii) personal reactions to things that happen in the classroom;

iii) questions or observations about problems that occur in teaching; and

iv) ideas for future analysis or reminders of things to take action on.

**Process Involved in Reflective Journal Writing**

The VTs were encouraged to:

- make entries about their reflections in Urdu language on regular basis; once or twice a week, or even daily if possible.

- review journal entries regularly and may re-write reflections in a particular case;

- share journal with their peers regularly if possible. Also share journal with their respective tutors at least once in a week.

For this purpose, one tutor was responsible for responding to journal of a group of 5 VTs for a period of four weeks. After week four, a group of VTs was assigned another tutor so that the whole instructional team was able to go through the journal entries which might help them to examine VTs conceptual understanding of different issues. This process helped us a lot to recognize the growth and development of VTs.

**Reflection on VTs Reflections (VTs Journal Entries)**

In the following section, the excerpts from VTs' reflective journals are given which are translated into English for the purpose of this paper. The reflections are categorized according to the following aspects of the professional development of VTs.
a) Updating Content Knowledge

The prime purpose of the course was to update the content knowledge of four subjects – Urdu language, Science, Mathematics and Social Studies. VTs seemed to have enjoyed all subjects. Here is a reflection from a VTs journal about the subject of Science, “...what is light. I know the importance of light...now I can see the relationship of things with daily use. Though each one of us sees them in different ways and use them in distinct ways.” Another VT reflects on his experience of solving sums in a classroom situation at IED. He was excited when the tutors gave a simple principle which helped the VTs understand the logic involve in solving the sums. He records in his reflective the experience of that day, “Knowing the principle was a great gift that I got today.” Another VT wrote his reflections about his experience of learning about angles, “I learned certain useful things about angles. I must say I did not know about these things before this class. This new information is going to be an important part of my pedagogy.”

b) Improving Pedagogical Skills

In their reflective journals the VTs reflected on various aspects of the professional development which might help them to bring about improvement in teaching and learning processes. In the forthcoming quotations from the VTs’ reflective journals one could see how different things appeared to be important to them. One female VT recorded her observation about her attitude towards ‘importance of time’ at IED. She writes, “I was never particular about time in my whole life and I never realized that I was doing some thing odd. At IED I realized the importance of time.” Lesson planning is a crucial and integral part of effective teaching. VTs were exposed to various sessions on lesson planning based on several formats of lesson plans. They were encouraged to share their lesson plans with their peers, get feedback from them and make necessary modifications. She further reflects upon her experience of getting involved in lesson planning before going for teaching in the classroom, “... Before
coming to IED I never planned lesson for teaching. At IED I became aware of the importance of lesson planning, ... also I have come to know how to analyze my lesson and improve it further.”

Asking questions in a classroom could be a useful teaching strategy. But it all depends how successfully teachers use this strategy. It becomes crucial to engage students in critical thinking process by posing them challenging questions according to their ability rather than pitching the questions at a very high level. One of the VTs on this course reflects on the level of difficulty of questions in the classroom, “Now I have realized that teachers should ask questions according to the mental levels of their students. I must say I was least bothered about the high order thinking or low order thinking questions or any difference between them”. Activity based teaching is very popular but the question arises about the amount of activities and the balance between activities and teacher’s input and debriefing. One female VT criticizes her lesson plan based on too many activities. She writes “Today in my teaching I noticed that students were more interested in the activities. They wanted one activity after another. I personally didn’t like this situation. For instance I taught a lesson about “air” with the help of activities. And I am sure if I had asked the students to read about air from the textbook they couldn’t have done that”. This suggests that the teacher is not just interested in doing activity but she also seems to be concerned about the students’ conceptual understanding and their other curriculum needs. A similar reaction can be seen in another reflective journal where a teacher opposes over dose of activities for different reasons, A male VT reflected on the extreme use of the group activities by recording in his reflective journal, “Group activities create interest but too many activities should not be done at a time, as students get tired”.

The VTs were constantly encouraged to link their experiences in class with their own context. One female VT recalls her experience in her school in Balochistan and shows her concern about students’ learning time. “In my school there are 140 students in two rooms. I could not teach them at a time, however, I divided them in groups and gave them activities such as
observing animal and human beings behaviour and report back to the class. But I could not maximize students learning time”. She seems to have developed an awareness and professional skills to solve her own professional problems rather than relying on others. As she reflects in her journal, “working in groups, it is not easy since every one is unique... Once people start working together, they may disagree with each other. But an important thing is to listen the opponent and disagree with her in professional way. I have realized that as teacher I can solve my problems which seems difficult but not impossible. I wished I would have known it much earlier.” One of the challenging aspects of the VT programme was to facilitate teachers to reflect on their own teaching and give themselves honest feedback. In the initial phase it appeared to be a difficult challenge but gradually we could see change in their attitudes when they were ready for self-criticism. For instance one teacher analyses his lesson, “Lesson was taught according to lesson planning. I partly succeeded because all objectives were not achieved. This happened perhaps because of lack of realistic planning on my part. But I don’t regret to be a failure; at least I knew that I could not achieve objectives of today’s lesson.”

c) Use of low or Zero Cost Instructional Materials

VTs were given hands-on experiences to develop low cost material which they found quite interesting. They were also able to see the importance of such material and its impact on students learning. One VT writes, “I know that if your are teaching a topic you can reflect on the relevant activities. In the lesson I was to teach, I needed an iron bar. I went to a few shops but couldn’t find a bar. Suddenly I found a little wire on roadside. Now I started looking for a longer wire which I could use in my activity. Luckily after a little effort I could get one which was thrown there as it was apparently of no use to any one. I realize now that nothing is useless. Some times very ordinary things could make good activities.” He further added that “We know A.V.Aids are necessary for making learning successful. But if the lesson is planned carefully then we may not need too many aids. Teacher himself is an aid for students and their learning.” To reflect on learning activities he mentioned that “learning through practical
activities can’t be forgotten. Low cost material can be used for the practical activities. These things are even available in our homes. Students and teachers can generate a lot of teaching resources. By doing this, students will start seeing the importance of the used things.” He seemed to be inspired from the activities prepared from the local material. As he mentioned that “Activities were based on things which are mostly used in homes. We can do these activities in our schools as all of them are available in their schools.”

d) **Demonstrating Level of Confidence**

It was found that most of the VTs seemed more interested in the process of learning whether it is inside or outside the classroom. As one male VT mentioned that “Today an important incident was that I lost may watch while I was roaming on a road in Saddar with my friends. When I thought about it I recalled that its strap was loose. For a little while it worried me but I then realized it was mistake and I should pay for that. A good lesson for learning!” He also reflects on how his views were given importance as they were translated into English, “Today Mr. Davis came to our class and shared with us the forthcoming educational developments in Balochistan which was translated for us. I felt proud when my views were translated into English. I liked it very much because every individual’s views are important. It really boosted my confidence”. He further reflects on his level of confidence “Through reflection I can ask myself questions which help me develop my understanding of many new things. It helps me to develop my confidence and I know my limitations.”

e) **Awareness of the Contextual Change**

Two weeks were allocated to reconceptualization of teaching which helped VTs to examine their notion of teaching and identify problems that affected their teaching learning process. While reflecting on this experience one VT said, “Today we visited a class at SMS school. All the students were present. I thought about my local context where full attendance is a rare phenomenon. I thought about the reasons... May be the teachers
are not interested, may be the teachers give punishment to the students, or the parents are not interested but I must say it is a real problem in my school”. It was a very important realization on the part of VTs that change takes time and it is not easy to abandon the old notions and practices in a short period of time. While thinking about his job of working as a mentor with the teachers of cluster schools he makes his point with the help of an anecdote, “I understand that change cannot take place in one day. I tell you a story. A man at the age of 80 changed his religion. Next day when he got up in the morning he started praying according to his previous religion. When somebody asked him about this he explained that my mind was obsessed with one kind of religion for eighty years. It will take me some time to unlearn the practice of eighty years teachings of my old religion. Most of the teachers’ minds are occupied by tradition and it will take some time for the influences of the tradition to die down”.

As mentioned earlier the course aimed at bringing about change at conceptual, pedagogical and attitudinal levels. The VTs realized that their job as mentors would not be devoid of challenges. One VT refers to the potential challenges but his tone remains optimistic, “These things can be made possible in my context but for that we will have to change our attitudes. With real dedication and passion nothing is impossible. We may face some problems in making students working in groups as it would be a new strategy in our context but we can get positive results after doing it many times. Surely I will be trying this strategy when I go back to my school”.

It is interesting to note that the VTs realize the change is a collective process. They seem confident to apply new ideas without any difficulty if they have support from the concerned offices. As one VT mentioned, “during the practicum we found that the students took interest in their learning because they had conducive environment, co-operation from the peers and teachers. I can apply this method without any difficulty if there is a professional support from the Government”. His reflection on his sharing work with peers indicates the required change in his thinking and behaviour. He writes, “What I’m learning at IED I
can reflect on it share with teachers and peers, I feel proud of sharing with teachers... I get quick feedback from them. I need not to quarrel with any one even if someone disagrees with my point of view. I don’t mind now, perhaps this is change that I have found in my behaviour”.

f) Getting ready for re-entry as reflective teachers and mentors

As mentioned earlier the main purpose of the programme was to prepare the visiting teachers to work as mentors and effective teachers. Thus in the final phase of the programme they were to develop an action plan for their re-entry as a reflective teachers and mentors. As one VT records in his journal, “At the end of the day I took the message of reflection with me to my hostel. While lying in my bed I thought about the IED-the questions, and thoughts were emerging on the horizon of my mind. My head seemed to be in motion... may be it was a part of the process of change”. About his mentoring role he mentioned “I couldn’t teach the way I wanted as I was in team teaching situation. My teaching partner was a senior person. It was difficult for me to give him feedback on the negative points. But then I thought “What’s the purpose of our coming here to IED. If we won’t give honest feedback to each other we cannot improve”. While reflecting on his mentoring responsibilities, he said, “I may sound ambitious about my future responsibilities. But I have to be realistic since there won’t be cooperation from many corners.” He also seems cognizant of the fact that the teachers as professional cannot be forced to learn to teach in classrooms. As he said “You can’t force teachers to solve their problems. What is important is to bring about change in their attitudes to solve their own problems”. He reflects on the notion of reflective practice by recording in his journal “Through reflection, teachers can work with other colleagues and through reflection I can avoid my emotional and hasty decision making.”

It is worth mentioning here that most of the VTs, particularly female VTs, it was perhaps first experience of attending a course for eight weeks far away from their families.
Use of Reflective Journal in an In-service Teacher Education programme: Some Implications for School Improvement

We could see some adjustment problems in the first week of the course but later they gelled together as a wonderful group teachers. One VT records in his journal, "As we bonded together over a period of eight weeks, I couldn’t expect when I came to IED on 5th January, 1997". Another VT reflects on his experience at IED, "I have enjoyed being here so much I do not want to go back to Quetta... we will miss IED a lot".

Discussions, Conclusions and Some Implications for School Improvement

Looking at the content and nature of VTs’ reflective journal entries on several aspects of professional development and its implications for school improvement, the following significant features of the reflective journals have been identified.

i) The Role of Language

As mentioned in the earlier part of this paper the medium of instructions in the Balochistan VT course was Urdu. The request to this effect was made by the Government of Balochistan. Consequently the tutors made conscious efforts to use only Urdu in the classrooms. VTs were also allowed to use Urdu language in their interaction with their tutors and peers and write their reflective journals in Urdu. The facility with Urdu language helped them to express in a more free and frank manner. We now believe that if they were asked to write their journals in English they perhaps would not have expressed themselves so well. It would be an interesting study to compare the reflective journals written in Urdu with those written in English by VTs in other VT programmes at IED to look at the influence of language on the content, style, and quality of reflections.

ii) Influence of the Local Context

It was important to note that there were constant references to the context from which VTs came from. Most of them lived in an environment where there was strong influence of religion. On
their arrival the group collectively made the request to open days’ proceeding from the recitation from the Holy Qur’an. VTs liking and disliking, as were expressed during the ice breaking activity on day one, were some how linked or influenced by the religious personalities. The idioms and metaphors they used in their reflective journals are drawn from either religious knowledge or Islamic history. For instance; one female VT toward the end of the programme reflected on her experience at IED and recorded in her journal, “Before coming to IED we were like Arabs before the dawn of Islam”. Another important source of their images was the immediate physical contexts. For instance there were frequent references to mountains, barren lands, snow, turtles, horses etc. It is interesting to note that how important is the role of context in terms of choosing and using certain vocabulary for rich expression.

iii) Extension of Reflective Journals

The Balochistan VT programme seems unique in the sense that VTs of the first course who have gone back to Balochistan after the completion of their course are still keeping in touch with the IED tutors through written communication. Their letters are not just description of what they have been doing but they have identified a series of critical incidents to share with us for providing them with further feedback. The VTs have used several ‘metaphors’ for them as mentors in cluster schools where they work with 40 teachers (mentees) for two day in a month. For example; turtle, soldier, commando, shopkeeper, broker, arbitrator, wise person, intellectual, practitioner, doctor, nurse, social reformer, gru, friend, leader etc. This indicates that that had been trying several strategies rather then relying on a single strategy to work with their mentees. This also shows that they found reflective journal as a useful device to allow them to critique on their actions and share with others for feedback.

iv) Dynamics of Reflective Journal

Each tutor was responsible for reading five journals. The decision of sharing the journals was not imposed. It was suggested that those who would like to share their journals with tutors can do
so. After the initial reluctance, VTs started sharing their journals with tutors. Each tutor would respond on their written reflection. So the journals were turned into interactive reflective journals. The encouragement of tutors helped VTs a lot to come out of the descriptive mode and start raising questions. In this way the bond of trust between the instructors and VTs was further strengthened and VTs came out candid with comments, critical questions and innovative alternatives in their journals.

v) **Account of the Journey of Professional Development**

Reflective journal was an interesting source of tracking the professional development of VTs over a period of eight weeks. It was interesting to note how, with the passage of time, the VTs demonstrated some significant changes in terms of classroom participating in classroom activities, cooperating with others, accommodating other’s view point, helping and facilitating their peers, improving their own content and pedagogical knowledge, and becoming more critical in their thinking.

vi) **A Source of Feedback for Tutors**

Though the primary purpose of the reflective journals was to develop the critical thinking of the VTs, they were useful for the instructors as well in terms of feedback. The VTs were frank to reflect on various happenings in the classroom. Sometime at VT would not ask question in the class but would write in his reflective journal. If it was a question of general interest we would discuss it with the whole group. We must say the reflective journals helped us in many ways to make certain changes in the content and pedagogy in the light of reflections of the VTs.

vii) **Medium of Personal Catharsis**

At times reflective journals was a rich source for personal catharsis. For instance one VT’s close relative died in Balochistan. In his reflective journal he talks about this incident and how it affected him being so far away from his home. He visualised the scene on this occasion. He then continues to say, “I am very sad
but I must not express my grief to my colleagues. I should try to be as normal as possible. I don’t want my personal loss to make my friends sad.”

Challenges in using Reflective Journals

While using reflective journals in the programme we could identify a number of challenges. We shall briefly talk about some of these challenges in this section:

- It did not come as a surprise for us, that VTs experience some difficulty in conceptualizing the notion of reflection and reflective journal. In spite of explicit guidelines and practical demonstrations most of the VTs were just describing the day’s happenings in their journals. Thus their journals turned into notes of different activities like any 'log book'. It was perhaps the third week of the programme when things started changing and VTs started raising critical questions.

- Another issue which emerged in the initial phase of reflective journals was recording only socially desirable things, i.e., VTs mentioned only good things around them. Gradually they were encouraged by the overall environment of the class that disagreement is always welcome and that spirit behind the disagreement is to help in the process of learning and improvement. We think it is very important to create such environment where VTs should feel free to reflect without any pressures.

- Another challenge was to build a bond of trust before expecting them to share their journals with tutors. We discussed the possibility that if any one of them would like to share their journals with the tutors we would welcome that. After a few days the reflective journal started trickling in.
A further challenge we faced was the negative side of sharing the journals with the peers. We noticed that a few VTs copied thoughts and reflections from other journals. We immediately realized that and discussed with the VTs that we are interested in their more own thoughts and for us each one's own experiences, thoughts, questions, and reflections are equally important.

Conclusion and Implications

It was found that the reflective journal helped VTs in many ways. For instance in processing learning experiences for developing understanding, principles and theories of teaching, recording the development of ones beliefs and values about education and teaching practice, recording the personal and professional growth and reflect on concerns, development of the ideas and confidence; developing language skills' develop and promote thinking skills, providing a source of inspiration where achievement are recorded and problems are shared with other practitioners through writing; providing focus and structure it for doing reflective practices; encouraging self evaluation.

As mentioned earlier this programme was conducted in Urdu language on the request of the clientele whereas the other VT programmes are being conducted in English language. VTs write their reflective journals in English which is either their second or third language. Our assumption is that Urdu language might have facilitated VTs of Balochistan writing in a critical manner. We may explore possibilities of using Urdu as an optional medium of reflective journals in other VT programmes of IED. This would encourage the VTs who might not able to express fully because of the linguistic deficiency.

Another important variable in encouraging reflections is to provide the VTs a congenial and non-threatening environment in the classroom. This is crucial for the effective use of reflective journals as VTs tend to write socially desirable things. Only by providing a conducive environment we could expect reflections
which are critical and are useful for the professional development required for effective school improvement.

Another important point is to make VTs see the relationship of reflection with improvement. There could a few activities to make them realize that how crucial it is to think about the alternative ways of solving a problem. This may lead to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Our experience of VTs sharing journals with the tutors was found useful in many ways. For instance we could track the professional development of VTs over the period of eight week. We also got some useful feedback in order to make changes in the content and pedagogy of the course. This flexible mode was facilitated by VTs sharing their journals with us. The tutor comments helped the VTs, as they shared with us later, to further raise critical questions and related the activities of the classroom with their own context in Balochistan.

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