

Pre-Service Music Teachers' Concerns before a Practicum Stint

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Abstract

A crucial element in any teacher training programme is teaching practice. Terms such as practicum, refers to teaching practice which is embedded in the teacher training programme itself. Such stints become more challenging for a teacher, for their teaching would be observed and assessed by a teacher educator. The purpose of this study was to explore the music pre-service teachers' concerns before embarking on practicum. A total of 24 pre-service teachers participated in this study. Their concerns were captured through a written reflection. This reflection was written seven days before these pre-service teachers were to begin their practicum stint. The written reflections were analysed using a thematic approach. Among the concerns are issues related to communication skills, lesson planning and meeting the expectations of teacher educators. The recommendations made in enhancing teacher education programme, notably in training music teachers are also made.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, music education, teacher training

1. Introduction

The journey of becoming a teacher is an arduous one. For many it begins when enrolled in a teacher education programme. The mode and content of the programme, varies and is constantly evolving. Many countries are still experimenting with the best method of training teachers who are capable to match the constant changing landscape in the field education. However to assume aspiring teachers join a programme without any experience and expectation is naïve.

Lortie (2002) in his classical sociological study *Schoolteacher* noted that pre-service teachers enrol in teacher education programme with a strong belief about teaching and learning; and all these are a result of years spent in school. He termed it 'apprenticeship of observation'. Hence, teacher educators realise that teacher education programme should take note of the beliefs and values pre-service teachers bring along when joining the programme. Instead of ignoring their beliefs and values, harnessing them would enhance the learning experience of these pre-service teachers.

A common feature in teacher education programme is introduction to technical and procedural aspects of teaching. New elements such as the habit of thinking about teaching and learning are included. A compulsory element in many teaching programme is the teaching practise or better known as practicum. During practicum, pre-service teachers are evaluated on their ability to deliver or utilise the technical knowledge or newly learned techniques which they have learnt prior to practicum. Practicum provides the opportunities for pre-service teachers to put into action the skills they have acquired and learnt as well as to hone their classroom management techniques, under the watchful eyes of either a mentor-teacher or a teacher educator. Practicum provides a glimpse of a teacher's role for many pre-service teachers (Zeichner, 1996). Through practicum, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to experience actual contact with pupils in a natural setting i.e. classroom (Sieforth & Samuel, 1979).

Though the practicum experience plays a vital part in the teacher education programme, its educative values and approaches are often questioned (Segall, 2002). Zeichner (1996) highlighted that the practicum stint only focused on instruction with children in the classroom, and the teacher education programme does not prepare them for the full range of their responsibilities.

In this article we outline the concerns raised by a group of pre-service teachers. The uniqueness of this study can be seen in two broad areas. They are the pre-service teachers who took part in this study, and the way the data gathered for this study. The pre-service teachers are enrolled in teacher education programme specifically

designed to produce music teachers. The distinction of this study lies in the pre-service teachers' qualification. Though these pre-service teachers are designated to become a music teacher, having music knowledge is not a prerequisite in following this programme.

This study was administered at a teachers' training institution in Malaysia amongst a group of third year undergraduates pursuing a teaching degree in music education. The programme undertaken by these budding teachers is known as *PISMP* which literally means a Bachelor of Teaching programme with honours in a specialized field. This is a four year programme with a total of 8 semesters of study. The curriculum of this programme can be divided into three main components (see Table 1).

Table 1. Component of teacher education programme

No	Component	Credit Hours
1	Compulsory Courses Core Courses	23
2	Professional Education Major Professional Practices Elective Courses	86
3	Elective Package 1 Elective Package 2	24
Total		133

Source: *PISMP Handbook*, June 2012.

Among the papers offered in the music programme, the Curriculum & Music Teaching papers are taught in Semester 4 and 5. A key component of these two papers is exposing pre-service teachers to elements of teaching. Teaching practice is one of the key elements of this paper. The length of time for the first teaching practise or practicum consists of four weeks whereby students are graded solely on their specialized field which is music education. During practicum, each trainee is given a music supervisor who observes at least three lessons during a period of four weeks. At this time, the music supervisor guides the teacher trainee on various issues such as pedagogical content, classroom management and ways of using various methods that are suitable to be applied during a music lesson.

The other is the way data was gathered. Instead of distributing a questionnaire or conducting interviews, we decided to ask the pre-service teachers to write down their concerns. It was carried out seven days before the pre-service teachers embarked on their practicum stint. This allowed the capturing of their immediate concerns. The main aim objective of this study was to gather insights of the pre-service teachers' views of what their personal concerns before pursuing their first practicum stint in schools.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

In this study, concerns related to practicum are a real life contextual for pre-service teachers. A case study approach is more appropriate for such study (Yin, 2013). This method allows the voices of pre-service teachers into the study. Though consent was obtained from the Head of Department of the institution to carry out this study, the researchers took upon themselves to explain the study to the pre-service teachers. They were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

2.2 Sampling

The participants of this study were twenty four pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher education programme leading up to a Bachelor of Teaching degree specialising in music education. This duration of the programme is four years i.e. eight semesters.

In semester 4, these pre-service teachers were exposed to micro-teaching. During the micro-teaching sessions, the pre-service teachers are only required to teach one section of a lesson, either the set induction section, or only

one of the steps leading up to the closure of a lesson, while the fellow classmates will act as their students. In the beginning of semester 5 the pre-service teachers would face real-life students. They had to teach 5 year old children from a nearby kindergarten during the micro-teaching session. At the end of semester 5, the participants of this study were placed in schools for their first practicum stint. During this practicum stint, pre-service teachers are guided by a teacher educator and a teacher from the school who acts as a mentor.

2.3 Data Collection

This study was carried out at the end of semester 5, just before these pre-service teachers are about to embark on their practical stint. It was timed in this way to capture the pre-service teachers' concerns regarding their practicum stint. The pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on their concerns. As a guide, the following questions were posed to them:

- i. How do you view the importance of communication skills in schools?
- ii. How do you balance between lesson planning and teaching style amongst students in schools?
- iii. Do you think you have sufficient pedagogical content knowledge to be imparted during the first practicum?
- iv. Do you think the knowledge you have will meet the expectations of your music supervisor?
- v. How do you view the importance of using teaching aids during a music class and teaching in a music room?
- vi. How do I deal with difficult students in the classroom?

The pre-service teachers pondered over these questions, and wrote down their thoughts on a piece of paper, which was provided. To maintain anonymity, the pre-service teachers were instructed not to reveal their names.

2.4 Data Analysis

Four written reflections were selected randomly and analysed by all the researchers. We read and re-read the reflections until common themes were agreed upon (Mueller & Skamp, 2003). To determine the themes, a qualitative thematic content analysis was used. This technique allows to be made inferences objectively and systematically leading up to categorizing concerns in a thematic stance (Sarvela & McDermott, 1993).

The remaining twenty written reflections were then divided into two groups (two researchers in one group). Each group analysed ten written reflections. The researchers compared their analyses and findings. The findings were arranged into themes. In the following section, findings are discussed in accordance with the emergent themes.

3. Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore twenty four pre-service music teachers' concerns before embarking on their first practicum experience. Findings related to this study are presented thematically.

3.1 Language of Music and the Teaching of Music

The crux of a good classroom management is good communication skills. Establishing and creating conducive communication is essential in the teaching and learning process. To achieve this, teachers must have patience and confidence. Though teachers are aware of this, mastering this skill requires ample practice, and time is an essence. A determining factor in mastering this skill is the subject being taught by the teacher (Ungureanu, 2011).

Pre-service teachers were rather concerned with a few main issues in communication. The average age of the students these pre-service teachers would be facing are 7 to 12 years old, and most of these students are exposed to music lesson only during the school hours, which is about 60 minutes per week for KBSR(primary school integrated curriculum) classes and 30 minutes for KSSR (primary school standard curriculum) classes. Hence, good communication skills are necessary to cultivate and instil interest in music. Ability to express and give instruction using phrases familiar to students are absolutely necessary. Failing to do so could disrupt the teaching and learning process.

Giving clear instructions during a lesson is also another great concern of the pre-service teachers. For example pre-service teachers weren't sure if the way they asked questions or give instructions to perform a certain task would be understood clearly. This is because musical terms are normally in English but translated into Bahasa Malaysia when taught in the classroom. As such some students may get confused and not understand clearly when instructions are given or musical facts are explained. For example during a percussion lesson, pre-service teachers are required to teach students various rhythmic patterns when accompanying a song with percussion instruments. If the rhythmic patterns are not taught correctly then students would definitely find it difficult to accompany the song sung and participate in group and class activities.

Four pre-service teachers were concerned about their ability to explain and interpret music facts clearly using a

step by step approach. Simplifying the steps involved in learning music would help students' comprehension. Pre-service teachers are worried that their students may be confused and as result of this not pay attention during the entire lesson.

Pre-service teachers were aware that establishing good rapport with their students would enhance the learning process during a music lesson. But the concern was how to? One pre-service teacher indicated this by, "*If I raise my voice, I am afraid they might lose interest in music*". Another pre-service teacher was concerned on how to react if her students rebel or throw a tantrum. This situation would disrupt the flow of the music lesson and cause unhappiness in the classroom environment. The question then would arise as to how tactful should a music teacher be when conducting hands-on activities?

3.2 Juggling Lesson Planning and Teaching Style

A crucial element in practicum is the planning of lessons. Teachers are required to plan their lesson before entering a classroom. Through experience teachers are able to plan their lesson better. In the case of this study, pre-service teachers have been exposed to theory of lesson planning. There are three stages in a lesson. They are pre-lesson stage, requiring assessing what their students know; followed by the delivery of the lesson, in which the environment of the day plays a crucial role. Finally a teacher must reflect on the lesson. All these components are embedded in the lesson plan template given to the pre-service teachers.

Pre-service teachers weren't sure if they knew how to balance between lesson planning and teaching style? This is because when they were in Semester 4, pre-service teachers were taught how to plan and write a 30 minute music lesson based on a structured format given by their music educators. During this session, emphasis was on the activities that can be carried out during set induction, imparting knowledge in every step and ways of ending a music lesson. Though there was mock teaching, at the beginning of Semester 5, it was with 5-6 years old students. Even though pre-service teachers were given this exposure, their primary concern now is whether they would be able to prepare appropriate lessons for school children who are in the age range of 7-12 years old.

Pre-service teachers' concerns were on how to design a lesson plan catering to diverse students during practicum. One pre-service teacher voiced concern on what would be expected if her teacher educator decided to visit on the first day of practicum. The primary concern was without the information on what is the level of knowledge in music that their students have; preparing a lesson plan would be equivalent to shooting in the dark. Nevertheless the success in executing a lesson plan depends on numerous factors. Some which are beyond the control of the teacher. For instance students' behaviour and reaction are something which no one could predict. Ability to 'think on your feet' would enhance the success of the lesson plan.

3.3 Imparting Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Teaching is a highly complex activity, in which a teacher will have to rely on many kinds of knowledge. Mishra & Koehler's (2006) framework depicts the complexity of teaching (See Figure 1). Abbitt (2011) summarized the domains as follows

- Technological knowledge—knowledge of technology for processing information.
- Content Knowledge—knowledge of the subject matter to be taught. In the case of pre-service teachers it would be the language of music.
- Pedagogical knowledge—knowledge of nature of teaching and learning.

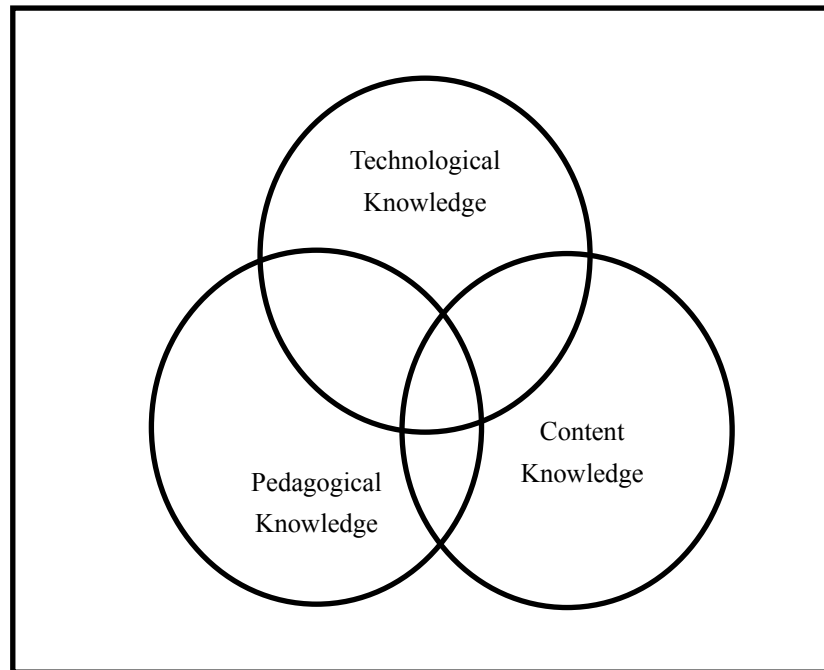


Figure 1. The technological pedagogical content knowledge framework (adapted)

One of the pre-service teachers was also concerned if she has sufficient pedagogical content knowledge to be imparted during a music class. During the stint in the programme, various musical skills such as singing, playing the keyboard, recorder and appreciating music were introduced. As such whether these skills and knowledge could be utilised and displayed during practicum were a concern to the pre-service teachers.

Among the pre-service teachers in this study, only seven have musical qualifications from The Associated Board of The Royal Schools of Music London in piano and violin playing. Though having these qualifications were not a prerequisite to become a music teacher, having it could boost one's content knowledge. As such it is not surprising when four pre-service teachers were concerned on encountering school students who might have their own private qualifications from The Associated Board of The Royal Schools of Music London or Trinity Guildhall Examination, London.

Some pre-service teachers also mentioned that they were not sure of the ways of evaluating students during a music lesson as this is a requirement in the school based assessment process. The Bachelor of Teaching in music education programme does not offer a specific paper on assessment and evaluation for pre-service teachers. Instead, this important component is embedded in other papers and pre-service teachers are expected to adopt and adapt. Hence whether these pre-service teachers would be able to evaluate students accurately during their first practicum remains a concern.

3.4 Living Up to Expectations

Pre-service teachers were also concerned about meeting the expectations of their respective music supervisors. One major concern expressed by two pre-service teachers were that many lecturers had delivered their lesson using the lecture mode, causing them to feel inadequately exposed to hands-on methods of implementing musical knowledge in a classroom setting. These pre-service teachers were concerned of the lack of knowledge the methods they employ during their practicum might not be similar to what their lecturers expected. On the other hand, one pre-service teacher was concerned on meeting the standards set by the lecturer.

Conversely one pre-service teacher was concerned by the occurrence of double standards. She was referring to the lecturers assessing during practicum, depending on whether the pre-service teacher obtain extra points if they have musical qualifications recognized from The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music London or Trinity Guilhall, London.

On a similar note, one pre-service teacher questioned whether the knowledge obtained during their training was sufficient for them to face students. She was afraid that her music lecturer may not be satisfied with her

performance and compare her teaching methods with other peers who have a music background. On the other hand, some music lecturers may have their own set ways how a music lesson should be constructed and this may deprive pre-service teachers from thinking further thus restricting creativity amongst students in the classroom. Therefore, music lecturers who are going for practicum must be equipped with the knowledge of 'scaffolding' these novice teachers so as to guide and mentor them as well as listen to the ideas and suggestions of their pre-service teachers.

3.5 Using Teaching Aids during a Music Class and Teaching in a Music Room

Most of the pre-service teachers in this cohort agreed that using teaching aids will benefit students during a music lesson. For example with the aid of a keyboard, a singing lesson becomes more interesting. But then the question arises as what are the alternative teaching aids a music teacher can use if problems such as electricity failure arise in schools.

Many pre-service teachers were also concerned of the school's facilities, such as availability of a music room. This is because conducting a music class in a music room will be more conducive for musical activities as well as control sounds produced during a lesson. Most pre-service teachers were anxious that if there were no specific music room located by the school authorities then noise made in a normal classroom might be disruptive for other nearby classes. Thus they may be penalised for classroom management and also class control during observation.

3.6 Dealing with Difficult Students

Some pre-service teachers were also concerned of how they were going to cope with difficult students in an actual classroom setting. For example students who are hyperactive or show some special needs. As the training in music education does not focus in this area, pre-service teachers have said that they worry that their classroom control might be affected and thus may experience disruption in the classroom. Then the question arises as to whether this experience would penalise them for classroom management by their music supervisors during observation. Will pre-service teachers lose marks when classroom management does not meet the requirements? How do I plan a music lesson that would include children with special needs? What are the suitable musical activities that would enhance my lesson in such setting?

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has revealed many interesting insights as to how music option pre-service teachers express their concerns and expectations before going out to schools for their first practicum or teaching practice. There are many areas of concern that need to be addressed by teacher educators. The reflections written by this cohort of pre-service teachers will be an eye opener to music lecturers. Some of the recommendations are discussed below.

4.1 Authentic Example

Before joining the teacher education programme, as a result of being in the schools as students, pre-service teachers have had a long apprenticeship of observation. Hence some of these observations could have been fossilised in the pre-service teachers. Unpacking and de-fossilising them is the greatest challenge many teacher educators face.

Teacher educators must have a good approach in achieving this. Besides emphasising the technical and procedural aspects of teaching, teacher educators must incorporate their experience of classroom teaching. Instead of depending solely on textbooks, teacher educators could incorporate their school experiences. It would be good if the teacher educator highlights the problems they faced during their teaching stint. Genuine examples would boost pre-service teachers' confidence.

4.2 Instructional Communication

Teachers who use verbal and non-verbal behaviours in giving instructions during their lesson would have positive spill-over effects such as increase in students' motivation (Webster, 2010). Webster (2010) posited six skills that teachers should have in their instructional repertoire (See Table 2). Some pre-service teachers expressed concerns regarding communication mainly related to giving instructions. Their major concern was whether children would understand instructions given during a music session. Mastering these skills (shown in Table 2) would alleviate pre-service teachers' concern.

During the teacher education programme, teacher educators teaching methodology related subjects should emphasize this skill i.e instructional communication. It would leave a greater impact on pre-service teachers if the teacher educators were able to incorporate them and highlight them at the end of their lectures.

Table 2. Instructional communication skills

Communication Skill	What to do
Being clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid false starts, vocalized pauses, and mazes Give straightforward explanations and maintain topical continuity Present new material in a step-by-step manner Work in supporting examples Cue students to critical elements of a skill or task Demonstrate Check for understanding Review periodically Signal transitions
Communicating Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate how one area of content relates to another area Link lesson content to students' personal goals Link lesson content to students' personal interest Link lesson content to students' personal learning needs
Using Humour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid sarcasm, other deprecating remarks Poke fun at yourself Poke fun at the lesson content Use physical comedy Use puns Tell jokes aimed at no one in particular
Showing Immediacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make eye contact with students Smile often Use vocal variety Remove objects between yourself and students Move around the classroom environment Use humour Gesture with hands
Manipulative Presentation Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be animated Appear relaxed Be friendly Be dramatic Leave an impression Be attentive Be open
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain eye contact with students when they are speaking to you Be still when a student is speaking to you Avoid interrupting when a student is speaking to u Nod your head to indicate you are listening Pay attention to students' verbal and non-verbal language Identify critical cues Determine the meaning of students' cues and implication for instruction Rephrase what a student has said to check your understanding of their message Adapt your communication and instruction to what you learn about students through interaction with them

Adapted from Webster (2010).

At present, the pre-service teachers of this study are offered subjects which can be broadly divided into three main components (See Table 3). Of all the subjects offered only major subjects under the core courses component is taught by teacher educators from the music department. In other words, a large chunk of subjects are taught by teacher educators who most probably display instructional communication skills which are not necessarily specific for music lessons. Hence some of the instructional communication skills displayed by them could be inapplicable in a music lesson. Thus music pre-service teachers face the challenge of adapting and adopting these skills.

Such setbacks could be avoided, if teacher educators practice the habit of team teaching. In every course taught, a music teacher educator must be paired with a non-music teacher educator. Such approach would enrich the instructional communication repertoire of both the pre-service teachers and teacher educators themselves.

Table 3. Course structure

Code	Course	Credit
1	Compulsory Courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory Courses for Higher Education Institution • Compulsory Courses for Teacher Education Institute 	23
2	Core Courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Studies • Major • Professional Practices 	86
3	Elective Courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elective Package 1 • Elective Package 2 	24
TOTAL		133

Source: MOE (2012).

4.3 Observation Form

Music lecturers who are appointed as supervisors during teaching practise are issued with a generic structured evaluation form known as PR1. The form is divided into four sections that comprise various criteria. Some of the criteria are not applicable to a music lesson. Among them are diagnostic testing, therapy elements and the usage of braille, which are used extensively in observing pre-service teachers of special education. The forms used should be tailor made for a specific option. This change would definitely be more efficient and help lecturers observing to be more focused thus increasing quality.

4.4 Pedagogical Content Knowledge

As pre-service teachers face problems implementing hands-on activities in the classroom, music lecturers here play a vital role in scaffolding these pre-service teachers during practicum by giving them ideas and discussing with them during the planning stage. Even though pre-service teachers may have had a short stint of exposure during their study of Curriculum I and II in semester 4 and 5 and Musical Teaching Approaches in Semester 3, it is still prevalent that music lecturers should also play a major role by practising clinical supervision and guiding pre-service teachers in their lesson planning and discussing ways of improving their standards during practicum.

With the introduction of KSSR, pre-service teachers are also required to assess and evaluate the progress of students as part of the school based assessment programme during a music lesson. As the music degree programme does not offer a specific paper on assessment and evaluation for music, it would then be suggested that the teacher training division include specific papers in this area as a compulsory paper in order to facilitate pre-service teachers before graduating.

4.5 Dealing with Difficult Students

As for dealing with difficult students, it would be suggested that pre-service teachers are given exposure about the various behavioural problems and challenges faced in schools today. The music department should

collaborate with the special education department on matters regarding students with special needs and ways of dealing with them. This would be an eye opener for the music pre-service teachers and also help them to come to terms with difficult situations in the classroom.

5. The Implications for Teacher-Education Development

From the above study, it can be summarized that pre-service teachers have great concerns before pursuing their first teaching practice. The above findings will help teacher educators of the issues concerning practicum. Though some of the recommendations made in the earlier section are embedded in the programme, teacher educators have a key role in highlighting them to the pre-service teachers. It would be good if the teacher educators make it a point to highlight and reinforce them at every lecture or class they conduct.

At the same time it is vital that the points highlighted by the teacher educators should be similar and more importantly should not contradict. To avoid such incidences i.e. variation in the points, teacher training institutions could create a unit to coordinate and address issues concerning teacher's belief.

As the education landscape is constantly changing, and many teacher educators would have left school long ago, it would be good teacher training institutions invite teachers from neighbouring schools to share their experiences.

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