



## DEVELOPING NOVICE TEACHERS PRACTICE THROUGH CRITICAL REFLECTION\*

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### ABSTRACT

*Group work and leadership skills are essential skills of 21st-century students. For students to develop these skills well, teacher students and teachers need to be trained and practice proficiency at schools. This study was conducted to show how group teaching in university was practiced in schools. The study is carried out in two phases: at VNU University of Education firstly when observing students' teacher classrooms and secondly students' classroom at primary/secondary schools. The findings of the study are used to suggest guidance for good practice in leadership and management training courses in Vietnam.*

**Keywords:** groupwork, placement, leadership, teacher, student.

### TÓM TẮT

#### ***Phát triển tư duy phản biện cho giáo viên phổ thông thông qua thực tập sư phạm***

*Sang thế kỉ XXI, lãnh đạo và làm việc nhóm đã trở thành những kỹ năng thiết yếu của mỗi cá nhân. Để phát triển những kỹ năng này, sinh viên học viên các trường sư phạm cần được đào tạo và thực hành thành thạo trong nhà trường. Nghiên cứu này được tiến hành cho thấy việc tổ chức các hình thức thảo luận nhóm, phản hồi trong giảng dạy được thực hiện tại Trường Đại học Giáo dục- Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội (ĐHGD-ĐHQGHN). Nghiên cứu được thực hiện theo hai giai đoạn: Tổ chức thực hiện các hình thức thảo luận nhóm trong thời gian đào tạo tại Trường ĐHQGHN và giai đoạn hai tại các trường tiểu học / trung học cơ sở của họ. Các kết quả của nghiên cứu được có thể coi như những gợi ý nhằm hướng dẫn các hình thức thực hành cho các khóa đào tạo lãnh đạo và quản lí ở Việt Nam.*

**Từ khóa:** làm việc nhóm, thực tập, lãnh đạo, giáo viên, học viên.

### 1. Introduction

Education Managers as a practiced-based profession requires both theoretical and practical learning. These types of learning are so important for learners to become professional education Managers. With classroom and field settings, the process of

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learning is critical for education manager learners to help them to develop their skills and improve the values, skills, and knowledge needed for the profession. Vocational Learning enables students to become competent and ethical professional education managers. People see it as an advantage activity that normally begins from the outside to inside the learners' mind to become their capabilities with placement. From this perspective, learning is a long-term developmental and critical process, the purpose of which should be not only to inform, but also to change and transform.

Although the importance of learning results in the future of learners, educators and field teachers do not spend much time rethinking how they learn and develop in the classroom and field setting. Recognizing how students achieve their learning goals in the education sector is critical to understanding how they learn about their professional roles in educational management and formulate their professional identities from field experiences (Papouli, 2014)

The role of teacher mentoring in helping the novice teachers develop professional teaching practice is high value in the professional point (Feiman-N emseretal.,1998). Earlier research on teacher mentoring at the induction level has been systematically reviewed with a focus on the interpersonal and technical aspects of the mentoring relationship that serves for the purposes of beginning teacher retention (Ingersoll&Strong, 2011). The beginning teachers should have a strong support from the mentors as well as their colleagues at school.

This study is based on the Education Management Diploma in Education University (EMDE) qualification for Master of Education Management which is a Two-year full time course of study. The full time EMDE course is organized (by statute) so that placements have to take up to 30% of course time in each subject. Given that they are a significant component of education management courses, it is imperative that the purpose and benefit of placements is clearly understood and articulated and that the characteristics and elements of successful placements are known and considered by students. For this reason, three question framed the research:

1. Why is placement an important part of learning to teach?
2. What are the essential experiences and opportunities which result in significant learning and professional development occurring during a placement?
3. Are education management training placements currently delivering what is required for successful student learning and professional development?

The research study on which this article is based on was justified in terms of a case study strategy that is underpinned by a bricolage of critical theoretic and critical hermeneutic approaches. Participant responses are analyzed in relation to the research questions.

### *The concepts*

Howie & MacSporran (2010) argue that group learning is established as an effective way to educate and socialize student social work. The University of Western Scotland has developed a small-scale practical learning center and a model of group supervision, to assist students in the practice of assessment. The author focuses on this learning method and the students' experiences and perceptions. The author also argues that when the group process are applied and the students engage in focused activities, this is an effective learning method. Teamwork encourages students to think, analyze, develop capacity and confidence, and provide opportunities for an exchange of ideas to develop critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking in education includes outstanding studies by authors such as Benade (2015), Parsons & Stephenson (2005) with *Developing reflective practice in student teachers: Collaboration and critical partnerships*. Smyth (1998) with *Developing and Sustaining Critical Reflection in Teacher Education*. Benade (2005) believes that in the 21st century, learning and teaching at school must prepare young people for engaging in a complex and dynamic world deeply influenced by globalization and technological revolution skill. In addition to the use of digital technology is the development of flexible learning space. These developments require, and lead to, practice reflecting the enhancement of practitioners' teaching.

Parsons & Stephenson (2005) study the ways in which teachers can be helped to develop their capacity to engage in reflecting on practice. The author argues that the exploration of the nature of reflective practice suggests that the individual needs to be aware and able to track, think, understand and have knowledge of teaching and cognitive methods. Different types of knowledge can help develop practice. The analysis of the answers shows that the design of the practice encouraged students to consider a variety of aspects of their practice and that collaboration with colleagues and experienced colleagues helped them to understand more clearly about their teaching. Some comments on the cooperative nature of practice have also been expressed; Students are concerned about the difficulty of establishing a working relationship with a partner, while the teacher is concerned about equity in an important partnership.

In their study, Dewhurst & Mc Murtry (2006) emphasized that student placement is an integral part of teacher education and often both students and teachers view placement is an important aspect in initial teacher education. During the 2003-2005 period, the author investigated the teacher's views on the current nature of the practice and their success in meeting the needs of career development. The findings of this study indicated that students and teachers shared many views and therefore some key experiences and opportunities emerge. Different priorities were also emphasized. The common perception is that the placement must be modeled on social construction.

The researches on technology issues in teaching, in education consist of such significant studies such as Learning Management System Technologies and Software Solutions for Online Teaching: Tools and Applications, Information Science Reference (Learning Management Systems and Online Teaching Software Solutions: Tools and Applications, Scientific Reference Materials) by Kats (2010), Howison & Finger (2010), Kulshrestha & Kant (2013) is about the Benefits of Learning Management System (LMS) in Indian Education. In general, these studies emphasize the importance of ICT in training teacher education and teacher placement as well as how to improve the quality of teaching and placement with ICT.

### ***The Research Study***

This article reports on a research project with first year education management students. The placement was undertaken as part of developing a more critically reflective pedagogy, which asked students to write narratives about placement experiences. The richness of these narratives makes them useful for developing a critically reflective process for application in practice teaching.

A pilot Study was used to investigate the effectiveness of critical practice. Participants' responds to questions encourage critical thinking. The survey was divided into two phases.

The survey focused on the following questions:

- What are the reasons for the importance of placement in the part of learning to teach?
- What is the most valuable of learning and professional development occurring during a placement?

Phase 1 was carried out at Master of Education Management classes, at the University of Education, VNU Hanoi. The questionnaire was designed in order to get the responses of learners after group discussions of the content of the course outlined by the teachers. As mentioned above, the chosen subject was "Curriculum Development". 2 classes were involved in this survey and one of them was experimental and the left was not (control group- is a group separated from the rest of the experiment).

*The contents of discussion consisted of:*

- The role of standardization of school based curriculum goals;
- Defining teaching strategies for goal, contents and learner characteristics;
- The solutions to ensuring the success for all learners;
- The real benefits of the capability approach curriculum;
- The advantages and disadvantages of the approaches in curriculum development.

The experimental class was divided into 5 groups (each group has about 5 learners). These groups were chosen based on learner need and interests. Each group worked together for fifteen minutes and then took ten minutes for refectation. They presented what they understood from the lesson, the practical experience in their related theoretical content. The prospect of applying knowledge in the context of specific school contexts. During discussion, the researchers observed, and some photos were taken (under the ethical rules in research). Questions with explanation were sent to learners in the experimental class.

Phase 2 was carried out at 2 high schools in Hanoi where the learners' worked as educators (principals, managers...) Learners of our Master of Education Management class carried out group works at classes in their schools. They instructed their employees (teachers, educators...) at their schools how to implement a school based curriculum in groups. These groups discussed the approaches to developing school curriculum and how to define the need of pupils and the student centred approach. The questionnaire for the school teachers about the effectiveness of the school-based training was provided by the school principal (whom was enrolled at the School of Educational Management at the University of Education)

## 2. The Methodology

35 item questionnaire developed by the researcher with a five point rating scale. Participants were asked to tick "V" on a list of experiences and opportunities that they think are essential... on the 5 different levels of agree and disagree on school placement - Descriptive statistics involving the use of Mean and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research questions. The results show the reasons for the importance of placement in the part of learning to teach, such as: *The student's perspectives on effectiveness of placement for their Learning Activities, Opportunity to make the connection between practical experience and the theoretical knowledge, improving their capabilities, increasing opportunity to support the students 'needs, developing professional practices.* 35 statements in these results were made. Responses were then systematically interpreted and assigned to codes and classifications. Group of authors devised the code list and classifications then assigned responses to these items of two research questions.

The two research questions in the questionnaire were conflated to give one set of responses from each questionnaire. This allowed for more effective analysis since the authors found it difficult to distinguish responses between the two different questions as responders had tended to respond to the two questions in the same way, thinking that they were asking the same questions.

*The meaning levels are categorized as follows: 1.00 - 1.80: Very disagree / Very dissatisfied / Very unimportant/ Not at all...; 1.81 - 2.60: Disagree / Not satisfied / Not important/Rarely...; 2.61 - 3.40: No Comments / Average/ Sometimes...; 3.41 - 4.20: OK /*

*Satisfied / Important/ Often...; 4.21 - 5.00: Very agree / Very satisfied / Very important/ Very Often...*

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Given that there were so many responses to the questionnaire, that placement is a complex experience, and that learning to teach is multi-dimensional, a wide range of statements was made. The mean of respondents emphasising the same experience or opportunity is relatively small. The highest mean for any one shared response from experimental group is 3.98 and from Retrospective group is 3.47. The total number of responses from experimental group ranged from 3.1 to 3.98. The total number of responses from Retrospective group ranged from 2.11 to 3.47. The number and percentage of responses by Students' perspectives on two groups on effectiveness of placement for their Learning Activities are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Students' perspectives on effectiveness of placement for their Learning Activities

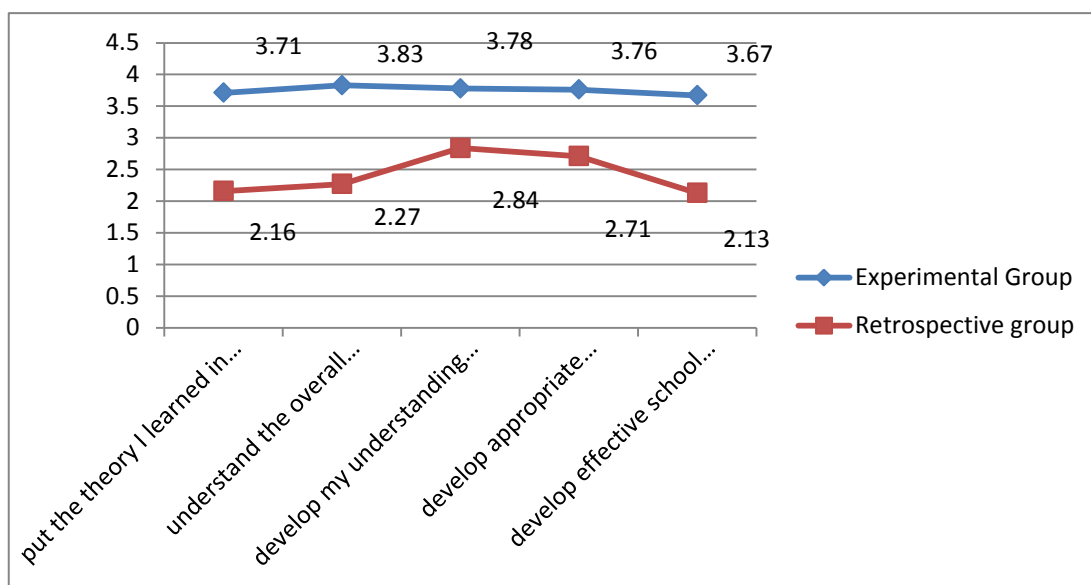
Items	Experimental Group	Control group
	(N= 68 )	(N= 72 )
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1. Delegate roles and responsibilities.	3.51	2.11
2. Share diverse perspectives.	3.43	2.23
3. Pool knowledge and skills.	3.76	2.26
4. Develop new approaches to resolving differences.	3.87	2.65
5. Find effective peers to emulate.	3.98	2.34
6. Develop stronger communication skills.	3.53	2.76
7. Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own.	3.54	2.72
8. Plan and manage time	3.33	2.45
9. Refine understanding through discussion and explanation	3.21	2.87
10. Give and receive feedback on performance	3.10	2.93
11. Hold one another (and be held) accountable.	3.32	2.21

The table 1 shows that the two categories with the most frequently reported responses were the same for both experimental group and from retrospective group are:

- Develop new approaches to resolving differences;
- Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own.

Meanwhile the order within top five of each group was different. Top five of experimental group are: *Find effective peers to emulate, Develop new approaches to resolving differences, Pool knowledge and skills, Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own and Delegate roles and responsibilities.*

Top five of retrospective group are *Give and receive feedback on performance, Refine understanding through discussion and explanation, Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own. Develop stronger communication skills and Develop new approaches to resolving differences.*



**Figure 1.** Students' perspectives on effectiveness of placement for Opportunity to make the connection between practical experience and the theoretical knowledge

Table 2 shows students' perspectives on the effectiveness of placement for Opportunity to make the connection between practical experience and the theoretical knowledge. *Understand the overall context of the school, Develop my understanding of what happens in a classroom and Develop appropriate resources for school management* are top three of both experimental and retrospective groups.

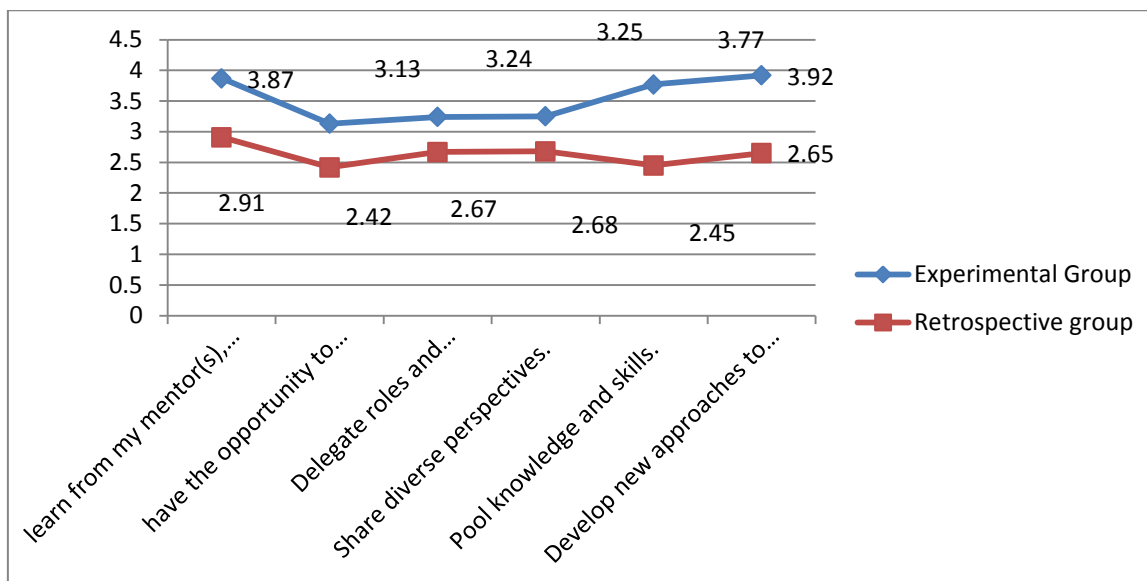


Figure 2. Students' perspectives on effectiveness of placement for improving their capabilities

The common mean in top three of two groups is *learn from my mentor(s), classmates in the school*, although *Develop new approaches to resolving differences, Pool knowledge and skills* and *learn from my mentor(s), classmates in the school* are top three of experimental group and *learn from my mentor(s), classmates in the school, Share diverse perspectives* and *Delegate roles and responsibilities* are top three means of retrospective group.

Table 2. Students' perspectives on increasing opportunity to support the students' needs

Items	Experimental Group (N= 68 )		Control group (N= 72 )	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
1. academically articles that we analysed at university helped us to view things from different perspectives	3.46	4	2.76	4
2. it helped to up to date my theoretical knowledge	3.98	1	3.15	1
3. the observation task documents helped me to pay attention to detail	3.41	5	3.05	2
4. being in the real [classroom] environment and delivering the lessons helped us to develop [the right] classroom behaviour	3.39	6	2.97	3
5. allowed us to see what to expect in classroom environment	3.73	3	2.13	6
6. I expected to have a mixture of lessons	3.88	2	2.65	5



Table 2 shows students' perspectives on increasing opportunity to support the students' needs. The highest mean for any one shared response from experimental group is 3.98 and from Retrospective group is 3.15, the lowest mean for any one shared response from experimental group is 3.39 and from Retrospective group is 2.13. The top three means of experimental group are *It helped to up to date my theoretical knowledge, I expected to have a mixture of lessons* and *Allowed us to see what to expect in classroom environment* meanwhile the top three of retrospective group are *It helped to up to date my theoretical knowledge, The observation task documents helped me to pay attention to detail* and *Being in the real [classroom] environment and delivering the lessons helped us to develop [the right] classroom behaviour*.

**Table 3.** Student s' views on practicums developing professional practices

Items	Experimental Group (N= 68)	Control group (N= 72)
	Mean	Mean
1. identify my weaknesses	3.76	2.56
2. improve my practice in areas that needed development	3.21	2.98
3. extend the range of management strategies I used in the school	3.43	2.67
4. be more reflective about my management and leader skills	3.56	3.07
5. focus on school responsibility	3.87	3.47
6. choose and use appropriate technologies for my task	3.43	2.67
7. prepare plans according to school 'needs	3.54	2.97
8. approaches techniques for particular situations	3.39	2.39
9. use a number of effectiveness techniques in school management	3.78	2.42
10. Hold one another (and be held) accountable.	3.34	2.87
11. Activities helped [me] to be part of the school	3.76	3.32
12. it allowed me to improve myself	3.54	3.07

The final table shows students' views on practicums developing professional practices. In these responses, *Focus on school responsibility* is the highest mean of both two groups. Top three of two groups consist of four means because two means are on the third highest rank in both experimental group and control groups. Therefore there are four means in the highest rank in both groups. Top three highest ranks of experimental groups are *Focus on school responsibility*, *Use a number of effectiveness techniques in school management*, *Activities helped [me] to be part of the school and identify my weaknesses*. Top three highest ranks of control groups are *Focus on school responsibility*, *Activities helped [me] to be part of the school, be more reflective about my management and leader skills* and *It allowed me to improve myself*.

In general, the respondents' chosen priorities in the experimental group are *Find effective peers to emulate*, *Develop new approaches to resolving differences* and *It helped to up to date my theoretical knowledge*. Respondents' chosen priorities in the control group are *Activities helped [me] to be part of the school*, *Focus on school responsibility* and *It helped to up to date my theoretical knowledge*. Both respondents of two groups agreed on the ideas of updating their theoretical knowledge.

**Table 4.** Responses in each classification by learners at phase 2

Classification	Number of responses		Per cent of all responses	
	Experimental group (n=30)	%	Control group (n=36)	%
1. Ensure that all students (regardless of ethnicity, composition or gender) achieve the highest level of academic achievement	22	73,33	18	50,00
2. Coordinate different forms of assessment to determine the needs and characteristics of learners	20	66,67	16	44,44
3. Ensuring that the school program is designed will provide opportunities for all students in the school to actively participate in and experiment with ideas	17	56,67	16	44,44
4. Take initiative and involve staff in the exploitation of teaching methods and the acquisition of modern educational programs with advantages in accordance with the practical school	16	53,33	17	47,22
5. To optimize the existing facilities of the school to serve the implementation of the school program	15	50,00	14	38,88

6. Involve outside school forces involved in the design and implementation of school programs	14	46,67	13	36,11
7. To standardize goals that need to be met at school	12	40,00	14	38,89
8. Design the content of the program linked to the defined goal.	10	33,33	11	27,22
9. Develop teaching strategies that are relevant to the goals, content and characteristics of learners	10	33,33	08	22,22

Nine school-based curriculum development skills were explored by our students at the school as a school administrator who was in charge of coaching the curriculum development skills for their teachers. The results were also evaluated in two groups of schools: group of administrators in the experimental group and group of administrators in the control group. The results were analysed then evaluated in relation to The results were analysed then evaluated in relation to 9 chosen school curriculum development skills.

The results from both study groups have shown in the first instance the effectiveness of placement, group discussions in training in master's degree management students at the education management Faculty. Research questions have been gradually clarified.

In conclusion the study suggests that Placement offers opportunities for learning and professional development which not only are best undertaken 'in the field', but need to be, since student teacher learning is situated and social. The student teachers and teachers in this study highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging. This could so easily become marginalised due to the sheer volume of other, perhaps more measurable demands of a school placement.

#### 4. Conclusion

Results from research shows that the group discussion and practice has a positive effect on training activities in general and the training of teachers and educational administrators in particular. The study also suggests that Educational administrators will improve their knowledge and skills if they have the opportunity to take part in the reflection activities. In addition, education managers need a solid experience in their profession to perform well in their leadership role.

Research shows that pedagogical practice plays an important role in teaching and learning. Students' perspectives on effectiveness of placement for their Learning Activities included of (i) The reasons are high value included of Find effective peers to emulate,(ii) Develop new approaches to resolving differences, and (iii) Pool knowledge and skills. These reasons help the students to become proficient in learning at university.

Some factors become the main effectiveness which result in significant learning and professional development occurring during a placement which included of *learn from my mentor(s), classmates in the school* (the highest mean 3.87 of Experimental group in comparison with retrospective group of mean 2.91), the some are quite high is *have the opportunity to work with experienced teachers* (mean 3.13 -2.42), *delegate roles and responsibilities* (mean 3.24 -2.67).

Group study is one of the collaborative learning methods used in the study. It showed that Group classes help students succeed in developing collaborative and leadership skills (Specific in this case study is the development of school - based curriculum development skills). This research on pedagogical practice through group study shows high effectiveness of this method. Implementing teacher school placement to student learning and professional development will be successful when developing new teachers practice through critical reflection on group work placement.

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