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Who Am I in My Story of Teaching?: Confronting Puzzle of Practice Through Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This paper showcases an episode during which I embraced my inquirer self as an attempt to confront my puzzle of practice that had long became the basis of my uncertainty towards my own teaching. Chronologically, the paper is of seven parts. The first part depicts my initial intention of revisiting my teaching practice as means of unpacking my frames of reference that were the basis of my puzzle of practice. Part two describes how I employed narrative inquiry as my main research design, while incorporating the elements of self-study and autoethnography that served as the powerful mechanism for my research. Two main field texts were gathered during this particular phase of my fieldwork: my teaching/research journal and my students' learning journals that were analysed and transformed into research texts. The next three parts of this paper illustrate how I re-story the time when I re-experienced my teaching and critically re-examined my teaching approach and strategies with the help of my students' feedback in seeing my practice through a different lens. These parts also accentuate the struggle I faced with in my effort to transform my teaching practice - from a "teacher-focused strategy" or a "teacher-directed", into one that promoted "student-centred" learning approach. In part six of this paper, I attempt to answer the question of "*Who am I in my story of teaching?*" by reflecting on the three main lessons learned throughout my research journey. Finally, in hindsight, it came to my knowledge that in searching the possible answer to my puzzle of practice, what I needed most is to continuously make my frames of reference more open, reflective, and emotionally able to change.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, reflexivity, student-centred learning, higher education

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Öğretme Hikayemde Ben Kimim?: Anlatı Sorgulaması ile Uygulama Bulmacalarıyla Yüzleşmek

Öz

Bu makale, öğretimime yönelik belirsizliğimin temeli haline gelen uygulamamla yüzleşmek için sürdürdüğüm bir iç sorgulamayı ele almaktadır. Kronolojik olarak, çalışma yedi bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölüm, öğretme pratiğimi tekrar gözden geçirme niyetimi, uygulama bulmacamın temeli olan referans çerçevelerimi çözme aracı olarak ele alıyor. İkinci bölüm, araştırmalarım için güçlü bir mekanizma görevi gören kendi kendine çalışma ve otoetnografi öğelerini birleştirirken, ana araştırma tasarımım olarak anlatı araştırmasını nasıl kullandığımı açıklamaktadır. Çalışmanın bu aşamasında iki veri kaynağı incelendi: öğretim / araştırma günlüğüm ve analiz edilen ve araştırma metinlerine dönüştürülen öğrencilerimin öğrenme günlükleri. Bu makalenin sonraki üç bölümü, öğretimimi yeniden deneyimlediğim, öğretim yaklaşımımı ve stratejilerimi, öğrencilerimin uygulamamı farklı bir mercekten görme konusundaki geri bildirimleriyle eleştirel olarak yeniden incelediğim zamanı göstermektedir. Bu bölümler ayrıca öğretmenlik pratiğimi "öğretmen odaklı bir stratejiden" ya da "öğretmen odaklı" bir yaklaşımdan "öğrenci merkezli" öğrenme yaklaşımına dönüştürme çabamda karşılaştığım mücadeleyi ifade etmektedir. Bu makalenin altıncı bölümünde, araştırma yolculuğum boyunca öğrendiğim üç ana dersi düşünerek "Öğretme hikayemde ben kimim?" sorusunu yanıtlamaya çalışıyorum. Son olarak, geçmişte, en çok ihtiyaç duyduğum şeyin, referans çerçevelerimi sürekli açık tutmam gerektiğini, uygulamalarıma yönelik sorgulama yapmam gerektiğini ve duygusal olarak değişim yapmayı öğrendiğimi ele almaktayım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: anlatı sorgulaması, içsel sorgulama, öğrenci merkezli öğrenme, yükseköğretim

Introduction: Familiar landscape, different pathways

> As I made my way to the classroom, I glanced at my watch to check the time. It was almost five past eight and I was running late. Definitely would not be a good first impression to the students, I thought. It was the first Thursday of the month, and the first meeting took place in the early hour of the morning. I should have left my room earlier, I thought again, but I could not seem to compose myself since waking up that morning. I was wondering, why was I being so nervous? What was I anxious about? This was not my first time ever teaching the philosophy of education course. It was three years ago when I last conducted the course, right before my study leave. Still, I could not shake off the emotion, as I knew that I could not lie to myself nor could I ignore the feelings, however irrational they were.

(10 July 2008; personal insight based on teaching journal)

That was the first week of July 2008 and vividly illustrated are my inner thoughts recorded in my teaching journal. I was at the early stage of my fieldwork, just another stop I made along my research journey towards exploring my personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I was home and back in a familiar teaching landscape. Returning to teach again, after two year of absence due to studying abroad, I brought with me crystallised notions on researching teaching and learning experiences, within the context of university-based teacher education. This time however I had a personal goal: to confront my "puzzle of practice" (Russell & Munby, 1991, p. 164) that had long become the basis of my uncertainty towards my own teaching.

As an inquirer, I needed to come face to face with my uncertainties as a way for me to understand them as a knower: a knower of myself, of my situation, of my students, of my subject matter, and of the process of teaching and learning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1998). As I continued walking toward the classroom, I was still overly occupied with my own train of thoughts. Back in the campus, the familiar educational landscape naturally triggered my prior teaching experiences. Consequently, personal uncertainties and dilemmas that had been haunting me throughout my teaching years emerged again. Having ascertained the reasons behind them, I realised that my puzzle of practice head eventually led me to the central question of "who am I in my story of teaching?" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 3). Therefore, seeking an answer to this question became the basis of my overall

doctoral journey. I have shared the beginning of my inquisitive journey in my previous work (see Samah, 2011, 2012, 2013) in which I explained in detail the process of my learning experience during my MPhil Programme in Bristol that has transformed the way I viewed educational research, which later guided me in refining my research focus.

Embracing the terms and space of narrative inquiry

Re-visiting my teaching practice was a crucial process in the course of my research as it allowed me to re-examine the existing knowledge found in my teaching practice - in my past experience and my "present mind and body" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1). However, in preventing myself from wandering off and losing my way while exploring my teaching landscape, I needed a kind of cartographical depiction that delineates the boundaries of my exploration. I turned to narrative inquiry as my main research guidance in which I confined my exploration within "the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry – temporality, sociality and place" as the guide in navigating my whereabouts within the educational landscape I was familiar with (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007, p. 23). Assigning myself to the dual roles and responsibility of being the practitioner-researcher during the fieldwork also meant that I was working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space wherein I was located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In fact, the opening vignette of this paper partly illustrates that I was re-visiting my teaching experience in four directions of inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward. Thus, I was perpetually "in the midst" throughout the journey (ibid., p. 63). However, my doubt towards my dual roles was adequately cushioned by Etherington's (2004) words of encouragement, which suggest that to be a reflexive inquirer was "to be *aware* of our personal responses and to be able to make choices about how to use them" (p. 19, emphasis by the author). From past literature, I also learned that being reflective was the practical means to change the particular pattern of assumptions and expectations that had become part of my mind. In fact, Brookfield (1995, 2000, 2017) had consistently reminded me that to be critically reflective academics

or practitioners we need to "see our practice in new ways by standing outside ourselves and viewing what we do through four distinct lenses" (p. 28).

Hence, while narrative inquiry was the main mechanism in studying personal learning experiences, I also incorporated both the approaches of self-study and autoethnography into the method. The story of my journey of reframing my personal practical knowledge, was unfolded from "narrative (a look at a story of self), auto-ethnography (a look at self within a larger context), and self-study (a look at self in action, usually within an educational context)" (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008, p. 17). The combined approaches were significant as they "privilege self in the research design, recognising that addressing the self can contribute to our understanding of teaching and teacher education" (ibid.). The integration of these approaches made my research journey into a story of a narrative inquirer's self-study on her teaching practice, one that offered the means for making transparent her journey towards a "personal professional knowledge and growth" (Kitchen, 2005a, 2005b).

Throughout this particular phase of my fieldwork, I heavily relied on two types of field texts in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The first one was entries of my teaching/research journal, in which I wrote or recorded my thoughts and feelings related to all my teaching activities. Also included were my reflections about re-experiencing my teaching that allowed me to re-examine the process. Another kind of field text were my students' learning journals. Students were requested to reflect on their classroom learning experience and to engage in individual reflective journal writing. It was another learning activity that I attempted, as a way of promoting reflective practice in teacher professionalism among my teacher students. In facilitating students to reflect on and write about their personal classroom experience, I provided an accessible medium for them in expressing their thoughts, feelings and ideas. Each student was expected to send me weekly electronic reports during the fourteen-week academic session through email. In making sense of these data corpus, I later transformed the raw texts into research texts by applying the concept of hermeneutical cycle, during which flexibility, consistency and coherence were sought after (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

The details of the meaning making process of my research data can be found in my earlier work (see Samah, 2018).

Where the story began

> The long corridors
> Lecture rooms, halls, labs
> Room 202…the door….enter
> Sea of faces - staring (and judging?)
> I - teacher (again)?

> (10 July 2008; personal insight based on teaching journal)

It was that particular July morning again, and as I was approaching the classroom, still, I could not seem to calm myself. What I experienced was what I personally termed as "first day syndrome" – a churning, combined feelings of apprehension and excitement from my pre-assumptions. Mixed along with expectations about the course, the class and the students all jumbled up producing a swarm of butterflies in my stomach. I was a bit out of breath when I entered the classroom due to the brisk walking. Standing quite nervously in front of the room, I eventually saw them all, my students. All fifty-one of them, according to the schedule I received for the academic session of 2008/2009. As I placed my pencil case, files and a couple of books on the desk, I could not help but notice how small the room was for the students. They were seated in lines of fixed auditorium-style chairs, all facing towards me, who was standing anxiously behind an old, brown managerial desk, with a wide whiteboard on my back and a PC on the right-hand side of the desk.

Due to my nervousness, it took me sometime to collect my feelings and thoughts before I started the class. Since it was not my habit to hide myself behind the desk, composedly I walked around the desk as to be in front of it and facing the students, so that I could stand closer to them. This somehow sent the message that the class was about to start, and some of the students had already stopped talking. A few seconds were seized just to browse briefly all the faces that were staring back at me, as if they were all waiting for me to say something. When all the noises eventually subsided, I started by greeting them, and just like I always did in the past, I proceeded by welcoming them, my first-

year students, to the faculty, and congratulating them for their achievement in having successfully winning their places in the university. I then introduced myself and while doing this, I wanted them to accept me as not just as their lecturer but also one who would facilitate them with the course throughout the semester. As I continued with the ice-breaking session I could not stop realising how I struggled with my English. Nonetheless, I was not so sure whether this was due to my aggravated uneasiness caused by the sudden embarrassment of some students staring at me, or my overwhelming feeling due to my two years of absence from teaching. This made me further thought whether I had lost some of my classroom communication skills.

After completing the session, I moved on to distribute the course outline to the class. My previous experience of teaching professional courses, like philosophy of education, taught me that it was very important to help students to have clear understandings about the outline of the course that they were about to undertake. Most importantly, my aim was to make them comprehend the objectives of the course. Embodied in my teaching strategy for the course were the facilitating components of experiential based learning (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993) and reflective practice (Brookfield, 1995, 2000) as mediums of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000). Along with the active learning activities, which required "learner's active impact on learning and a learner's involvement in the learning process" (Niemi, 2002, p. 764), was students' reflective practice towards the learning activities.

The first obstacle

It was the last week of July, the fourth week of the semester, almost a month after the first meeting with my students. By that time, my email inbox was already filled with students' weekly entries. I remembered being extremely excited with the idea of receiving students' responses and feedback on how I conducted my course so far, thus permitting me to see things from another lens. However, before receiving the entries, considering that most of the students were new to the idea of reflective writing, I had spent a considerable amount of time in preparing the format for the students' journal.

I should be thankful to Moon (2006) for her "free writing techniques" (p. 101) in assisting first timers to start with a journal, which I referred to as my main guideline.

At this particular stage time, I had already revealed my researcher self to them, informing them that I was actually a PhD student whose interest was in exploring dimensions of teaching and learning within tertiary education. I explained to them that by sharing their personal learning experiences with me, they would help me, as a researcher, in grasping some understandings of the learning process that they were going through. The information that they provided in return was crucial in helping me to obtain insights into my teaching practice. By initiating these efforts, especially in creating the understandings towards the nature of my roles as both a teacher/lecturer and a researcher, I was hoping that I had sent clear messages to my students. In my view, by making clear my intentions I was conveying to them not only that I provided them with a medium, which they could express their feelings and thoughts about my teaching, but I was also open to any given ideas. I was hoping that they would see this effort as a two-way collaborative endeavour.

As I was about to start receiving entries on a daily basis, I could have prepared myself psychologically to be able to read and listen well to every word my students were trying to tell me. After all, openness is part and parcel of self-study in reframing my teaching practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). I also reminded myself back then to make sure that I completely let my guard down if I really wanted to be open to my students. This was my first attempt ever of inviting students to an activity that was a joint effort in nature. I was thinking far too much about the idea, often overly occupied with my own expectations that it would turned out the way I have wanted it to be; that students were willing to share with me their experiences and I would be willing to accept everything they would offer. However, this was not the case, or as it seemed to me, because as I opened the inbox of my email, and started to read the entries one by one, I could not help but feel trapped in a tangle of emotions. I soon found myself dreading having to read some of the students' acrid feedback and criticisms. One

entry written by a female student, and along with the other similar entries, nonetheless, left me feeling

perplexed:

> WEDNESDAY
>
> To be frankly honest, Im no(t) (t)hat excited when it comes to this class. it has nothing to
> do with Miss Narina, just that i really cannot understand why i should know about Theology,
> Philosophy, and etc etc..i know its important for us who are the 'so called future teachers' to
> know a(b)out the philosophy of education but we already learn about the meaning of
> philosophy and to be honest i think that is enough(sic) for us to know. why should we learn
> about other people point of view about philosophy? aren't they like the same after all.? I
> don't know if i can manage to score in this subject..i like to read but....i dont like to read
> about something that I think will never make sense. and besides, i still dont think that im
> managed to change my mind about me not wanting to be an educator. i still dont see myself
> being an educator one day. and thats kindda scares me a little bit because what if i am in the
> wrong programe..but i love english, i love to learn languages..damn it..
> im really really confiuse (sic)
>
> (SPL4, Entry 2; 27 July 2008; Original email content maintained)

My feeling intensified especially when she continued with her inner most thoughts about the course

when she further wrote:

> THURSDAY
>
> Today we learn about philosophy and its branches..they have weird names and something
> that i dont think i will be gladly to memorize them..i tried so hard to push myself to believed
> that this subject can be fun, but seriously i cant. But thankfuly you are the type of lecturer
> who is soft and sangat2 sabar (very, very patient)..because if you are the type who is pushy
> and annoying i will totally totally HATE THIS SUBJECT and would not even care to know
> anything about it.im the type who hate being pushed, and if that particular person is being
> nice to me i will do the same thing. So dont worry miss narina, even though i dont really
> like this subject i will try my best to do great in it.
>
> (SPL4, Entry 2; 27 July 2008; Original email content maintained)

As I finished reading her entry, I felt as if someone had literally slapped my face; I was taken aback

by her strong words. It is not my intention to dramatize the event, but truthfully, I felt that the

experience was indeed disturbing, as I had never experienced such harsh feedback from a student.

Reading this particular entry and a few others alike reaffirmed my assumptions on first year students. As a teacher/lecturer I felt that they need me to take them by the hands in making their way throughout the path of understanding. For me, the first step was to provide them with all the necessary information, all related to the basic theories and concepts the course should deliver.

Traditional lecturing, with the guidance of prepared class materials, was the strategy I implemented during the early weeks of the course. Nonetheless, through her words, it was obvious that she did not perceive my lectures, which were basically my explanations of the weekly topics in power point presentations, helped her understand the fundamentals of educational philosophy. It was also evident that the class notes that I had painstakingly emailed her and her other classmates, before my e-learning account was ready to be accessed, were not that much of a help either as she could not comprehend the content. What she had written earlier also gave me the impression that she was not the kind of student who was into reading. Knowing this was truly a let-down because I had spent so much time in readings to update the notes, simplify the words of explanations, and add relevant examples to support them. Indeed, her entries perplexed me, which led me back to the core of the questions that I had been dwelling with throughout the years of teaching. All and all, her bold confessions confirmed my biggest fear of not doing well in my part, as the sense of inadequacy, and disappointment slowly engulfing in me.

Strange however, for a moment, I was also impressed by the firmness of her thoughts and by the clarity of her feelings. She expressed, courageously, her dislike towards the course and its contents, her uncertainties and vulnerability towards her chosen profession, as well as her perceived notion towards my teacher/lecturer self. Then again, my teacher/lecturer self was telling myself that I need to take the issue of generation gap into consideration, and at this particular time I was dealing with a new breed of Malaysian students. They were the twenty-first century Malaysia's youngsters who benefited from the era of information and communication technology (ICT). These were the young adults who had been exposed to the idea of freedom of speech through online blogging or social

networking and other various state-of-the-art, internet-based mediums of expressions. In becoming a critically reflective teacher/lecturer myself, I need to consider these contemporary issues ever so openly.

Most importantly, I needed this openness to separate myself from the lecturers who had once taught me, whom in my memory did not provide me with the opportunity to speak out about the learning experience that I had gone through. Thus, I wholeheartedly accepted this student's lamentations. With the intention to convince her that she should at least give me, the course and herself another chance, I replied to her email. Sharing with her my own thoughts on the personal issues she was wrestling with, I wrote to her:

> Wow! Sounds that you really hate this subject. But you are not the only person who feels this way. Please bear with me for the time being, because I really need to explain to you all the basic concepts first. Later on, I'll show you the practicality of philosophy in classroom or school setting. Maybe then you start to understand things better.
>
> I'm impressed with the way you confront the real issue - whether teaching profession really suits you, or the other way around. When you start to have this kind of fundamental question, indirectly you are dealing with the genuine philosophical stuff. Which for me is really good, because you can connect yourself, personally with the things that we've discussed and shall discuss in class.
>
> Remember that teaching comes from the heart, and if you are not willing to be in this profession, I suggest you need to address this matter seriously. But I also believe that we can learn to love teaching, if we ask ourselves why we've been chosen to be in this path.
>
> My degrees are in psychology, and I don't have any formal trainings in teaching. I don't have a diploma in education and I don't have any teaching experience in school before. But somehow I ended up teaching in a faculty of education. I love to teach but when I started out as a lecturer, I don't know how to. But I learn how to, and until now I am still struggling with my teaching practice. How to be a good teacher? I still don't have the answer until now. This is the reason why I choose this area as the topic of my PhD research. I try to understand students' learning experiences in order to improve my teaching.
>
> Seriously, teaching requires a lot of self-study and reflections into our self or selves. I hope that I don't discourage you by telling you all these things. Keep on writing to share

with me your ups and downs in your learning journey. Look forward to read your next entries. See you tomorrow.

(29 July, 2008; personal email reply)

From my reply, I was hoping that she could relate her unsettling emotions to my own uncertainty on my own practice. Like her, I was also in the path of discovering what was best for me to be a good teacher. Moreover, I felt that I was also pleading with her to have patience towards the class, because my lectures were meant to provide understanding of the basic concepts of the course. I was a bit disappointed to learn that she did not truly understand my explanation on the details of the course during the first day of our meeting. From her entry, I then knew that some students were still not clear that the course would include both lectures and group work. This led me to think that I was still poor at giving clear classroom instructions, thus, I needed to improve my instructional knowledge (Kreber & Cranton, 2000).

Back on track

Confronting my apprehension towards receiving students' poignant but sincere feedback, then conquering my doubt on how I conducted the course so far, proved to be an emotionally alleviating experience. Consequently, such experience had brought me back on track again. Being focused created room for me to become more contemplative, and this had made me see beyond the descriptive nature of students' journal entries. Indeed, when I first browsed through the entries, they were telling me that the students wrote to share with me about what they felt and thought on what had been happening during the classes. However, at a deeper level of understanding, especially the accounts that they described, although not so much in detail, the words were enlightening at the same time. For instance, this particular student's entries had left me pondering the central question, related to students' perceptions towards the course:

> Before the class started, I tried to revise about yesterday's lesson. Although I've been reading it through for nearly four times, but I still don't get it. Now I know why my seniors said that philosophy is really abstract. I just start to wonder why it is so hard for me to learn philosophy.

That is why I am hoping that Miss could include more examples while explaining to the class about philosophy instead of asking us things that we don't even know. This thing is getting harder each time. The more I learn, the more I get confused. What am I supposed to do now? Please help me…

(SPL13, Entry 2; 24 July 2008; Original email content maintained)

Allowing myself to comprehend the message she tried to convey had made me conclude that most students viewed the course content as abstract and confusing hence most students "could not see it". This came to me as no surprise as I had received similar responses from the earlier batch of students during my preliminary study conducted in the previous year. Moreover, these personal entries echoed the same arguments behind such acknowledgements. The underlying reason for this particular view was student's unfamiliarity towards the course content. A number of students were saying that they found the early topics were difficult to understand as most of the terms and concepts introduced were new to them. In addition, due to their surface understandings, both theoretically and conceptually, most students could not foresee the applications of the philosophical concepts in themselves as teacher students, nor its practicality within the classroom setting. For some students, they could not seem to establish the connections that bridge the concepts with practice. In order to develop such connections, these students were expecting my assistance in providing them with concrete examples that they could physically observe, which were similar to laboratory experiments usually carried out during science courses.

With more than a hundred entries received to date, my researcher consciousness was informing my teacher/lecturer self that the combinations of students' responses were rich sources of feedback to my practice that I must seriously consider. The following journal entry, for instance, provided me with the insight into my overall teaching performance throughout the past three weeks of the semester:

This week, Ms Narina have adopted a new methodology in teaching. Instead of using power point alone, Ms also gave description by drawing a mind map in the white board.I found that the mind map helps a lot than using power point because i will take a longer time to

understand what is shown on the screen. Comparing to the mind map it serve purpose in making lessons more enjoyable and i can understand it at a faster speed….

(SPK7, Entry 3; 31 July 2008; Original email content maintained)

From this entry and other similar entries, I gathered bits and pieces of implicit, yet constructive opinions, ideas, and suggestions students were offering me, some of which were indeed ingenuous. In some way or another, these students were sharing positive inputs with me, especially in finding ways of formulating teaching approaches that accommodate their own expectations towards the course. I was particularly delighted with my students' feedback, as they informed me that the reflective exercise that I had eagerly encouraged my students to participate in was able to trigger the thoughts of some students on what teaching is basically about. I believed this newly introduced approach was also capable in creating the consciousness towards efforts in improving teaching as part of the professional development. This particular entry additionally convinced me that I should continuously employ the same exercise in my future teaching practice.

From these responses, which I believed were based on my students' keen observations on my classroom teaching, I also learned that accommodating the students' learning, which was in this case, the cognitive styles and learning preferences of both verbal and visual learners (Kozhevnikov, Hegarty & Mayer, 2002; Mayer & Massa, 2003), was crucial. This feedback had also taught me to acknowledge the fact that there are individual differences in sensory-based skills that students "are able to encode and represent information in multiple ways, and the activation of the multiple representations increases memory, learning and achievement" (An & Carr, 2017, p. 412). In realising this, I felt that I should not depend entirely on lecturing as my main teaching strategy, despite being aware of its effectiveness by discerning when and how lectures were appropriately utilised, or as Ramsden (2003) suggested, by knowing exactly "the underlying approach adopted" (p.148).

Who am I in my story of teaching?

Looking back on this particular episode, from the earliest phase of my fieldwork, the experience of coming back to teach an educational foundation course to a classroom of undergraduate students had

been worthwhile. The beginning of the fieldwork journey was also a crucial phase as it was the platform, from which I took the first few steps in becoming a critically reflective practitioner and a reflexive researcher. While attempting to transform my teaching practice - from a "teacher-focused strategy" or a "teacher-directed", into one that promoted "student-centred" learning approach, I was also in the midst of rediscovering my personal and professional selves. Often, I kept asking myself: "Who am I in my story of teaching?" and it eventually dawned upon me that at the early part of my research fieldwork, I was still struggling to make sense of my personal practical knowledge. However, in hindsight, there were several lessons learned throughout this experience.

Firstly, being critical to the class preparation and implementation of my lesson plan for the course had made me challenge my idealistic belief on my practice. However, it was during the time of managing the first batch of students' weekly learning journals that my feelings and thoughts about my practice had been further challenged. Reading and analysing the manifest and latent contents of each student's journal entry had paved the way towards a new dimension in revising and updating my personal practical knowledge. Definitely, my students' written feedback that was based on their classroom learning experiences had provided me with new lenses through which I progressed in transforming the way of seeing my educational landscape that I thought was so familiar. Truly, I found it propitious to employ and utilise students' weekly journals entries to both aspects of my pedagogical and research knowledge. As Brookfield (1995, 2000, 2017) suggested, students' responses and feedback serve as the alternative lens in turning me into a critically reflective teacher/lecturer, which I truly agree with him.

Secondly, this particular stage of my research journey was also the time when I first experienced negotiating between my dual roles. To begin with, it was truly a relief for my researcher self to discover that most students voluntarily wrote to me and provided me with all the valuable feedback that I had eagerly anticipated. In addition, I found my researcher self enthusiastically welcomed all the journal entries and it did not bother me whether these comments were positive or negative. While

my researcher self-seemed to be very pleased with such encouraging outcome, my practitioner self on the other hand reacted differently. This was especially during the time I received the negative feedback. I still could not simply brush aside the strong statements and poignant points made by the students. In a way, the harsh criticisms adversely affected my teacher/lecturer self-esteem. Experiencing such paradox somehow made me realised that I was personally engaging in my own reflexivity as a researcher. Looking back, I now very much agree with Berger (2015) when he said that reflexivity is "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220). Most importantly, such experience during my research journey had helped me in embracing myself as a narrative inquirer. I can really understand the meaning of it all, even years after, when Clandinin and Connelly (2004) said, "For us, narrative inquiry is a multi-dimensional exploration of experience involving temporality (past, present and future), interaction (personal and social), and location (place)" (p. 576).

Thirdly, I had learned that revisiting my practice during the fieldwork would mean unpacking, not only my teaching but also my frames of reference that were specifically the basis of my puzzle of practice. Mezirow (2003) described these frames of reference, often problematic, as "sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)". Little did I know that the overwhelming feelings, thoughts and assumptions triggered by the strong comments by a number of students actually misled me. I realise now that my abrupt decision to change my lecturing style for the course at that time, with the intention to improve it, was all based on the premise "I had to do this" or "I needed to do that"; "I should have done this" or "I should not had done that". Moreover, my concern with the students' inability to comprehend the earlier topics of the course was due to my lecturing style in class. At this stage, I failed to caution myself that by concentrating too much on how to organise, structure and present the content that was easier for my students to understand still positioned me as a "teacher-centred" (Lindblom-Ylanne et al., 2006, p. 285) lecturer.

At this point, I believed I had let my traditionally-bounded teacher/lecturer self-triumphed, yet again, convincing myself that I was the one who should shoulder the responsibility for my students' understandings of the content. I was again overpowered by my ideal of an effective lecturer, which was deeply grounded in my traditional teacher role. As a Malay Muslim lecturer, I firmly believed that I was the *mu'allim* (Huda et al., 2016), who was also the learned *budiman* (Lim, 2003a, 2003b), the bearer of responsibility towards acquiring and imparting knowledge to my students. Reversing back to this traditional role, I was in fact on the verge of being consumed by my old "frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58).

Conclusion: Insights from my experience

I know now that in order for me to further explore my personal practical knowledge, narrative inquiry has not only become part of my main guideline for my future research, but I also need to acknowledge it as a "research methodology with an underlying ontology of narrative conceptions of experience" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 24). In relation to this, I also need to constantly remind myself that for me to truly embrace narrative inquiry, I need to understand that "a narrative ontology implies that experiences are continuously interactive, resulting in changes in both people and the contexts in which they interact" (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013, p. 576). Through narrative inquiry, I am confident that I could constantly challenge my frames of reference and trying my best to make it "more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58), as I am aware that my assumptions towards my practice had the potential to be transformed. In other words, confronting my habitual mindsets would mean, as Brookfield (1995) proposed, allowing myself to stand outside my practice and see what I do in a wider perspective. In doing so, I also learned recently that I was actually engaged in pedagogical reasoning, i.e. "the thinking that underpins informed professional practice" (Loughran, 2019, p. 4) during which I explore and critically articulate the reasoning behind what I had actually done for my teaching, especially within the context of teacher education in Malaysia. As Clandinin (2012) put it, "it is important that we

continue to inquire deeply and narratively into who we are, and are becoming. It is in this way that we can more fully, and more thoughtfully, engage with the preservice teachers who come to learn with us about who they are, and are becoming, as teachers" (p. 148); a view which I wholly agree.

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