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**A Case Study on Integration of
Different Reflective Methods in
Teaching Practice**

**Teli Karaman
Mathematics Teacher
Doğuş Groups of Schools
Turkey**

**Ayşenur Yontar Togrol
Associate Professor
Boğaziçi University
Turkey**

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
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A Case Study on Integration of Different Reflective Methods in Teaching Practice

Teli Karaman
Mathematics Teacher
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Ayşenur Yontar Togrol
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Abstract

In order to develop the skills and competencies required in teaching profession, students have to reflect on their teaching practices. Most of the studies in teacher education programs showed that self-assessment, peer-assessment and the combination of both can be an effective method in developing competencies needed as a professional.

In this case study, combination of different evaluation and reflection techniques were discussed in a secondary school teaching mathematics undergraduate program. Video recording, peer feedbacks through blogs, self-assessment, peer evaluation report and instructor feedback were integrated in order to provide an effective learning environment for teacher development.

In this teaching practice course students were expected to plan and perform a 30-minutes length mathematics lessons by considering learning theories, models and teaching strategies. Teaching performances were videotaped during the instruction in order to support the reflective teaching practices. At the end of the presentations students were participated to online-discussion in which they reflected on all the classmates' teaching experiences. Both individual video recordings and peer feedbacks provided different perspectives in the preparation of the individual self evaluation reports.

Content analyses of reflective blog comments, self and peer evaluation reports were also conducted and discussions were carried out to present detailed information on pre service teachers professional development.

Key Words: Teacher education, teaching practice, self evaluation, peer evaluation, reflection

Contact Information of Corresponding author:

Introduction

Teaching profession requires specialized knowledge and skills. In order to perform their jobs teacher candidates should possess certain competencies (Kilic, 2010). To acquire these competencies teachers need comprehensive and qualified training before starting to their profession (Sisman & Acat, 2003; Kilic, 2010; Işık et al., 2010). Effective teaching was defined as 'one that produces demonstrable results in terms of the cognitive and affective development of the college students' (Cabrera & Nasa, 2002). Teacher competencies develop through not only by theoretical but also practical applications, therefore teacher candidates should be trained in practice oriented, learner-centered environment to be prepared to such conditions (Kilic, 2010: 79). To enhance the novice lecturers by making use of the expertise are already present in the universities but present study integrates this application with multilevel reflection processes.

In micro teaching sessions teacher candidates teach a small portion of a lesson to their classmates. Micro teaching fosters the development of multiple skills as preparing lesson plans, choosing teaching goals, teaching in front of a group, asking questions and using different evaluation techniques. Additionally receiving immediate feedback determines the productivity and efficient use of teaching strategies (Kilic, 2010). Micro teaching session must be combined with different reflective practices in order to be successful. Larrivee and Cooper (2006) summarize the ways of reflection as journal writing, teacher narratives, critical incidents, support groups, critical friends and action research. But methods like video recording, blogging and peer evaluation extend the productivity of application.

In establishing a peer feedback environment, educators can provide a climate in which all the students can deepen their understanding of effective teaching practices which promote quality learning. Chan (1999) states that peer review/observation of teaching, if handled with care and carried out systematically, is capable of yielding extremely fruitful results. A positive affective environment is created when individuals receive constructive criticism from people they respect and with whom they have a good rapport (Orlova, 2009:33). Fulcher and Paull (2010) stated that peer review helps academics improve their teaching practice, develops collegial and collaborative relationships and engenders reflective practice. In a similar research key themes of successful peer evaluation were identified as the effectiveness of the supported reflective practice process, improvements to teaching practice, developing confidence and congruent espoused theory and theory-in-use, ongoing professional development and developing collegiality (Bell, 2001). Orlova (2009:30) states that more than three decades ago, when she was a student teacher, her evaluations came from either a mentor or a university supervisor. Feedback about her teaching was filtered through the lens of their perceptions and experiences, leaving little space for her own reflection. While this type of supervisory observation is common, Teacher Education has advanced and now includes many other evaluation methods, including self-reflection by teachers on aspects of their own classroom practice.

The concept of 'reflection' was first introduced by Dewey in 1933 (Ekiz, 2006; Larrivee & Cooper, 2006), stressing that it is an active, deliberative thinking process which is mainly concerned with addressing practical problems of practitioners and trying to provide them with possible realistic solutions to their practices. It is later

interpreted by Schön (1983) in detail, offering an approach to the practice which is based on the close examination of what the practitioners actually do, in other words with the real life applications of practitioners. According to Schön, reflective practitioners continually learn from their experience, reconstructing experience through reflection (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006; Roychoudhury & Rice, 2012).

Larrivee and Cooper (2006) indicated the capacity for self-reflection as a distinguishing attribute of reflective practitioners. Similarly Wallace (1991) emphasized reflection as a key to teacher development because 'it is through reflection on professional action that professional expertise is developed'. By developing self-reflective skills, teachers become increasingly aware of their place and influence in the classroom. They slow down their thinking and reasoning process to become more aware of how they perceive and react to students. While experience is a key component of teacher development, it may be insufficient as a basis for professional growth (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Teachers develop routines or strategies for daily recurring dimensions of teaching. Although experience is the starting point for teacher development, reflection must be accompanied in order to provide valuable development.

Teachers have several options for self-inquiry; they can administer questionnaires, write journals as a response to a teaching event, compare their teaching against a checklist of good instructional techniques or make a review on audio or video recording of their performances (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Among these options, video recording is considered as one of the most valuable tool because it provides an objective and permanent source that can be viewed repeatedly to observe various aspects of classroom practice (Orlova, 2009). With a proper videotaping teacher candidates will have a live record of what is happening during their micro teaching session. Through video records students can observe themselves from a distance and determine their strong and weak points, even they discover certain attitudes which they didn't think that they were existed. Orlova (2009) indicates the special value of recording for non-native English speaking trainees because it enables them to focus not only on the nonverbal aspects of their teaching but also on their communicative competence, including their language proficiency, knowledge of essential language functions and their style of teacher-student interaction. In addition to these during pre-service years, it was observed that students who engage in recording and reflecting on their microteaching activities typically showed increased self-awareness, improved ability to shift roles from actor to director, and a sense of continuity regarding reflective practice for professional development.

For developing skills and competencies required for being a qualified teacher, prospective teachers must be aware of their performances and have to reflect on these practices. Most of the studies in teacher education programs showed that self-assessment, peer-assessment and the combination of both can be an effective method in developing competencies needed as professionals (Sluijsmans, 2006; Jabr, 2011; Roberts, 2006). In this study different evaluation and reflection techniques were used together in an undergraduate secondary school teaching mathematics program. Video recordings, peer feedbacks through blogs, self-assessment, peer evaluation report and instructor feedback were integrated in order to provide an effective teaching-learning environment for prospective teachers. Addition of blogging application provides wider discussion arena compared to limited class time.

The purpose of this study is to present a case in using various reflective techniques in combination and as a result conducting content analysis for enlightening dynamics of the interactions.

Procedure

Participants

Study was carried on during a practice teaching in mathematics course which is an undergraduate required course in which students have an opportunity to practice and apply what they have learned as a result of studying in the program of teaching mathematics (3 credit hours). 28 undergraduate secondary school teaching mathematics senior students (17 male, 11 female) in their last term before graduation were enrolled in this course in a state supported university where the medium of instruction is in English.

Method

In this teaching practice course students were expected to prepare a 30-minutes length mathematics lesson by consideration of different learning theories/models and teaching strategies. Students were videotaped during their performances in order to support the reflective teaching practices. At the end of each presentation all students were participated to online-discussion period (blogging) in which they reflected on all their classmates' teaching performances. Both individual video recordings and peer feedbacks from blogging provided different perspectives in the preparation of the individual self evaluation reports for each prospective teacher.

First five weeks of the course were allocated to theoretical review and to teaching practice activities. These were followed by micro teaching and reflection sessions over a period of ten weeks. In summary following steps were covered in the course; introduction of course requirements, lesson planning, teaching performance, video recording, blogging activity, self evaluation report, peer evaluation report and instructor feedback.

Introduction of Course Requirements: Students were informed that they had 5 main responsibilities throughout this course. These were preparing for a 30-minutes length mathematics lesson, teaching this planned lesson to his/her classmates in 30 minutes period, reflecting on all the other classmates' teaching experiences (blogging activity), reflecting on one of their classmates teaching experiences (peer-evaluation report), reflecting on their teaching experiences (self-evaluation report).

Lesson Planning: All the students prepared a 30-minutes length mathematics lessons. In preparation of lesson plans, each student had the chance of benefiting from resources created by one of their classmates in the previous semester. But they were expected to add various qualified activities by taking into consideration of learning theories/approaches/models/teaching strategies and methods learned in prerequisite courses.

Instruction: Students presented the planned lessons to their classmates. While the student-teacher was teaching, the others were expected to ask questions to the teacher, respond teacher's questions, do whatever the teacher request, etc. During the

teaching experiences, not just the presenter (student-teacher), but also the students were evaluated by the instructor according to their attention and attitudes through the lesson.

Video Recording: Video camera on a tripod was placed in the corner of the classroom with a wide perspective of action, permitting the movement of the device. All presentations were recorded in order to provide feedback for the students. Students were expected to watch these recordings before preparing his/her self-evaluation reports.

Blogging Activity: All the students were expected to reflect on all the other classmates' teaching experiences. These reflections were carried out in an online discussion environment, namely blogging. Both the number and quality of comments posted by the students were taken into consideration in grading. One of the students voluntarily opened an externally hosted blogging area and registered course participants to this site. Students posted their comments as a regular basis inline with the instructional practice evaluation guidelines.

Self Evaluation: All the students were expected to reflect on their teaching experience. This reflection would be about both preparation and implementation period. Detailed explanations about how to write a self-evaluation report were also presented at the beginning of the term.

Peer Evaluation: Each student paired with another student as the evaluator student and these students were expected to reflect on one of their classmates teaching experience. In writing peer evaluation report, students should follow the guidelines that the instructor gave them at the beginning of the term. In the evaluation report each blog comments should be taken account. Evaluator would be responsible for summarizing and combining the others' comments, ideas and also add his/her own conclusion and reflections about the specific presenter's teaching performance.

Results

By combining all the above mentioned activities students had an experience about reflective micro teaching activity. Because of the time restriction only the re-teaching part of the procedure could not be conducted. Nevertheless detailed information was collected on each reflection and preparation step. Detailed content analyses were conducted throughout the study. While presenting the results all the steps were discussed both from students' and instructor' point of view.

Lesson Plan	Blog Comments	Self Evaluation	Peer Evaluation
Student (presenter) vs. Instructor	Group of students (Blogging friends) Instructor	of Student (Presenter) vs. Instructor	Student (evaluator) vs. group of students (Blogging friends) and the instructor

Lesson Plan

In the previous terms students were taken various education courses and they prepared comprehensive lesson plans and teaching units. Since all the necessary feedbacks had given, there were no problems with the content and structure of lesson plans. Just one of the presentation topics was a lower level, contrary to this others were comprehensive high school lessons, and some of them moreover included university level content in order to challenge their classmates. In one of the presentation both student and the blog comments reflected the complexity of the subject.

Self Evaluation	Peer Evaluation
<p><i>'I planned to finish my lesson by Gamow problem, because it was containing all the points which we learnt but I couldn't solve it, it was difficult for students, also its language, although I reduce and change some words to make it clearer.'</i>(F8)*</p>	<p><i>'The language of the activity was above students' level. Therefore most of the students could not understand it and couldn't benefit from the activity.'</i> (M7)*</p>
<p>* identification of student</p>	

Almost all of the students had applied what they had stated in their lesson plans. Three of the lesson plans among 28 had an excellent structure which expert teachers should present the content in similar way.

Blogging Activity

Qualitative data were collected from the analyses of students' blog documents on the web. A closer investigation of the content of blog posts revealed that students had provided both positive and negative feedbacks. But the number of negative criticisms was limited compared to positive ones. Students tried to reinforce their classmates' efforts and they tried to provide the improvement of their teaching through positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. They dealt with the lacking parts of the presentation as if it was a natural mistake, it could never happen again with self-development of the individual overtime. An interesting point is that if the students expected from a particular student an excellent instruction depending on their prior impression or knowledge of good work of that student, and as a result couldn't find it in the presentation they behaved harshly and criticized these students the most.

By the transcription of all student comments a categorization which is presented in Table 1 formed for the analysis of the results. Categorization shows that students emphasized different aspects of the teaching practices and that detailed and comprehensive reflections were made. It would be impossible to discuss all these topics during the predefined class period with participation of all students individually. As it can be seen most of the comments belongs to the management and content part of the instruction. Little or no place was given to the evaluation part of the instruction. One of the reasons for this can be the limited instruction time and the inadequacy of the students to apply an evaluation at the end of the lesson. Since most of the students tried to make positive reflections and constructive criticism they probably purposefully did not mention these missing points of the instruction.

While most of the blog comments were in line with self reflections of students, some points seem not mentioned in any one of them. As an example below blog statement was not answered in self evaluation report (SER). But contrary to this more positive evaluation were carried out in peer evaluation report. From the instructors point of view both of them were partially correct. The real case is somewhere between these two extreme judgments.

Blog Comment	Peer Evaluation
<i>'He asked well prepared questions about the subject. However, while a student was solving a question on the board, others were saying another way of solving that question, but he did not consider those students, so noise occurred. He shouldn't let students make a comment on the question until the student on the board had finished solving.'</i> (F11, blog comment)	<i>'It showed that he could cope with difficult situations easily. . . He was competent enough to deal with naughty boys. Classroom management was very good I think.'</i> (M13)

Table 1. Categorization of Blog Comments

Main Categories			Main Categories	
Introduction		Starting to a lesson with a question	Content	Effective Lesson
		Using and reminding prerequisite knowledge		Using activities during the lesson
		Clarification of symbols		Detailed outline
		Introduction of new terms		Use of material reinforcer
		Solution of homework problems		Using wide range of activities
Management	Content Based	Keeping students alert		Use of technology
		Effective classroom questioning		Using various instructional models and learning theories
		Calling students with their names		Clear and simple explanation of the selected topic
		Providing student motivation		Using explanatory sheet
		Dealing with problematic students effectively		Appropriates of the content to the teaching level
		Good classroom management		Citation of supportive information
		Creating real classroom environment		Finishing the lesson properly
	Ending	Disciplinary behaviors		Good time management
	Behavior Based	Use of body language		Reflection Type
		Use of (fluent) English	Only negative reflections	
		Proper volume and intonation	Both positive and negative reflections	
		Using blackboard properly		
Professional	Proper use of <i>teacherly</i> emotions			
	Acting as a real teacher			
	Interaction with the students			
	Student-centered instruction			

Self Evaluation

In self evaluation part of the course, students were expected to reflect on their teaching experiences in terms of both preparation and implementation. While evaluating themselves as a teacher, it is advised to seek answers to various questions ranging from 'How did you get prepared for this lesson? Were these sources enough

to be prepared for this lesson?’ to ‘If you have a chance of conducting this lesson again, which part/s of this lesson would you change to make it more effective?’.

Investigation of the self evaluation reports revealed that 24 of the students prepared the report in line with the provided outline. Only three students wrote their reports in different content outline. Detailed content analysis of the self evaluation reports revealed 7 different categories; preparation, introduction, management, content, teaching methods/strategies, evaluation, finishing the lesson.

In preparation part all the students provided detailed information. MEB (Ministry of National Education) text books and supplementary test books, internet were the commonly mentioned resources. Although they used high school mathematics text books as a reference for the objective and the content of the lessons, they widely used the internet as a source for the interactive class activities and follow up exercises.

In introduction part six different kinds of lesson introductions were mentioned as reminding the content of the previous lesson (n=8), answering the homework questions (n=2), with an interesting question (n=3) or story (n=4), introducing the meaning of the new terms and symbols (n=6), greeting students (n=2). It was observed that students had no particular problem in the introduction part of their teaching practice. At this point they tried to control their excitement and successfully proceed to the lesson.

In management part of the instruction method based strategies was presented in providing student motivation. Some (n=7) used materials (such as chocolate, small gift, extra point etc.), while others used interesting question, role playing, puzzles, history of the topic as motivators. In relation to behavior based strategies only two mentioned their standing position during the teaching practice in their self evaluation report while it was one of the most important points. Seven of the students strolled around the class while teaching; five of them observed student work, give feedback to their solutions; three of them used different places for teaching. But majority of the students stand still in front of the blackboard. Main reason for doing so was the use of direct instruction while being excited; fear of losing the control of the content could be some other reasons for this attitude.

All the students said that they clearly stated the objectives and the content of the lessons. In addition to this they think that they have almost achieved these objectives. Just a few students indicated limited time and the lack of real classroom setting as obstacles in achieving these objectives.

Although detailed information and instructions were provided about learning theories and teaching strategies in previous terms, it seems that students lack in differentiation of these methods. For example some of them mentioned about Gagné and Bruner. Direct Lecturing, Indirect Lecturing, Role Playing, Cooperative Learning, Discovery Learning, Learning by Doing are some of the strategies that were mentioned. Constructivist approach was mostly emphasized. But the concurrency between these strategies and the implementation seems problematic and misunderstandings shaped their performances. Therefore the need for more lessons with applications seems essential in teacher training programs.

Seven different kind of supplementary materials were used in order to support instruction, while five of the students didn't use any. These can be categorized into groups as question/solution based and content based. Question based materials were puzzles, quizzes and class-works, while content based materials were tables (e.g.

Sieve of Eratosthenes), solid figures, video and applets. Nine of the students used power point presentations; two used Geometer's Sketchpad Program and two video demonstration of mathematical proof. Some of the power point applications were successfully integrated to the instruction but three of them were not effective.

In evaluation part they had some difficulties. Students had only 30 minutes to perform their instruction, so it was very difficult to both instruct and evaluate students accordingly. Almost all of the students have used classroom questioning for providing immediate feedback and also for keeping students alert during the lesson. Half of the students applied pop-up quizzes during the lesson. And some other only indicated that it would be good to apply quiz at the end of the lesson in their lesson plans.

One of the problematic parts of the student instructions were the finishing part, since for most of the students this was their first teaching practice in front of a group of students: 'During the whole lesson, I was very excited. That was my first time in making a lecture to the students as a real teacher. I didn't have any previous experience of lecturing.' (F1, self evaluation report)

While planning their lessons they could not restricted the content so they wanted to give as much information as possible in a limited time which made them anxious. They should prepare less detailed but more activity and student oriented lessons. They valued the substantiality of the content while the instructor valued the coherency of teaching methods, activities and content.

Ten of the students clearly indicated watching their video records while evaluating their teaching practice by indicating their positive and negative behaviors and gestures. In addition 5 of the students clearly stated suggestions to improve their teaching, moreover they also mentioned lacking parts of their instruction which were not mentioned in any of the blog comments or peer evaluation reports. Closer investigations of students' writings revealed some similarities and differences in self evaluation and blog comments. As an example, following statement indicated only in the self-evaluation report of the students while no comments made about it in blog comments:

'I have learned that, teacher should solve the questions which he or she planning to solve in the class. Because students asked if their answer was right or wrong and I could answer directly, followed their solution steps until to the end.' (M5, self evaluation report)

The following statement exemplifies the consistency between blog comment and self evaluation report: 'As a result of this experience I learned that teaching is not as easy as it has seen. Because I generally criticized others about not walking around the classroom but I also realized that I didn't walk around the class at all (M8, self evaluation report)'. Some students objectively criticized themselves and the instructor thinks that this is the positive and beneficial results of self-reflection. Below is an example of one of the successful students who confused the rule and couldn't demonstrate it in front of the class: 'Self esteem is not good every time; one has to carry some suspicion. Like everybody, I am still learning . . .' (F3, self evaluation report)

Peer Evaluation

Students prepared a peer evaluation report reflecting on one of their classmates' teaching experiences. It is strongly emphasized to find the answers of the evaluation criteria based on the online blog comments and critiques. Therefore evaluator would be responsible for summarizing and combining the others' comments and ideas and write their own reflections about the specific presenter's lesson. Although students were advised to follow the evaluation criteria for their peer evaluation report, it was observed that almost more than half of the students developed their own format in preparing the report. Since students were free to write their blog comments in any format, they developed a pattern of writing positive and negative points of instruction. Hence they found it efficient to write their peer evaluation reports in parallel to this style.

14 of the students (most of them) mentioned the blog comments in a very organized content analysis format. They wrote a general comment or opinion followed by a blog comment supporting the validity of these statements. Peer evaluation reports were seen to be widely positive feedback oriented. Students did want to motivate their friends. Although they mentioned the missing or inappropriate parts of the instructions, but these were generally about the commonly agreed deficiencies so little emphasize were given to minor points.

In peer evaluation reports although students combined their opinions with blog comments, some reflected their feelings more than blog comments: 'He didn't mention about polynomials and asked a question, so a crisis occurred. , I think he couldn't manage to teach it.' (F2, PER)

For those peer evaluation reports which combined blog comments and their opinion compared to respective student self evaluation reports it was seen that a high degree of consistency exists.

Peer Evaluation	Self Evaluation
<i>'Can, Elif, Cenk, Murat, Berk, Duygu, Gamze, Aykut and Mert were all congratulated Ayşe on her choosing the questions of exercise sheet since it has the main concept of the topic with important points that prevent misconceptions from easy to hard ones.'</i> (M15)	<i>'I prepared these questions according to students' cognitive development level. In order to prevent misconceptions, questions were planned from easy to difficult.'</i> (F1)
<i>'I want to say that for 30 minutes F8's lesson plan included a dense content. She should have included fewer topics, so she could have explained them in a more detailed way and give more examples and solve more questions which could make it easier for students to understand'</i> (M9)	<i>"I couldn't make my students acquire all my objectives especially related to rotate complex numbers, also I couldn't give opportunity to practice them enough about the topic'</i> (F8)

Conclusion and Implications

Changing classroom demands redefine the teacher's role as social mediator, learning facilitator, and reflective practitioner (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006). It is very important to provide chances of self-reflection in teacher education, so that it will become a natural and inseparable component of student-teachers' teaching throughout their teaching career.

Pre-service teachers with little or no experience should be confronted with the idea of reflection starting from their first years of university education. Critical reflection activities in early years prepare students for real teaching environments and provides a habitual development of these kinds of behaviors. Almost all of the students in the present study were so eager to see their friends' blog comments and they emphasized the importance of these comments in their professional development.

Students in teacher education programs implement lesson plans, give feedbacks, manage a class and introduce communicative activities. However, critical self-reflection goes beyond simply assessing these skills and requires students to thoughtfully analyze and determine how their own belief system and attitudes impact their decisions and actions in the classroom (Orlova, 2009). Factors that facilitate the supported reflective practice were indicated as including the support triangle, the role of the educational developer in providing feedback and monitoring, and the role of the support colleague. Bell (2001:29) states that truly collegial and developmental activities involving observation encourage shared critical reflection on real life teaching experiences and can lead to transformation of both perspective and practice. Although his research was on staff of higher education it can be also implied to teaching education programmes.

It is very important in peer observation to provide guidelines for the selection of peer observers, a set of criteria for providing feedback, an agreed on process for the giving and receiving feedback. Fulcher and Paull (2010) mention about the barriers to the peer review process such as time factors, lack of suitable peers, resistance to change and lack of institutional support. In the present study pre-service teachers did not face much of these problems, but time factor constituted a problem for re-teaching units. In addition students seemed quite relaxed to perform in front of their classmates whom they know for years, although nearly for all it was their first teaching performance.

In a similar research Ekiz (2006) stated difficulties mainly related with starting the planning stages of teaching and with ending up teacher candidates' images of teaching. In the present study although no mentioned difficulty were observed in the planning part of the instructions, in line with the findings, some missing parts were observed in evaluation and ending up the lesson parts.

Supporting and enhancing learning and teaching through the use of reflective practices must be the inseparable parts of the teacher education and it should be initiated in the early years of education fostering the cumulative increase of abilities. The format of these lessons also constitutes great importance. Theoretical and practical lessons must be given in a compound structure in a way that each learning theory must be accompanied with its application in simultaneous sessions. Hence students would be able to connect and differentiate between different methods and strategies. In addition, teaching practice courses must be extended to maintain the reflective practices of teaching applications in a proper way.

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