

The critical reflection profile: Working to raise the quality of teacher education in Malaysia

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The focus of this article is the Critical Reflection Profile (CRP) and Guidelines which have recently been developed at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia (UPSI). The revised Malaysian national curriculum has a new focus on critical and creative thinking. There is an opportunity to introduce critical reflection - and teacher action research - into the day-to-day practice of teachers and school leaders in Malaysia. This coincides with changes in legislation that have somewhat destabilized the school system, for example ending the teaching of mathematics and science through the medium of English. At this time of rapid change, UPSI, as one of the major providers of teacher education in Malaysia, has an important role to play in improving the quality of teacher education with consequent improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Over the last decade, UPSI has built up a vibrant tradition of action research in partnership with local schools in the State of Perak and Selangor. The current initiative builds upon this work. With the support of the vice chancellor, a group of professors and senior lecturers are working to embed critical reflection in all aspects of teacher education: pre-service and in-service courses for teachers and continuous professional development of lecturing faculty. In a country with considerable ethnic variety such as Malays, Indian, Chinese, Iban, dan Kadazan communities, it is true that the introduction of critical reflection which is grounded in educational values, requires inter-cultural sensitivity and open dialogue. The CRP has been developed as a mediating tool for this process of cultural change. The article presents the theoretical framework for critical reflection in eight dimensions upon which the new Guideline for Critical Reflection in Teaching and Learning were grounded; and explains the process envisaged for use of the CRP and its function in mediating critical reflection in teacher education.

Keywords: critical and creative thinking; questioning and analysing beliefs; challenging assumptions; academic excellence; cultural sensitivity

Introduction

The focus of this article is the Critical Reflection Profile (CRP) which has recently been developed at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Malaysia. The CRP is accompanied by Guidelines on Critical Reflection in Teaching and Learning which explain its purposes and the theoretical framework used in its development. These Guidelines were produced, at the request of the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dato' Dr. Aminah binti Ayob, by a group of professors and

senior lecturers led by Adjunct Professor Bridget Somekh, working intensively over a three week period in July 2011. They seek to clarify the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the reflective process that enables students and teachers to become autonomous professionals. Specifically, the CRP and its accompanying guidelines are a teaching resource for post-graduate study and professional development of academic staff. At one level, they provide support for students/trainees who are required to write reflective journals during school placements, and for the academic tutors and guiding teachers in schools who support that work; but at a more fundamental level their aim is to support the development of academic excellence in teaching and learning. They are being trialled by staff and students for the first time in the academic year 2011 – 2012; writing this article is part of the process of subjecting them to critical reflection with the aim of improvement.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialised agency of the United Nations, defines critical reflection as ‘Questioning and analysing experiences, observations, theories, beliefs and/or assumptions.’ www.ifad.org/evaluation/guide/annexa/a.htm. Critical reflection is the hallmark of excellence of excellence in international scholarship. It is an essential component of intellectual endeavour at world class universities. We claim in this article that critical reflection is also the hallmark of excellence in the work of all professionals, world-wide, including teachers. It is not, however, assumed to be a hallmark of excellence in all cultures. Specifically, in Islamic cultures where there is a strong tradition of learning and reciting the text of the holy Quran, and in Chinese cultures where there is a Confucian tradition of respect for elders and authorities, it is significantly more difficult to inculcate critical reflection as a habit of study and means of achieving excellence. Therefore, the development of the CRP and Guidelines was a more wide-ranging task than is often associated with the literature on critical reflection. In their introduction to the special issue on Reflective Practice and Action Research (2011), the editors of *Educational Action Research* note ‘different kinds of reflection’ and suggest that these are sometimes divided into ‘an intellectual hierarchy of ways to reflect’. All the articles in the special issue (SI) ‘illustrate vividly the challenge to understand through reflective processes, and all provide examples of change’ (Editors, 2011, p. 255). But it is noticeable that all the articles are written from a ‘western’ perspective, with authors from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and the UK. Thus the SI provides further reading that will be useful for Malaysian students and academic staff using the CRP and Guidelines which are the focus of this article, but it is not useful as a starting point. For Bridget Somekh there was a particular interest in working on the CRP and Guidelines with colleagues at UPSI because she had worked for five years as academic supervisor for a Saudi Arabian doctoral students, Mervat Babair, at Manchester Metropolitan University (Babair, 2010). Mervat’s thesis was commended for its excellence by the examiners, a considerable achievement as Saudi is not a culture with a tradition of critical reflection and both Mervat and Bridget experienced a steep learning curve in the process of its writing. For the professors and senior lecturers who made up the working group there was a strong awareness that learning to be critically reflective was very difficult for many Malaysian students, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. They were aware of their own learning to be critically reflective, either when studying at universities in the UK or Australia, or as higher degree

students at Malaysian universities; and they were aware that the culture of the latter made it difficult to become critical and remain critical, particularly when writing up a thesis for examination. Hence, the importance of developing a CRP and Guidelines for use in professional development of academic staff as well as teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The changes in Malaysian education in recent years

Changes in the national agenda always bring about changes in education which is pivotal in attaining the national aspirations. However, such changes in national policies often destabilise the school system and also, inevitably, teacher education. This is because teacher education programmes need to be designed to meet the demand for teachers in schools – and they need to adapt to support changes, for example in the curriculum, as they are introduced. For instance, with the revision of the school curriculum in 2003 in which the medium of instruction for mathematics and science was changed from Malay language to English, both pre- and in-service teachers were subsequently trained to teach the subjects in English. However, in 2009, the government decided to revert the teaching of these two subjects from English to Malay language starting from 2011 under the transformational curriculum (*Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* or Primary School Standard Curriculum) to be introduced phase by phase beginning with Year 1 Primary (Muhyiddin bin Mohd Yassin, 2009). In this process, the training of pre- and in-service teachers to teach mathematics and science necessarily reverted from using English to Malay language as the medium of instruction. What can be said is that any changes in the national educational policies would influence the modus operandi of teacher education (Siew & Chang, 2011). Such changes are always disruptive, ushering in new demands but also new opportunities.

The transformational curriculum known as *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* or KSSR was introduced to meet the national agenda in building a high income developed nation by year 2020 under the Economic Transformation Programme or ETP (PEMANDU, 2010). It also incorporated the National Philosophy of Education to produce well-balanced individuals, responsible citizens, knowledgeable (k-workers) and global players (Ministry of Education, 2010). There were six main components in KSSR structure: namely sciences and technology, communication, spirituality, attitude and values, humanities and personal skills, and physical and aesthetic development. Three value-added elements were included in the curriculum, namely creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship, and information technology and communication. It is of interest to note that critical, creative and innovative thinking runs through all six components in achieving the end-outcome of KSSR. Subsequently, this implies that there is an urgent and critical need to prepare teachers to have the knowledge and skills to incorporate critical, creative and innovative thinking in teaching the six components in KSSR.

Furthermore, under the ETP, the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) on education focuses on strengthening the private education services in schools and institutions of higher learning, for the private sector is regarded as a powerful complement to the government (Muhyiddin bin Mohd Yassin, 2010, p. 475) and indispensable partners in the Government's effort to raise quality standards and create an international higher education brand for Malaysia

(Mohamed Khaled Nordin, 2010, p. 476). In this regard, the increasing participation of the private institutions in education, including teacher education, has provided greater competitiveness to the public institutions to produce quality human capital of international standing.

Thus, these rapid changes in the national agenda and education that are happening in Malaysia pose a tremendous challenge to teacher education in producing quality teachers: teachers that are able to produce well-balanced individuals, responsible citizens, k-workers and global players that will be able to contribute to fulfilling the national aspirations of making Malaysia a high-income developed nation in 2020.

Education is one of the 12 industry sectors in NKEA and teacher educators, as leaders engaged in the education field, have a responsibility to develop excellence in the education field. Hence, introducing changes in teacher education programmes to support teaching of the Standard Curriculum for Primary School (KSSR), starting with Year 1 pupils in 2011, has been a major focus of development at UPSI over the last two years. Everything is considered new in KSSR: a new syllabus, new activity books and modular approach is introduced whereby pupils will learn basics literacy skills, language arts and grammar.

In requiring teachers to teach in a way that encourages students to become critical, creative and capable of innovative thinking, the KSSR implies a new kind of teacher education. For example, the new curriculum for teaching English in primary schools (rather than using it as a medium of instruction) requires teachers to work with students in a more interactive way. More hands-on activities are highlighted which mean it should be more fun and interesting for the pupils. Although teaching methods will remain predominantly traditional there is a requirement for additional and enrichment activities in the classroom. To teach the new curriculum as the policy makers have envisioned, teachers need to be more creative and innovative themselves. They need to be able to use critical reflection to continuously improve their teaching as reflective practitioners. Developing teachers' skills in critical reflection will improve their teaching as reflective practitioners. Developing teachers' skills in critical reflection will also assist in areas of their teaching which are acknowledged to be difficult. For example the provision for students with special educational needs made in the Education Act of 1996 has been largely through special schools for students with hearing impairment or partial sight. Students with learning disabilities, hearing and visual impaired can also be placed in integration programmes in mainstream schools. Although the concept of inclusive education, in which students with special needs are placed in mainstream classes and taught by mainstream teachers, is available in theory, to date not many students with learning disabilities have the chance to be involved in inclusion. The requirements for teacher education to prepare teachers to work in more student-centred, creative and innovative ways, will perhaps help more mainstream schools to embrace integration.

The process of developing the guidelines

During a one month residency as Adjunct Professor at UPSI, in July 2011, Bridget Somekh was asked to work with a small group of professors and senior lecturers from different faculties to develop Guidelines for Critical Reflection. A whole day was set aside for the group's first meeting at which Bridget presented initial ideas for discussion, including a suggested way of sharing work between group members. Two further half days were time-tabled, one later in the same week and the other two weeks later. As a visitor she did not have the same calls on her time as the other members of the group, but despite having to make some changes to the time slots group members were committed and the preparatory work was undertaken collaboratively as Bridget had envisaged. It was always agreed that she would write the Guidelines in the final week of her residency which coincided with the end of year Convocation ceremonies in which other members of the group were heavily involved. The final document would be translated into Malay language and the English and Malay versions published together in a single booklet.

A number of important decisions were made at the first meeting:

- 1. First, the title of the document was decided: *Critical Reflection in Teaching and Learning: Guidelines for Practice*.**

This title focused on the widest possible area of concern to teacher educators and students.

- 2. Second, the group decided to ensure both depth and clarity of analysis by breaking down the complex processes of critical reflection into seven dimensions (Figure 1).**

Dividing critical reflection into seven dimensions ensured that the process of theoretical analysis to produce the Guidelines encompassed all aspects of teaching and learning. Whereas, it is more usual in the literature on critical reflection for the focus to be on either personal development or political struggle (see Editors 2011 op cit), these guidelines would focus on bringing critical reflection into the whole culture of academic study. They would engage with critical reading and critical writing as aspects of a single process involving knowledge construction, the self and subjectivity, situational understanding, analysis and interpretation, and cultural understanding. The dimensions are overlapping and inter-dependent so that their analytical specificity will be countered by their internal cross-referencing.

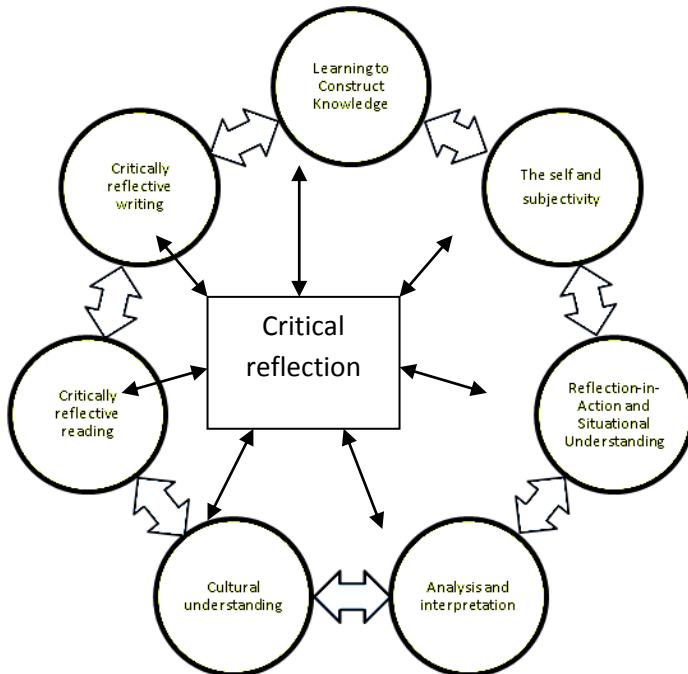


Figure 1: Dimensions of Critical Reflection

3. Third, the group decided to represent the finest theoretical work in the field by means of 'Key Quotations' focusing on the key concepts of each dimension of critical reflection.

It was agreed that the document needed to make available to students and faculty the finest scholarship on critical reflection. Since this literature is in English and English is not the mother-tongue language of Malaysians it would not be sensible to include a list of publications for required reading – the demand would be overwhelming and students would be unlikely to engage with such a time-consuming task in addition to their other study. Key quotations, however, would engage students with the ideas of eminent scholars. The group decided to select these quotations for their power to illuminate key aspects of critical reflection, which would necessitate some quotations being several lines long. The intrinsic difficulty of the language was not taken into account. Instead, questions following each quotation attempted to focus the student's attention on key concepts in the quotation as 'a way in' to understanding their meaning. These quotations would not be translated in the Bahasa Malay version, because it would be difficult to capture the subtleties of meaning of the originals, but the translations of the focusing questions would provide further support. Understanding the quotations would be difficult for students, but by selecting quotations rather than articles, or chapters, or books the scale of the task was kept to reasonable proportions.

4. Fourth, Guidelines for Practice would be provided for each dimension. They would be expressed as actions/behaviours.

The intention was to express the Guidelines in terms that would ensure that they could be used in practice. The Guidelines for Practice in each dimension would provide students and academic staff with critically reflective actions (rather than intentions). Each of the seven dimensions would include four Guidelines for Practice and these would be grouped together as twenty-eight items in a Critical Reflection Profile (CRP) with tick box choices to carry out a self-assessment. When completing the CRP students would be asked to rate each item by ticking one of four options: ‘I practice this daily’, ‘I practice this at least once a week’, ‘I practice this at least once a month’, ‘This is not part of my current practice.’

Translating the conceptual processes of critical reflection into concrete behaviours ran the risk of over-simplification. The gains were very significant, however. The PRC would be completed on two occasions, either at the beginning and end of a course, or at the beginning and end of a school placement. On the first occasion, the students (or staff attending a CPD course) would be asked to self-assess their own level of critical reflective practice and to set themselves targets for improvement before completing the CRP for the second time. These would not be formal assessments, but a means of assisting students in self-assessment of their progress to become more critically reflective. This approach drew on the concept from activity theory of developing a mediating tool to support the process of change. This was similar to the ‘Generic Pedagogic Framework’, that Pearson and Somekh describe using as a planning tool to support the process of change with teachers in the Pedagogies with E-Learning Project (Pearson & Somekh, 2006). It also drew on the idea of a profile developed by the ViTaL Development and Research Programme in which students used a similar tool to self-assess their progress in using the ELLI learning power ideas and assessment principles. This approach, although developed at the University of Bristol in the UK had proven to be culturally sensitive when used with considerable success at a Malaysian Sixth Form College (Small, 2007).

5. Fifth, each dimension would be illustrated by examples of critical reflection.

At the planning stage it seemed unlikely that such examples would be available from the writing of UPSI students and staff. However, once work had begun it emerged that the Faculty of Languages and Communication (FBK) had been teaching critical reflection for many years and was able to supply both course materials and examples of students’ Reflective Journals. By this means the group developing the PCR and Guidelines was able to draw on the tradition established by FBK.

Collaborative working practices

Each member of the group took responsibility for developing one of the Dimensions of Critical Reflection. This entailed drafting the introductory text, selecting the key quotations, drafting the guideline statements (actions/behaviors) and identifying examples of good critical reflection. The

preliminary material (Purpose of the Guidelines, What is Critical Reflection?, Why is Critical Reflection important?) was discussed in the working sessions and subsequently drafted by Bridget Somekh. Meanwhile Bridget taught a two-day workshop on Critical Reflection to a mixed group of Tutors from UPSI who supervised students on school placements and Guiding Teachers from schools who worked with students on placements. Tasks undertaken by the workshop participants provided invaluable data for Bridget, in terms of understanding both working practices and cultural knowledge. This confirmed the need for the Guidelines since it was clear that relationships and communications between the triad of student, academic tutor and guiding teacher were often poor and there was a poor understanding of the requirement for students to write a reflective journal and of its purposes. It was at these workshop sessions that Bridget met Dr Goh and Encik Sidik of the Faculty of Language and Communications (FBK) and was able to access the tradition of teaching critical reflection in FBK and examples of critically reflective writing in students' journals. In practice, the working group members all brought different skill sets to the collaboration – some were already practicing critically reflective teaching , one had good skills in using software to produce diagrams, together their knowledge of the research literature on critical reflection was wide-ranging and books could be accessed quickly from private collections or the university library. Differences in skills and experience, and differing levels of pressure to undertake administrative tasks meant that each member of the group contributed what they were best able to accomplish and provided assistance for each other in their areas of expertise.

An example of one of the Dimensions:

The section of the Guidelines on Exploring the Self and Subjectivity is presented here to exemplify the nature of the text and the inter-relationship between the different sections.

Exploring the Self and Subjectivity

(i) Why are the Self and Subjectivity important in critical reflection?

Thinking is a process of the mind. Therefore, critically reflective thinking always begins with the self. Let's use the metaphor of a mirror. The mind holds up a mirror to experience so that there is a double image – the experience and the reflection upon the experience. Then the mind turns the mirror back on itself and there is an inward-looking double image – the self-in-action and self-reflection on the self-in-action. The second of these is called reflexivity.

The self is the starting point for all our actions, so we need to become self-aware to understand our professional practice. What are my motivations? What are my values? What are my feelings? We cannot avoid our own subjectivity so it is foolish to pretend that we can ever be objective in our actions. However, we need to guard against unfairness and bias in our decisions and actions. Critical reflection on the self and subjectivity is important as a way of understanding our potential biases and guarding against them.

Self-reflection is about focusing our thinking on who we are and what we can do as practitioners/teachers. It is a constant process and leads to an on-going

commitment to improve and refine our own teaching practice. Systematic and critical (i.e. questioning) self-reflection may lead to profound personal growth and transformation. It involves a constant questioning of our own assumptions, and a capacity to analyze and synthesize on what we have done and why we feel and act the way we do in given situations in order to create new perspectives and understanding.

(ii) Self and Subjectivity: Key quotations

These five quotations have been chosen to deepen your understanding of Dimension 2: The Self and Subjectivity. Practice critical reflection when you read them. Search out all their possible meanings.

The questions following each quotation are intended to help you reflect critically on them.

6. Becoming creative and innovative

“All teachers have the capability to be creative and innovative and this capability can be greatly enhanced if the teacher is constantly reflecting on his/her practice.” (Goh, 1996, p.42)

Question: What opportunities do you have to be creative and innovative in your teaching? (Don’t accept ‘none’ as your answer!) Critically reflect on all the possibilities.

7. Systematic self-study and professional self-development

“In short, the outstanding characteristic of the extended professional is a capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of educational ideas by classroom research procedures.” (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 144)

Question: What educational ideas could you test out in your teaching? Critically reflect on your progress so far in becoming an autonomous professional.

8. Exploring the values embedded in our own actions

“In an educational context, all actions (not only those that are intentionally value-oriented) are understood as explicit or implicit “interpretations of educational values”. In other words, it is legitimate to ask what values are embedded in action. As the “translation” from general values to concrete actions is always uncertain, it follows that there is an obligation to reflect on the relationship between concrete action and professional values.” (Altrichter et al., 2007, p. 274-5)

Question: Make a list of three or four concrete actions you have taken recently in your teaching. What educational values were embedded in these actions?

9. Looking at our own teaching to find the reasons for our students' failures

“.... Every teacher must ... by regarding every imperfection in the pupil's comprehension, not as a defect of the pupil, but as a defect of his own instruction, endeavour to develop in himself the ability of discovering new methods ...” (Tolstoy, 1967, quoted in Schön, 1983, p. 62)

Question: Think of two of your students who seem to be failing to learn. Could you develop new methods which would support these students' learning?

10. Reflexivity

“Reflexivity is that aspect of the process of making a judgement about reality (interpreting and event, a piece of data, someone's state of mind, etc.) that is dependent on ('bent-back-into') our previous thoughts and experiences. A judgement such as, 'Martin knows the rules for multiplication' may look at first sight as though it is a simple statement about an objective state of affairs; but when we remind ourselves that it is 'reflexive', we remember that it is constructed by means of our own prior assumptions and experiences about what it means to 'know a rule'. The significance of the principle of reflexivity is that although most of our statements have a reflexive quality, we ignore this most of the time and treat our statements as being about external facts.” (Winter, 2010, p. 342)

Question: Make a list of things your students know. Then remind yourself that your judgements are reflexive. What assumptions are you making in judging your students' learning?

(iii) Self and Subjectivity: Guidelines for practice

- Critically reflect on the actions and decisions I take in my work with students to see if there is any bias in my judgements.
- Critically reflect on any incidents that made me angry or upset, to try and understand if I was fearful or felt threatened – or was there another reason?
- Develop and test out new ways of doing things so that my teaching is innovative and creative.
- When students are difficult or challenging, try to find out if they have any personal difficulties, either long term or short term.

(iv) Self and Subjectivity: Examples of critical reflection

• Lecturer's reflection

I taught an Ordinary Differential Equation class. Every time after a quiz or a test or a midterm, there would be students came and sought my advice. What sparks my mind was their statement:

“Dr Shiqin, I love your teaching. In class I understand what you teach, however I do not know why every time during the test, I will feel blank and forget everything you teach”.

When they come with this statement, I always blame on them. I will say to them:

“Did you do the suggested exercises given in class? You need to do them and you need to practice a lot. If you do not know how to do it, come and ask”.

When I sat down and tried to see why did this happen to my students, I felt that I had to do something for my part. I should not blame them all the time. I should try to improve my teaching. So the first step I did, I made sure students did the suggested exercise given. For that, I asked them to send their work for me to check.

(Analysis: Problem in students not being able to apply their learning in the test – blaming the students was not a sufficient answer – introduced a change in the lecturer’s own behaviour.)

- ***Student reflecting at the end of the practicum***

Furthermore, the most exciting part of this teaching practice was that I could figure out ways to control my students especially those who could be considered as the problematic ones. I had one experience where my student was really rude with me. I knew that he was just trying to challenge me and at the same time he wanted attention from me. One day, I called him to see me personally and then I explained to him that I was mad at him because I care for him as my student. I told him that I want him to be somebody in the future and I am not his enemy but is friend. The next day, he did not skip from my class anymore and he already showed some respect towards me. We even played basketball together in the evening. I think this boy got the message that I am not his enemy but his friend. It was good to hear him call me ‘teacher’. It was good to see that this boy still got a chance to change to a better person. I hope that he will be a useful person in the future. As a conclusion, all of these experiences really helped me to view the teaching career from different perspectives and it gave me more spirit in becoming one of the best teachers in the whole world.

(Analysis: Starts from a practical concern (control of students) and then critically reflects on one incident and how a personal, challenging and caring approach made a big difference. Inspirational.)

Discussion

Acquiring a habit of critical reflection is difficult for all students, but the concept of challenging propositions, including those presented by professors and teachers, and approaching texts as starting points for discussion rather than authoritative texts is much easier for those who have been brought up in western cultures. The Beatles’ film, *Life of Brian*, is a satirical comedy based on the life of Jesus. This kind of irreverent, casual reference to the Bible and Christian teaching is accepted in the west without causing serious offence to Christian believers. It is not acceptable, however, to use Islamic holy texts in this way. It can be argued that Salman Rushdie’s offence lay in approaching Islam from a critical stance, perhaps because his experience as a writer living in England was highly westernised. This cultural difference lies deep at the core of academic study. Islamic academics – and even more so Islamic teachers and teacher educators – carry out their work as a service to Allah. Their endeavours will be

successful, ‘God willing’. They bring commitment and advocacy to their work, often dedicating themselves to serve with an explicitly religious orientation, for example, ‘And with such effort, we can smile in heaven because we know we have been working to raise the quality of teacher education in Malaysia.’ Thus, the development of a critical stance – becoming critically reflective – could be liable to misinterpretation. In an academic institution like UPSI whose students are asked to conform to a strict dress code, in line with the teachings of the holy Quran, it becomes difficult for students to challenge orthodoxies. Similarly, within the Chinese community in Malaysia there is a long tradition of respect for authority deriving from the philosophy of Confucius: the young are invited to honour their elders and their ancestors and to conform to the community’s norms of thought and behaviour.

The working group that drew up these Guidelines for Critical Reflection was made up of Malay scholars and scholars from the Chinese and Indian Malaysian communities. Bridget Somekh brought her own western identity to this partnership, with the advantage of prior experience of supervising a PhD student from Saudi Arabia. The challenge for Bridget in leading the group developing the Guidelines lay in knowing where to draw the line between striving, on the one hand, for academic excellence, and imposing a western concept of critical reflection in a post-colonial environment, on the other. In that sense she was leader of the group in terms of organisation of the work and drafting the final version of the text, but she was dependent on other group members in drawing essential lines of judgement. Those experienced members of the group who had carried out postgraduate study in the UK or Australia and habitually practised critical reflection were particularly helpful. One example of this fine-line-drawing was how to deal with Revealed Knowledge within the dimension: Learning to Construct Knowledge. Bridget was encountering the concept of Revealed Knowledge for the first time. After having it explained to her she presumed that Revealed Knowledge must be a concept common to all the religious groups in Malaysia and suggested a text that allowed for different kinds of revealed knowledge, dependent on each religious group. She presumed that Hindus, Buddhists and Christians also had their own revealed knowledge and suggested that the difference lay only in whether this knowledge could be submitted to critical reflection. But it was explained that Revealed Knowledge is a specifically Islamic concept. On this understanding, the agreed definition for Revealed Knowledge in the Guidelines was, “This knowledge is divine revelation to be accepted as truth. It is not put under scrutiny in critical reflection.”

Writing a text in English for use by those whose home language is likely to be Malay, Tamil or Mandarin also posed problems. The Guidelines needed to present excellence in scholarship but needed to do it in a manner that was accessible. The decision to publish two versions of the text –English and Bahasa Malay – helped to overcome this problem. The other important decision was to severely limit the extent of academic citations in the Guidelines. These were limited to the key quotations that presented concepts relating to each of the seven dimensions. The introductory texts to each section were written in the style of an encyclopaedia entry with no citations. The result was that some concepts are introduced in the text which may need further explanation and teaching: for example, Pedagogical content knowledge. Here too, it may be more helpful for Malaysian students to Google this concept and be directed to

Lee Shulman's website (<http://www.leeshulman.net/domains-pedagogical-content-knowledge.html>) rather than being directed by a citation to the 1986 book in which he first introduced it. The aspiration is for students to be introduced to key theories and concepts through the key quotations and provided with easily accessible introductions, guidelines for practice and examples of critical reflection. The focus of students' learning should be on the concepts that are crucial to becoming critically reflective and for the slog of inessential tasks to be removed.

Another fine-line decision was made after discussion of the title for the Guidelines. This was made on strategic grounds. The issue was whether or not to make the Guidelines relate specifically to Action Research. To relate them specifically to action research would have acted as a branding, making their focus critical reflection into a specific kind of academic practice rather than one generic to academic excellence in all disciplines. The Special Issue (SI) of EAR referred to at the beginning of this article links critical reflection explicitly to action research, indeed the title of the SI is Reflective Practice and Action Research. While it is clear that critical reflection is a centrally important concept in action research, this leads to defining it too narrowly as a special kind of academic practice. It was important for these guidelines to be much wider in their reference, focusing on the massive problem of uncritical reading and memorisation of authoritative texts as well as the methodological project of forefronting subjective experience and seeking for the interrelationships between theorising and practising. Creating a culture of critical reflection at UPSI, in order to promote academic excellence, is the responsibility of all academic staff and students. Linking them specifically to action research would limit their appeal and act to exclude a large proportion of the academic community. The Guidelines will, however, be useful to those engaging in action research, including the teachers and local education leaders with whom UPSI has established close relationship over the last ten years. Bridget Somekh led workshops on action research for local teachers during her visits in 2009 and 2010 and worked with Prof. Nagendralingan to launch a Malaysian Chapter of the Classroom Action Research Network (CARN) during her 2010 visit. Her strong associations with action research, including her editorship of EAR from 1992 – 2008 and her co-editorship of the Handbook of Educational Action Research (Noffke & Somekh, 2009) mean that the Guidelines sit comfortably alongside action research methodology. However, Bridget's experience and expertise is wider than this would suggest. She is also co-editor of a book about research methods in the social sciences (including both quantitative and qualitative methods) for postgraduate students (Somekh & Lewin, 2011).

There was only one place in the Guidelines where the decision to title them 'Critical Reflection in Teaching and Learning' became a potential constraint. The Guidelines would be much more widely used with this title, but the working group felt it was important to include 'Analysis and Interpretation' as one of the seven dimensions and these are concepts which suggest involvement in research. In effect, critical reflection is a means of integrating some of the practices of research into the practices of teaching and learning. To overcome this problem Critical Reflection and Action Research are presented, in the Guidelines, as a continuum of practices.

The first section is included here to explain this approach:

Analysis and interpretations

(i) What is analysis and interpretation?

Analysis and interpretation are at the heart of Critical Reflection. They are also key processes in Action Research. Think of Critical Reflection and Action Research as being at two ends of a continuum. Writing a critically reflective journal is where CR and AR meet because what you write in the journal is data for research. When you carry out Action Research you collect other kinds of data as well as writing a reflective journal. In Critical Reflection your journal is the only data you collect.

Critical reflection in the analysis and interpretations of evidence is usually based on an interpretative philosophy with the idea of giving or ascribing meaning to the evidence. In research, analysis and interpretation are done by sorting, grouping, separating, and synthesizing the evidence to discover “what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992:153).

The process in analysis of data entails five cyclical stages. The first three occur in Critical Reflection as well as in Research:

1. Stage one – in CR and AR

- Familiarising or reading evidence by closely examining all incidents and experiences.

2. Stage two – in CR and AR

- Organising and selecting evidence by sorting what is important and unimportant from the mass of information available to you

3. Stage three - in CR and AR

- In CR: making meaning out of the evidence under scrutiny by seeking to understand participants' motivations, thoughts and feelings. This is recorded in the Reflective Journal.

- In AR categorising or coding data (evidence) by grouping, separating data into themes, topics, ideas, or concepts inductively and deductively.

4. Stage four – in AR

- In AR, presenting themes or concepts on the data in the form of a written outline or diagram to describe and explain phenomena that are meaningful and comprehensible.

5. Stage five – in AR

- In AR, interpreting data and drawing conclusions by explaining relationships and constructing a practical theory or model that relates to the research focus.

The construction of meaning out of the data requires you to critically examine the analytic process (...). This implies a readiness to step back from your assumptions and feelings, reflect on the data and be open to any evidence that is counter to your assumptions and feelings. In short, it requires you to extend reflections to reflexivity, and “intellectual integrity and the determination to be honest with yourself and others” (Reiners 1961:335).

Developing the guidelines in practice

The process of developing these guidelines was educative for all members of the group. One of the dimensions of critical reflection is Cultural Understanding and the process of working together on the preparatory analysis and writing of the draft text was rich in developing this dimension. The composition of the group reflected the multi-ethnic make-up of Malaysian society, and Bridget's presence brought a western dimension. We all learnt from one another. However, the power of these guidelines will only be realised as they are used and developed through the process of praxis.

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Appendix: The Critical Reflection Profile (CRP)

(NOTE: This is comprised of the Guidelines for Practice for each of the Seven Dimensions.)

Students will be asked to rate each item in the guidelines for each dimension by ticking one of these four options: ‘I practice this daily’, ‘I practice this at least once a week’, ‘I practice this at least once a month’, ‘This is not part of my current practice.’]

The Profile should be used at the beginning and end of teaching practice placements. Students will self-assess their own level of critical reflective practice and should set themselves with targets for improvement before completing the CRP for the second time.

Learning to Construct Knowledge

1. Develop and test out: the practical knowledge I need to get things done (e.g. how to teach and/or study)
2. Develop and test out: the skills I need for my professional work (e.g. how to produce teaching materials and use whiteboards and other teaching aids)
3. Critically reflect on the pedagogic content knowledge I need to teach (both knowledge of concepts and knowledge of how to explain them to learners)
4. Critically reflect on my practice to uncover the tacit knowledge that I use to decide on each action.

The Self and Subjectivity

5. Critically reflect on the actions and decisions I take in my work with students to see if there is any bias in my judgements.
6. Critically reflect on any incidents that made me angry or upset, to try and understand if I was fearful or felt threatened – or was there another reason?
7. Develop and test out new ways of doing things so that my teaching is innovative and creative.
8. When students are difficult or challenging, try to find out if they have any personal difficulties, either long term or short term.

Reflection-in-Action and Situational Understanding

9. React positively to unexpected events and reflect-in-action on ways of turning them to advantage for the students’ learning.
10. Critically reflect on any rapid decisions I make in my practice. Did I get it right or would another decision have possibly been better?
11. Use my reason to critically reflect on problems I face in my practice, and test out if a new way of doing things helps to overcome the problem.
12. Critically reflect on what I am learning from my experience of teaching, in particular whether this new knowledge is well grounded in evidence and is contributing to my growing situational understanding.

Analysis and Interpretation

13. Critically reflect on what I am learning from observation of colleagues and guiding teachers in school.
14. Choose an incident from my practice in the last 48 hours and critically reflect on how best to interpret its meaning; then represent the incident in a drawing or diagram in my journal.
15. Critically reflect on a persistent problem in my practice and analyse it by making two lists: (a) of words with which to describe it; and (b) words with which to interpret it.
16. Work with a critical friend to observe each other’s teaching and give each other rich and honest feed-back.

Cultural Understanding

17. Critically reflect on the cultural differences between my students, and where my own culture fits or does not fit with theirs.
18. Critically reflect on the culture of my placement schools and whether I am culturally sensitive to colleagues.
19. Develop and test out: strategies for culturally-responsive teaching.
20. Develop and test out: strategies to use the strengths of my students’ cultural diversity (Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups).

Critically Reflective Reading

21. Read critically to ensure I am up to date in new knowledge in the subject areas I teach.
22. Read critically to deepen my learning of the theory and practice of teaching.

23. In my teaching, develop and test out strategies to model for my students the processes of critical reading
24. Explore the internet to find new books and other sources of knowledge, keeping a careful record of the sources (URLs or publications).

Critically Reflective Writing

25. Write at least a page of critical reflection in my journal to support my on-going learning.
26. Write critically reflective notes on my reading, particularly about points which are contentious and where different authors disagree.
27. Keep a continuous written record of theories I am developing about my own teaching and my students response when I test them out in the classroom.
28. Re-read and critically reflect on my journal, annotating it with comments and reflections with the benefits of hindsight. (Use a different coloured ink so it's obvious which is the new writing.)