

# TEACHER'S JOURNALS AS A MEANS TO RECORD TEACHERS' PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Intrira Kulavichain

Faculty of Arts, Eastern Asia University  
[in\\_junchan@hotmail.com](mailto:in_junchan@hotmail.com)

Kitcha Thepsiri

Department of Language Studies,  
School of Liberal Arts, KMUTT  
[kitcha.the@kmutt.ac.th](mailto:kitcha.the@kmutt.ac.th)

## Abstract

Teacher's journals have been widely used in the field of applied linguistics to raise teachers' awareness and to see teachers' attitudes and beliefs. This research aims to investigate how trainee teachers reflect upon problems and solutions derived from formulating reflective journals. Teachers' journal entries and semi-structured interviews were instruments used to answer the research question, "How do teachers' problems and solutions change during a semester?" In analyzing textual data, a thematic content analysis approach was utilized to identify problems and solutions frequently mentioned in the journals. These journals were later explored and illustrated by extracting the highlighted points and obvious keywords to see changes and improvement during a period of one semester's teaching practice. The data gained from the interview was used to support or clarify any ambiguity in the journals. Lesson planning was discovered to be the most frequently occurring problem. To minimize this, regular consultations with the supervisors before the actual teaching and developing a lesson plan with the co-teacher to see other points of view would be helpful. The outcomes revealed positive perspectives of using teacher's journals together with highlighting crucial problems were necessary for enhancing teaching performance. In addition, the outcomes also provided helpful implications for both trainee teachers and supervisors in using journals more effectively.

**Keywords :** journal writing, reflection, trainee teachers, awareness.

การใช้การเขียนบันทึกของครูเพื่อเป็นวิธีการบันทึกและแก้ปัญหาของครู

บทคัดย่อ:

มีการใช้บันทึกครูอย่างแพร่หลายในสาขาวิชาภาษาศาสตร์ประยุกต์เพื่อให้ครูตระหนักถึงทัศนคติและความเชื่อ การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาว่าวิธีการฝึกอบรมครูสะท้อนปัญหาและแนว ทางแก้ไขที่ได้รับจากการบันทึกสะท้อนความรู้สึก บันทึกของครูและการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่ง โครงสร้างเป็นเครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการตอบคำถามการวิจัยว่า "ปัญหาและการแก้ปัญหของครูเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างไรในช่วงหนึ่งเทอม" ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลที่เป็นข้อความ ใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาเพื่อ ระบุปัญหาและการแก้ปัญหาที่พบบ่อยในบันทึก ในภายหลัง ได้มีการศึกษาบันทึกเหล่านี้ โดยการสำรวจจุดที่ขีดใต้ไว้และคำหลักเพื่อดูการเปลี่ยนแปลงและการพัฒนาในช่วงเวลาของการเรียนการสอนหนึ่งภาคการศึกษา ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการสัมภาษณ์ถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อสนับสนุนหรือชี้แจงความคลุมเครือในบันทึก การวางแผนบทเรียนเป็นปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นบ่อยที่สุด เพื่อลดปัญหานี้การปรึกษาหารือกับอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาก่อนที่จะสอนจริงและการพัฒนาแผนการสอนร่วมกับครูคนอื่นเพื่อดูจุดอื่น ๆ ในมุมมองอื่น ๆ จะเป็นประโยชน์ ผลการศึกษาแสดงผลที่บวกของการใช้บันทึกครูร่วมกับการเน้นปัญหาที่สำคัญเป็นสิ่งจำเป็นสำหรับการสอนมีประสิทธิภาพ นอกจากนี้ การศึกษาแสดงผลยังมีประโยชน์สำหรับครูผู้ฝึกสอนและอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาในการใช้บันทึกอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพมากขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: การเขียนบันทึก การไตร่ตรอง ครูฝึกสอน ความตระหนัก

## Introduction

For inexperienced teachers, having to encounter numerous problems in class is inevitable. They have to face several problem areas, such as using effective language during teaching, balancing the whole instructional program, evaluating students, etc (Thielen, 1993). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to develop their capabilities and skills needed to overcome these obstacles and to be able to solve similar problems. One method generally used in resolving problems and improving teaching skills is keeping a journal. Bailey (1990:218 cited in Gebhard, 1999) indicated that a teaching journal can be a place to criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions. Bailey also thought that in reworking, rethinking, and interpreting the journal entries, teachers can gain more powerful insights into their own classroom behaviour. Miller (2004:41) also affirmed that a teacher's journal is an excellent way to monitor one's teaching practice in a systematic but flexible way.

In many teacher training programs, writing a teacher's journal appeared to be a significant component that novice teachers were required to do. A large number of studies regarding teacher's journals have been conducted in order to promote teacher development in terms of raising teachers' awareness or to see teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Jarvis, 1992; Halbach, 1999; Yahya, 2000; Debreli, 2011). In much of the literature, there is little research concerning how teacher's problems and solutions change over a period of time. Therefore, this study is an endeavor to focus on problems and solutions reflected in teachers' journals to see the changes of teachers' problem solving methods in class. The expected outcomes of this study may provide possible approaches for teaching development in terms of creating suitable lesson plans, balancing the use of L1 and L2, and giving effective instructions, all of which teachers may gain from keeping journals.

This small-scaled research study is conducted through teachers' journals formulated in a teacher training course which requires participants to keep regular journals on their teaching. The paper will explore journal writing by three trainee teachers who are MA students in an applied linguistics program at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). The study aims to investigate how a trainee teacher's problems and solutions change throughout the semester.

### **Literature Review**

There are numerous approaches in teacher education. One important approach is viewing teacher learning as reflective practice (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Also, it was asserted that reflective practice is based on the assumption that teachers learn from experience throughout focused reflection (Schon, 1983; Wallace, 1991; Richard & Lockhart, 1996 cited in Richards and Farrell, 2005). Reflection is viewed as the process of examination of experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one's teaching, practices, and routines (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Posner (2000) defines reflective teaching as a practice that helps novice teachers to act in deliberate and intentional ways, to devise new ways of teaching rather than being a slave to tradition, and to interpret new experiences from a fresh perspective. For Bartlett (1990 cited in Mok, 1994), reflective teaching means moving beyond a primary concern with teaching techniques and 'how to' questions, and asking 'what' and 'why' questions for broader educational

purposes. Consequently, 'reflective practice' means a learning which comes from teaching experiences through reflection. In addition, this kind of learning appears to be beneficial to novice teachers in order to raise awareness and to facilitate their teaching development.

Furthermore, a number of experts pointed out that teachers should be critical, empowered, capable of independent thought, and aware of their own conceptualizations of teaching (Berlak and Berlak, 1987; Duffy, 1994; Smyth, 1987 cited in Watson Todd, 2004). From this point of view, it becomes necessary for teachers to be aware of their weaknesses and strengths. Pennington (1995 cited in Farrell, 2003:14) mentioned that teachers' change and development require an awareness of a need to change. Moreover, Bartlett (1990 cited in Panphet, 2003:3) stated that development in terms of teaching techniques is considered as the most important means of improving classroom practice of teachers. Also, he affirmed that "... the teacher may achieve her goal in improving her teaching through reflection".

For the above reasons, reflective journals have been widely used by a large number of many action researchers, teacher trainers, and theorists to promote the thinking and learning process (Francis, 1995; Yahya, 2000; Hull et al., 2004; Watson Todd, 2004).

Richards and Lockhart (1994) declared that teachers fail to capture events which can help them to develop a deeper understanding of teaching unless they keep reflective journals which can serve as a basis for critical reflection of their teaching processes. Bartlett (1990:209 cited in Yahya, 2000), proposed the following suggestions for keeping a journal in the classroom:

Our writing will be about our routine and conscious actions in the classroom; conversations with pupils; critical incidents in a lesson; our personal lives as teachers; our beliefs about teaching; events outside the classroom that influence our teaching; our views about language teaching and learning.

It is clearly seen from the above extract that journal writing describes the activities taking place in class including important situations, beliefs and

attitudes toward teaching and learning, and other factors that affect teacher's teaching performance and classroom practice.

Based on Hull et al., (2004 cited in Thepsiri, 2007) the teachers' journals were formulated during regular intervals throughout the semester to reveal teachers' opinions on what they did, what problems they faced, as well as what resolutions they made to deal with the problems.

Schmidt (1985 cited in Yahya, 2000) found that teacher trainees who kept teaching journals expressed many positive benefits, such as the awareness that reflection as a personal learning tool can make them become better teachers; the examination of their mistakes documented in their journals enables them to brainstorm strategies to prevent future problems; and the realization that coming to grips with personal thoughts, frustrations, and concerns in the reflective process is therapeutic. Also, Thielen (1993) stated that the steps to reflective practice seem to be connected with the development of independence in the trainee teachers. Thus, writing a teacher's journal becomes an effective means of promoting teacher development because it is essential for teachers to be aware of their problems and solutions together with developing their teaching skills and abilities.

In spite of these apparent advantages, there are some problems with journal writing, i.e. validity and reliability (Hull et al., 2004). Many studies using journal writing are frequently conducted on small numbers of subjects; therefore, there is an obvious threat to external validity. Furthermore, numerous methods of gathering data may be adopted, and the journal data might be used to complement the additional data. In some cases, the data derived from journal entries might not be compatible or even may be counteractive with those of the other methods. Despite some unavoidable drawbacks, Schumann (1980), Matsumoto (1987), and Numrich (1996 cited in Hull et al., 2004) have indicated that, if many subjects are used and journal data are measured in some way, the results seem to be more generalizable to other novice teachers than if just one self-observational study is done.

Another probable disadvantage of journal study is its reliability. The researcher cannot be certain that the subjects will reflect what actually happened. It becomes impossible to be sure of what goes on at an

unconscious or highly automated level of processing. Debreli (2011) says problems regarding the interpretation of some of the diary data were faced. The recording of irrelevant information and the lack of meaning in participants' written accounts had to be elaborated and developed with the interviews for further investigation. In addition, the unreliability of a journal can be resolved by sharing and discussing the journal with their supervisors and co-teacher to add further issues. Doing this might enable writing a journal to be more reliable because sometimes it seems difficult for the writer to cover the whole points in her journal.

Evidently, writing a journal can identify problems in class. Based on the finding of Pennington (1995), teacher change and development requires an awareness of a need to change. This awareness for change can be brought about by reflection. In sum, journal writing assists trainee teachers to develop a professional approach towards learning, and also teaches them to be professionals (Hull et al., 2004.).

From the aforementioned information, it could be concluded that reflective practice came from the notion that teachers learn from their own experience through reflection. Also, reflective practice can bring awareness which enables trainee teachers to develop their teaching abilities as well as promote autonomous learning. For these reasons, the use of teacher's journals appears to be extremely useful for trainee teachers, and is supported by a lot of classroom research.

## **Methodologies**

### *Subjects*

The subjects of this study were three trainee teachers with no previous teaching experience who taught English at a secondary school in Bangkok. They all took a course called 'Teaching Techniques in Practice' which required them to teach English for two hours a week for 15 weeks. An additional requirement of the teaching practice course was that the trainees must keep regular journals on their teaching. The subjects were selected on a

voluntary basis, i.e. the ones who were willing to participate in this research by allowing the researchers to examine their journals.

### *Instruments*

Two research instruments were used in this study: teacher's journal entries and semi-structured interviews. Teacher's journals were kept every week throughout the semester in order to record the problems and solutions in the subjects' classes. Altogether, there were about ten journal entries from each subject. Before writing their journals, the subjects were given a guideline about what to write in the journals. For example, their journals should contain problems, causes of those problems, solutions and future plans.

Another instrument was a semi-structured interview to find out in-depth information to support the data gained from teacher's journals and to clarify any ambiguity in the journals. According to Burns (1999:120) and McDonough and McDonough (1997: 183), semi-structured interview should be opened-ended and thus could provide much greater flexibility. In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher generally used prepared guided questions or alternatively had some overall direction in mind. The questions such as 'Why did the same problem occur even though the subjects realized their problems?', and 'Did writing teacher's journals facilitate the subjects to focus more on problems and to develop teaching performance?' were then used, in no fixed order, to provide the underlying focus for the interview.

### **Data analysis**

#### *Data from teacher's journals*

In analyzing textual data, a thematic content analysis approach was utilized to identify problems that frequently occurred throughout the course. Stemler (2001) asserted that content analysis is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. Holsti (1969:14 cited in Stemler, 2001) offered a broad definition that content analysis was "any technique for making

inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages".

The problems and solutions derived from teachers' journals were divided into three parts in which the progress of each trainee teacher was analyzed chronologically. And then, the highlighted points and obvious keywords were extracted in order to see the individual development from the beginning to the end. In addition, the problems of the three subjects were compared and contrasted to see similarities and differences in order to arrive at a conclusion.

#### *Data from semi-structured interview*

Semi-structured interviews were utilized to support the data from the teachers' journals. In order to do this, the interview extracts related to the data in the teachers' journals were selected to see what they had gained from writing a teacher's journal, particularly how much they had changed as a result of their teaching reflected through their journals.

#### **Data Presentation and Interpretation**

This section aims at presenting the findings of the study gathered from the teacher's journals and the semi-structured interviews to answer the research question, "**How do teachers' problems and solutions change during a semester?**"

In order to analyze the data more efficiently, the keywords taken from the teachers' journals were categorized into ten categories according to **Watson Todd (1997)** as follows:

1. **Board use** → layout, position of the writing, the use of board, screen, fonts
2. **Lesson planning** → step, activity, stage, designing the lesson, exercise, planning, activity objective, task, alternative plan, dividing the lesson



3. **Feedback and error treatment** → giving feedback, error correction, recast, stating utterance, praising
4. **Questioning techniques** → questions, questioning strategies, repeating, rephrasing, redirecting, asking supplementary questions, directing of questions
5. **Instructions** → repeating or rephrasing instructions, demonstration, eliciting
6. **Teacher's language** → LI, L2, mixture of LI and L2, balance of LI and L2
7. **Teaching approach** → inductive and deductive approach
8. **Timing** → time limitation, time management, planned time, pacing of the lesson
9. **Classroom management** → controlling class, movement during lesson, student interaction, student behavior, student involvement
10. **Explanations** → explaining language points, contexts, goals, classroom vocabulary, the use of example, simplifying or clarifying language

To clarify the findings, the extracts below illustrate the examples of the problem of board use and lesson planning.

“...When writing on it, I used an identifiable size of letters, but I felt *the layout or positions* of those letters were not attractive adequately; instead, it looked bit messy.”

(Subject 1: Board use)

“...This teaching was based on *exercise*, not *activity*, so the students cannot feel the sense of competition.”

(Subject 2: Lesson plan)

After categorizing the problems, the solutions were listed from the subjects' journals. Later on, the findings were summarized as in Table I. This table includes the problems and solutions of each subject from the beginning to the end of the semester.

**Table I**

Summary of the three subjects' problems and solutions

Time	Subject 1		Subject 2		Subject 3	
	Problem	Solution	Problem	Solution	Problem	Solutions
<b>Beginning</b> (Weeks 1-5)	Board use Lesson planning Feedback Questioning techniques Instructions Teacher's language Teaching approach	Consider importance Have alternative plan Recast and slow teaching Select relevant questions Elicit instructions from Ss Use mixed language Consider contents	Board use Lesson planning Questioning techniques Teacher's language Teaching approach Timing Classroom management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add conclusion in PPT</li> <li>Use group work</li> <li>Rephrase or prompt question</li> <li>Give instructions before task</li> <li>Use simple English</li> <li>Mix inductive &amp; deductive</li> <li>Redirect questions</li> <li>Observe Ss' behavior</li> </ul>	Board use Lesson planning Questioning techniques Instructions Teacher's language Timing Classroom management Explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the necessity</li> <li>Have alternative plan</li> <li>Prioritize questions</li> <li>Rehearse instructions</li> <li>Use more L2</li> <li>Manage time properly</li> <li>Ask Ss to interact more</li> <li>Check understanding</li> </ul>
<b>Middle</b> (Weeks 6-10)	Board use Lesson planning Teacher's language Timing	Use PPT Use relevant examples Use mixed language Use mixed language & easy L2	Board use Lesson planning Instructions Teacher's language Explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use group work</li> <li>Give instructions before task</li> <li>Reduce amount of L2</li> <li>Clarify classroom vocabulary</li> </ul>	Lesson planning Instructions Timing Explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balance the contents</li> <li>Demonstrate more</li> <li>Speak faster</li> <li>Give more clues</li> </ul>
<b>End</b> (Weeks 11-15)	Lesson planning Teacher's language Classroom management	Use relevant example & theme Wait for L2 answers. Pay attention to weak Ss	Lesson planning Feedback Instructions Teacher's language Explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt topic</li> <li>Use various strategies</li> <li>Pilot instructions with others Try to use L2</li> <li>Provide more context</li> </ul>	Lesson planning Questioning techniques Explanations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reorder the contents</li> <li>Ask specific questions</li> <li>Check understanding</li> </ul>

As preliminary data, there were apparent changes during the semester. The problems of the three subjects were elaborated. At the beginning of the semester, there were numerous problems found in their journals. These problems gradually decreased in the middle of the semester, and finally some problems were solved at the end.

In order to analyze the data more thoroughly, the frequency of each problem throughout the semester documented in Table I was counted as shown in Table 2. The purpose was to compare and contrast similarities and differences of problems and solutions among the subjects.

**Table 2** The frequency of each problem of the three subjects throughout the semester

Problems	Subject I	Subject 2	Subject 3	Total
Board use	6	2	1	9
Lesson planning	6	6	5	17
Feedback & error treatment	2	1	-	3
Questioning techniques	1	1	3	5
Instructions	1	3	3	7
Teacher's language	3	3	1	7
Teaching approach	1	1	-	2
Timing	1	2	2	5
Classroom management	1	2	1	4
Explanations	-	3	3	6
<b>Total</b>	22	24	19	

Overall, during the semester, each subject encountered numerous problems differently. Board use and lesson planning were mentioned more frequently by the first subject whereas lesson planning was the most frequently mentioned problem by the second and third subjects. The second subject specifically mentioned the most number of problems in her journal compared to her two counterparts. The third subject, on the other hand, mentioned fewer problems but she faced some crucial teaching problems such as lesson planning, questioning techniques, instructions, and explanations. Based on the data derived from Tables I and 2, the first four most frequent problems--board use, lesson planning, instructions, and teacher's language--were analyzed in accordance with solutions, and details were interpreted in depth as follows.

### *Board use*

According to table 2, board use was one of the most important problems for the first subject. He was aware of this problem since the beginning of the semester and could identify the cause, i.e. the position of his writing on the board. Then, he suggested a solution that seemed to be practical.

“For the solution, I should plan to write. First, I should think of level of importance. For example, form and usage of the grammar rule should be written on the right side, while elicited vocabulary should be written on the left side of the board.”

“I think I should write slower than the previous week so that I can adjust a good layout of the board as I am writing.”

#### **(Subject I: Beginning of the semester)**

However, in the middle of the semester, this problem was still happening. He felt that his solutions were ineffective; therefore, new solutions were employed.

“For this problem, I have stated many ways to solve it but they do not help me effectively. The new way to solve this problem is to use Power Point if I have a chance next time.”

#### **(Subject I: Middle of the semester)**

After using PowerPoint, though the problem of board use improved considerably, there was, however, a minor problem which was the obviousness of font color. In the following classes, the first subject realized more about this point and solved it by underlining important words when he would like to emphasize them.

It is evident that when his former solutions could not be solved effectively, he tried some new solutions to seek the most suitable ones. Finally, this problem was eradicated at the end.

For the second subject, PowerPoint was also utilized, but it needed to be improved because there was no conclusion for the students. For this reason, it was quite time consuming to write a conclusion in the first class. In later classes, this problem was solved.

As for the third subject, she prepared too many PowerPoint slides and some were not necessary. Then, when she had to prepare PowerPoint slides again, she would consider designing slides more carefully.

All in all, it can be interpreted that for trainee teachers who have problems writing on the board, using PowerPoint appears to be one interesting solution. PowerPoint can make classes smoother; nevertheless, teachers have to be careful when planning contents in slides as well as selecting appropriate font colors.

### *Lesson planning*

Based on the analysis of problems discovered in the subjects' journals, it could be seen that lesson planning was the most frequent problem mentioned throughout the semester. Although the three subjects realized their problems and made an effort to find suitable solutions since the beginning, this problem still could not be diminished.

For example: the first subject faced the problem of lesson planning from the beginning. He identified that the examples used did not match the theme of the lesson; therefore, he should have used examples that were relevant to the theme. Nevertheless, at the end of the semester, the same problem happened again and the solution was quite similar to the first one. The extracts below illustrate the first subject's solutions of lesson planning during the semester.

“Next time, I think I should not use isolated examples to show Ss. I should find an example that relevant to the topic or theme... In addition, if it is difficult to find a relevant example, I should adapt or adjust vocabulary to match with the theme or topic.”

(Subject I: Beginning of semester)

“After teaching I thought that I forgot to set up a theme for this lesson. Still, I used Isolated examples again... From this week, I will remember that whenever I create a lesson plan, the theme and context are very important. Firstly, I will find a theme that is easy to use with the grammar rule that I am requested to teach.”

(Subject I: End of semester)

The second subject realized that her class lacked a variety of activities since the beginning; therefore, she assigned the students to do group work. Nonetheless, after a few weeks this problem still occurred, and the similar problem and solution were discovered in her journals.

The interviews revealed the reason why the same problem occurred even though the subjects realized their problems. One subject mentioned a remarkable reason.

“It is true that writing teacher’s journals makes me realize many problems in my class, but I sometime forget about it. If I do not go back to read my journals in previous classes, the same problem may happen again.”

Moreover, the interviews revealed that the subjects realized that the problem of lesson planning happened frequently in their class. They thought that this problem was diminished; they could make changes and solve the problems to a certain degree. But lesson planning is quite a large area. One of them declared that

“When I could solve one problem, other problems about lesson planning always happened later. I think that experienced teachers will be able to handle this appropriately.”

Thus, it may be interpreted that lesson planning seems to be one of the most important problems for trainee teachers who lack teaching experience. In other words, lesson planning becomes a necessary focus for trainee teachers in ELT courses.

### *Instructions*

Giving instructions is another crucial problem for trainee teachers. For the second subject, giving instructions was the problem which remained unsolved at the end of the semester.

The second subject pointed out that at the beginning giving instructions was one of her problems. At first, the instructions were given after students had started the activity, so the students kept focusing on the activity and ignored the teacher's instructions. Thus, she realized that clear instructions had to be given before allowing students to perform activities. Nonetheless, after a few weeks this problem still occurred, and similar solutions were mentioned in her journals. In her teaching, the students misunderstood the objective of the activity because she did not clearly state what they were going to do. The following extracts refer to the examples of the second subjects' solutions.

"Next time, we should make sure that we give instruction clearly before launching activity."

#### **(Subject 2: Beginning of semester)**

"...I can see from this teaching that the objective of doing activity must be cleared to students as well, not just only for teacher. Therefore, next time I will tell the objective of activity with clear instruction before doing any activity."

#### **(Subject 2: Middle of semester)**

The interviews revealed that the subjects realized that sometimes the same solutions could not be used to solve the same problems. Even though they thought that their solutions were good and suitable, it did not work in some teaching situations. One subject explained by giving this reason:

"Although we realized our problems and were aware when teaching, in real class we cannot do as we want because sometime we might be excited and forget all. ... Maybe, I need to have more experience to handle these problems effectively."

It might be concluded that writing teacher's journals can raise awareness of problems which affects positive changes of trainee teachers in teaching performance. Sometimes problems cannot be solved by just realizing; direct experiences derived from classroom practice are necessary as well.

Additionally, the solutions that emerged from the subjects' journals were useful for facilitating classroom performance. The second and third subjects suggested an identical solution to improve their instructions, i.e. rehearse instructions with others.

"As a less-experience trainee teacher, I should practice giving instructions to someone else and see if he/she can understand or not."

"I see that students were confused because they did not know what they have done and what they are going to do next. So, I will try to rehearse giving instructions and plan the lesson continually."

For teachers, it seems to be easy to understand their own instructions because they know all the instructions and think that they are clear enough. However, students might feel that these instructions are difficult and too complicated. Therefore, rehearsing instructions with others and asking for comments and suggestions would be one helpful way to improve this problem.

### *Teacher's language*

For the problem of teacher's language, using L1 or L2 is one major factor which affects students' understanding. This problem was found with the first and second subjects since the beginning of the semester to the end. There was a noticeable point in the subjects' journals, i.e. at the beginning of the semester, when the first and the second subjects stated that they would try to use more L2 because they thought L2 was useful to facilitate students' language proficiency. Conversely, in the middle of the semester, they thought that they should reduce the amount of L2 use. The interviews revealed that in using L2, the subjects would consider students' interaction and understanding. One of them said:

"Many theories suggested that we should use L2 as much as we can. But it looked impossible in real teaching when I used a lot of L2, my



students would not pay attention to class. So my proportion of L1/L2 was quite different according to students' understanding and interaction."

Hence, in using L1 or L2, teachers need to consider their students' level of English competence. If students are at a lower level, the language of the teacher should not be too complicated. A mixture of L1 and L2 would be suitable to make a class run more smoothly.

Additionally, there were a few problems which happened only at the end of the semester, e.g. classroom management for the first subject, and feedback and error treatment for the second subject. The subjects might not be able to discover appropriate solutions in a short time. It could be concluded that in real teaching a variety of problems can possibly happen all the time. Therefore, hands-on experience would be a crucial factor in solving problems.

There were some additional points to ponder from the interviews which revealed additional issues in using teacher's journals as follows.

The interview results showed a positive consequence when recording problems and solutions in teachers' journals. It revealed that when the subjects realized their problems, they felt more enthusiastic to make change. One of them mentioned,

"The more I read my journals, the more I want to minimize the problems...."

Thus; we might say that writing teacher's journals appears to be a factor which can facilitate changes for teaching performance. That is, in reflecting oneself the writer can put an emphasis on thinking about mistakes and trying to improve her teaching.

Moreover, the subjects believed that writing teacher's journals is a good strategy to record problems and solutions which become useful in planning subsequent classes. Also, writing journals will be beneficial to teachers if they know how to write reflective journals and analyze the problems for suitable solutions:

“It would be useless if you just describe what you have done in your class without analyzing anything ... you have to analyze your problems critically as well as try to think of good solutions.”

In addition, the subjects stated that feedback from supervisors and the co-teacher appeared to be another factor which was very helpful in solving their problems. Because they are inexperienced teachers, they sometimes could not evaluate their teaching accurately without help from peers or supervisors. They explained that:

“If I did not get feedback from supervisor or co-teacher, I will see problems only from my point of view.”

Therefore, in order to write effective teacher's journals to solve problems and improve teaching, it is important to think critically about the cause of the problems. The use of specific and practical solutions would be beneficial to make changes in class. Furthermore, writing journals will be more valuable if teachers discuss or consult important issues with supervisors and co-teachers.

## Discussion

Based on the outcomes of this study, the data from teachers' journals and semi-structured interviews will be discussed as follows.

Firstly, writing teachers' journals is beneficial to record problems and solutions. It allows trainee teachers to reflect on their problems critically in order to find the best solutions in improving their teaching performance. Conversely, it would be less helpful if teachers do not come back to review their journals. After a few weeks, they might forget those problems and the same ones may happen again. Therefore, it is significant for trainee teachers to review their journals continuously. Even though writing teachers' journals assists trainee teachers to be more aware of their problems, sometimes it is rather difficult to implement the solutions written in the journals because of several variables such as excitement or commotion in the classroom. From the above reasons, this might be one limitation of teachers' journals. Some problems cannot be solved in a short period or in one semester; experiences gained through practice is essential as well. Writing

a teacher's journal is not the only way to solve problems in the classroom. However, we can conclude that writing teachers' journals brings about a positive impact on both teaching and learning. Writing teachers' journals not only help teachers identify problems, but it also enables trainee teachers to realize their development as well as to encourage themselves for further improvement in future teaching.

Secondly, the principal usefulness of writing teachers' journals is to raise teachers' awareness. According to the results of this study, writing teachers' journals can benefit trainee teachers in focusing on the areas which have to be improved. Due to more awareness in teaching, it gives teachers the opportunity to examine their successes and failures in a real context. It seems to be beneficial to use teacher's journals as a means to record problems and solutions for self development. When these problems are frequently raised, it would enable trainee teachers to be more enthusiastic to change. Schön (1983) suggested that professional understandings are theoretic and rooted in action. Changes in professional awareness come if the awareness is situated in practice, a kind of reflection-in-action. Similar to Francis's (1995) statement, reflection helps teachers to observe, think through, reconstruct, and deeply understand the process of personal theory building.

Thirdly, writing teachers' journals affects positive change of problems and solutions in class if teachers are conscious about writing reflective journals. For this reason, it is necessary for trainee teachers to be trained on writing journals before assigning them to write. Moreover, it would be more helpful for them if they have discussed and shared their problems with supervisors and co-teachers for important issues. Evidently, interactive journals offer the opportunity for trainee teachers to reflect on their supervisors' comments and for important issues to be targeted for discussion in supervision sessions (Hull et al., 2004). Farrell (2003) also supported that friends can provide another set of eyes that both support and challenge us to get at deeper reflections of our teaching. Thus, in writing teachers' journals, it would be better and more reliable if they try to be open-minded and listen to feedback from various sources such as their co-teacher and supervisor.

Generally, writing teachers' journals is for trainee teachers to be aware of their teaching. However, there are a couple of approaches that should be

beneficial in pursuing a future career as a teacher. Firstly, we can benefit from writing a teacher's journal by being able to reflect critically about different problems. Secondly, writing teachers' journals allows us to learn from our experience from which we can create our own effective solutions to practice as a habit. These two approaches could assist any individual in becoming a better teacher as stated by Gunstone et al. (1988 cited in Jarvis, 1992) that teachers are 'constructivists' who construct their own meaning from experience. People construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Hence, as Dewey (1993 cited in Farrell, 2003) said, teachers need to be able to explain their judgments and actions in their classrooms with reasoned arguments which lead to growth and development. We can say that writing teachers' journals is an effective means to promote teacher development and autonomous learning.

### **Implications for teaching and learning**

1. Writing teachers' journals can be more effective if supervisors suggest what is supposed to be included in the journals or provide useful guidelines before writing. In other words, trainee teachers need to be trained about writing reflective journals.
2. Furthermore, in order to develop performance in classroom, discussions between supervisors and trainee teachers should be arranged regularly after teaching to see progress. Also, it would be more helpful if written feedback from the supervisors is given. The supervisors can suggest or raise questions in teaching which enable trainee teachers to reflect on important points more critically.
3. The problem of lesson planning seems to be the main problem for trainee teachers because they lack teaching experiences. To reduce this problem, consulting with supervisors before actual teaching and planning with co-teachers to see other points of views would be helpful.
4. An appropriate assessment also needs to be incorporated into the learning process at the end of the semester so that teachers and students can determine whether problems and solutions are being solved. Finally, trainee teachers should be encouraged to assess their

own learning as well as their notions of how they learn by considering their own journals critically from the beginning to the end of the semester.

## Conclusion

Though there are some weaknesses of teachers' journals, several advantages of journal writing were observed. They allow trainee teachers who lack teaching experience to reflect on their teaching more carefully and to have enthusiasm for changes. Based on the positive results from this study, when teachers' journals were used as a means to record problems and solutions, they gave trainee teachers an opportunity to analyze their teaching more seriously. While recording, they need to ask the question 'why' for their problems in class to construct new ways of teaching for future classes. In addition, it would be more useful for improvement if important issues were discussed with their supervisors and co-teachers to look from other perspectives. These issues appear to be key factors to create a better class as well as lead to teacher development. The researchers believe that the outcomes of this study are impressive enough to continue using teachers' journals as a means to record problems and solutions that assist the learning and development of novice teachers.

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