

## Exploring the Creative Teaching-Learning Method to Promote Introspective Thinking Ability

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of reflective writing as a creative teaching-learning method to promote introspective thinking of pre-service teachers. Reflective writing is a new method to understand one's points of view on the world. Reflective writing refers to reflecting process on writers' previous writing experiences, which reveals cognitive and emotional process. Reflective writing provides researchers with the data which is impossible to be recognized from result text, and it also offers the opportunity to develop systematic thinking ability. In these regards, reflective writing has the possibility of the creative and ingenious research method. The results of this study show that reflective writing provides pre-service teachers with the opportunity to scrutinize their attitudes and belief on education. It can also provide meaningful data for educators to understand their students' perception on education and help to organize the effective teaching project to customize their students' needs and interests.*

**Keywords:** *creative teaching-learning method, reflective writing, introspective thinking ability, pre-service teacher training*

### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, reflective writing is regarded as a new method to understand one's points of view on the world, especially in the field of social science study about human interaction. The usefulness of the reflective writing as a research method is the duplex nature of the reflective text [1]. Reflective writing helps researchers to recognize inner world of authors and to reveal reflective thinking process of writers. Thus reflective writing reveals data which is impossible to be recognized from result text. Additionally, reflective writing can promote reflective thinking ability of the author by offering the opportunity to develop systematic thinking ability [2-3]. In these regards, reflective writing as a research method has creative and ingenious aspects. Accordingly, reflective writing has been used as a proper teaching-learning method to perform graduates' introspective thinking ability on composition class in the university, especially in the humanities field [4].

Teachers' roles are very important in that the quality of teachers determines the quality of education. Teachers' teaching behaviors affect the development of students' intelligence and emotion, so teachers must be careful before they acts. For this reason, introspective thinking ability is regarded as a crucial factor consisting of teacher professionalism. However, introspective thinking ability cannot be developed in a short time or obtained from the textbook only. This is one reason why the opportunity of experiencing self-examination should be offered to pre-service teachers while they are trained to become prospective teachers. Reflective writing is a proper teaching-learning method in teacher training programs in that it can contribute to promoting the introspective thinking ability of writers by offering reflective experience [5]. Recently, some educators have started to attend on reflective writing as a creative teaching-learning method in order to understand their students' perception on education and to offer

opportunity of introspective experience to students. Nevertheless, there has been little appreciation of reflective writing in teacher training program in universities.

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of the reflective writing as a creative teaching-learning method to promote introspective thinking ability of pre-service teachers. To do so, the reflective writing on education was provided to secondary pre-service teachers. It is expected that pre-service teachers will have the opportunity of introspective thinking through doing the reflective writing on the educational issue. It is also expected that this experience help to develop the students' introspective thinking ability. Also, educators can understand their students' world of consciousness on the given topic by descriptions of reflective writing.

The subjects of this study were secondary pre-service teachers and the topic of reflective writing is 'the role of secondary school teachers'. Pre-service teachers' own view about teachers' role is crucial because their view will affect not only the direction and quality of education but also their future students' satisfaction about their school life. It is considered that pre-service teachers' perception about the role of secondary school teachers has been influenced not only by their own educational experience before entering the university but by teacher training curriculum in the teacher education programs. Therefore, utilizing the reflective writing on the process of teacher training program can help secondary pre-service teachers organize their perception systematically by offering the introspective thinking opportunity [6]. Consequently, the process of reflective writing will become the important educational experience to pre-service teachers. Furthermore, the results of this study can also provide meaningful data for educators to understand their students' perception on education and help to organize the effective teaching project to customize their students' needs and interests.

## 2. Related Research

Generally, the discussions on the teachers' role are as follows. First, the role of teachers is regarded to satisfy the expectation derived from the status as a teacher [7]. In general, the academic concern about the role of secondary school teachers has been discussed in a normative viewpoint. According to this viewpoint, the most important point in schooling is to cultivate human nature of students because humanism is a virtual factor consisting of educational inner criterion. In this sense, teachers' qualification is evaluated by the capacity of realizing what the essence of human education is. Teacher professionalism can be realized by performing humanistic teaching [8]. Teachers should respect their students as a valuable being. It is the more significant process of teaching than the result of teaching. Therefore, it is regarded that the teaching process is an essential factor in education. Teachers have to watch their students carefully and help them to achieve higher dignity condition than now. Furthermore, teachers should have courage and ethical sensitivity on their teaching behavior because they are responsible for the development and growth of their students [9-10].

Second, the teachers' role is to recover the educational nature and to lead the school innovation for the better future than now. Those who support this view have sharply criticized that education was driven by the logic of efficiency and profit. They point out that interactions among teachers and students have been gradually dehumanized in schooling environment [11]. Teachers should make an effort to preserve the values which disappeared in schooling more and more. For this, teachers should pay attention to instill moral characters into the minds of students in process of teaching. Furthermore, in order to recover the nature of education, teachers should look for the valuable things which disappeared in schooling nowadays. Teachers' role as a school innovator is to create the friendly readership to improve teacher-students relationship. At the same time, teachers should cooperate with their colleagues to participate in school innovation movement with them.

Third, the teachers' role should be reviewed in noticing the realistic condition which teachers are confronted with. Teachers' behaviors are influenced from school circumstance [12] because teaching is a social phenomenon. Therefore, like other social phenomenon, teaching is influenced by the dynamic and contextual relationship with people and circumstance. In our society, especially, the secondary school is considered as an educational institution for successful candidates to be admitted to the prestigious university. Teacher's ability is evaluated with the result of university-entrance rates and their teaching performance is always compared to that of private instructors. Additionally, teachers should try to satisfy the demand for the intensive educational competitiveness in the level of global and national tendency [11]. Under these circumstances, secondary school teachers are suffering from heavy workloads, discouragement, mental conflict and identity confusion. Therefore, the teachers' role should be discussed not in the normative view but in the realistic sense [6].

### 3. Methodology

Reflective writing is a kind of assessment method that corresponds with the process-based writing method. Because reflective writing refers to reflecting process on writers' previous writing experiences, which reveals writers' cognitive and emotional process while they are writing [4]. Reflective writing shows diverse empirical data which can reveal ones' usual and troublesome moments in their life through writing. In this respect, reflective writing is helpful to understand the authentic meaning of writers' intention, because reflective writing can provide writers with opportunity of self-examination. Therefore, it is suggested that reflective writing has the aspects of the ethical research method in education [13].

Generally, the study subjects are regarded as objects only for the aim of study, in most researches. However, study using reflective writing is performed by active participation of study subjects. Therefore study subjects are considered as a co-operator on the process of study. Reflective writing provides not only the meaningful results for researcher but the educational experience for participants. At this point, reflective writing has the ethical aspects as a research method in the educational study. Moreover, the reflective writing's utility as research method is valued more than other study methods from the fact that the results of study can be used to improve the teaching-learning method [1]. Reflective writing consists of 5 levels.

- The topic of writing
- Internal questioning
- Reflective thinking
- Exposition of domain
- Self-examination

The participants of this study were 68 pre-service teachers at a university located in the central part of Korea. Table 1 shows the status of participants who had engaged in the reflective writing performance.

**Table 1. Participants of This Study**

	Grade		Gender		Department	
	2	3	Male	female	Teacher-college*	Non teacher-college
<b>N</b>	40	18	22	46	49	19
<b>%</b>	69.4	30.6	37.6	62.4	67.6	32.4
<b>Total</b>	68		68		68	

Teacher-college\*: Department of Mathematics education (12), Arts education (9), History education (9) Korean language education (10), and English language education (9)

In the first week of the semester in 2014, the researcher presented the topic of reflective writing to the participants. The topic was “What do you think about the secondary school teachers’ role?” Introducing reflective writing, the researcher asked the participants to have enough time for thinking about the topic before writing. The researcher emphasized that the most important thing in writing was to write one’s thought honestly and concretely according to the stream of consciousness. To do so, it was said that they should concentrate their attention on their inner-world. The Researcher also asked to check their writing whether it was consistent with their perception.

In the second week, secondary pre-service teachers read aloud their writings during the class, and then they had the session of questions and answers in order to identify implicative meaning of the context of their writings. Group interview was conducted to find out the participants’ expression about their experience of reflective writing.

In order to conduct detailed analysis on the contents of reflective writing, Colazzi’s data-analysis method was used [14]. The method is reading participants’ writings over and over, categorizing the meaning and the data and obtaining validity by checking study results again with the participants.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

It seemed that reflective writing about the secondary school teachers’ role offered the opportunity for pre-service teachers to look back their attitudes and faith as prospective teachers. It appeared that pre-service teachers experienced introspective thinking on the ‘writing topic’ and ‘themselves’ by doing reflective writing. Pre-service teachers participating in this study said that they had new experience through reflective writing on the secondary school teachers’ role. They confessed that it was not easy for them to write reflectively and they became to realize how difficult writing was.

It was another positive effect that pre-service teachers could have the opportunity of examining their subjectivity by doing reflective writing. Moreover they came to realize that reflective writing could improve the reflective thinking ability, so they wanted to have opportunities of reflective writing more than now.

### **4.1. The Experience of Introspective Thinking about the Secondary School Teachers’ Role**

It seemed that reflective writing helped to expend the scope of writers’ thinking about the writing topic. The assigned writing task to pre-service teachers was to write about the role of secondary school teachers. By the way, most pre-service teachers commented in detail various factors related to the teachers’ role such as the meaning of learning, significance of teaching, and the meaning of schooling. Furthermore, they looked back on their own lives and experiences one by one. They remembered many things they had experienced when they were secondary school students.

Pre-service teachers in the study defined the secondary school teachers’ role as follows: to sympathize with their students, to understand their students as a whole being, to discover the dream of students, to help students’ social adaptation, to cultivate students’ talent, to transmit various knowledge, to lead their students to the righteous path, to provide a hideout when students would be in trouble, and to protect students from difficult situations. Among these, pre-service teachers particularly emphasized that secondary school teachers should be a discoverer of dreams, a life mentor, and an expert of the subject. Most pre-service teachers considered that a discoverer of students’ life dream or a life mentor should be prioritized than an expert of subject teaching as the secondary school teachers’ role. It was found that pre-service teachers’ perceptions about the

secondary school teachers' role have been influenced by their own educational experience before entering the university. In our society, the secondary school is considered as an educational institution for successful candidates to be admitted to the prestigious university. Students are pushed by the demand to study hard only, and they were no exception at all.

I think that teachers must be a life mentor of their students. So they must help students to find the dream sincerely. And teacher should guide to go to the path that students want to go, related to their life dreams. For this, it is necessary that teachers should instruct the knowledge which is necessary and important on life journey of their students. But above all, teacher ought to communicate with students continuously and try to find students' dreams through familiar interaction with them. (English language education, S)

When I was a secondary school student, the sole purpose of learning was the success in entering a university. For this, teachers delivered us enormous knowledge passionately. And we studied very hard to get higher grade than other students who were in the same situations. It was impossible that I could recognize the meaning of learning under the cramming system at that time. But students have a right to know the reason of learning in their lives and the real aim of their lives. (Korean language education, C)

Students are still just immature beings. Adolescence is a period of rapid growth and change. So the students in adolescence need the affection from their parents and teachers. Education must show the method to communicate with the world in which they will live in the future. Many students want to be understood with warm heart and care with unconditional concern. Therefore, teachers should help their students to become mature beings. (Art education, H)

Like these, pre-service teachers suggested that one of the most important secondary school teachers' roles was to help their students to discover their dreams by inspiring them with self-affirmation. Pre-service teachers considered that secondary school students were immature beings and as a result, they spent hard times with mental agony as adolescences who were passing through a period of storm and gale. When pre-service teachers looked back on their secondary school times, they could remember that they had wanted to be understood by their teachers and hoped to find their real dreams through empathic interaction with their teachers. However, due to the high demand for academic achievement, this kind of interaction has been impossible. Because of dissatisfactory experience with their teachers teaching in their school days, pre-service teachers emphasized that secondary school teachers should instruct life's wisdom to their students as a model of life.

Everyone's life is valuable. Everyone has the right to pursue happiness and to realize the value of his life. No wonder every student is a valuable being who should be respected. Students are sailors who sail a boat named a life. Teachers should help students to arrive at a harbor safely without a dropout through understanding and encouragement. Also, students are able to grow more and more with teachers' careful concern. (Department of Mathematics education, Y)

Of course, I think teachers must deliver both wisdom and knowledge to students. However, the most important purpose of education is not to give enormous new knowledge to students regardless of the learner's consequence. Knowing is one thing and doing is another. Because teachers' behaviors influence students learning and doing as a model of life, teacher should behave responsibly in the students' presence. Therefore, teachers must be careful in their behaviors and keep in mind of the teacher's duty as a teaching person. (Philosophy department, Y)

Reflective writing leads the writers to judge and to understand the meaning of fragments of their thought considering the circumstance what they were interrelated with. Pre-service teachers seriously contemplated the effect of educational circumstance on teachers' teaching behavior in our society. They looked deeply themselves as a being-in-a world. Pre-service teachers have come to understand their teachers from the different

viewpoint. Teachers cannot perform his teaching according to his intention only. Therefore, even if their teachers' teaching behavior was not desirable as teachers, they were not solely responsible for it. In order to carry out teaching according to one's belief, favorable conditions for teaching should be prepared not only in the school but also in the society.

Maybe, if I was a teacher at that time, I would have done the same as my teachers' doing. Teachers cannot perform their teaching separately from their circumstance. If the policy about schooling and educational environment does not change, I would be confronted with the same condition as my teachers had been facing. If so, even if I study very hard to be a perfect teacher now, it would be impossible to be the teacher who I want to be. By the way, it is not easy to change the educational circumstance. And I am afraid that most parents and students will be ambitious of successful entrance to college now and for many years to come. (Department of Mathematics education, Y)

I believe that teachers as a model of life should behave in concordance with his conviction on education. I don't know well what my teachers' educational conviction was. Although I do not have a good opinion of my teachers' teaching until now, I believe that they must have done their best for us in their situation. It is certain that teachers' teaching was greatly influenced by educational situation at that time. Regardless of teachers' intention, the most important purpose of secondary schooling is to achieve high ratios of university acceptance. The most important secondary school teachers' role is to teach intensely to help their students to enter the university that parents and students want to go. (Korean language education, P)

Then, although pre-service teachers emphasized a life mentor more than an expert of subject, they agreed that teachers must instruct their subject well. They believed that 'Teaching ability' is also a core factor of consisting teachers' professionalism. In order to teach well, teachers should be a professional on their subject. Therefore, secondary school teachers must study constantly to master their major. Moreover, secondary school teachers should have the ability to apply various teaching skills in accordance with teaching situation. Additionally, pre-service teachers believed that secondary school teachers should try to satisfy the parents' demand on a high level of achievement which is needed to enter prestigious universities

Teacher is a man who instructs the subject contents to students. Therefore teachers must be an expert in their teaching. In order to deliver specialized knowledge to students well, teachers should work sincerely to learn enormous knowledge in their major fields and try to improve their ability on teaching techniques. Even if teachers should be a person who fills with love and affection toward students, they cannot be a good teacher without intellectual ability and expert teaching skills. (Department of English literature, L)

In our society, parents' demand on high degree in subject achievement and success in university entrance is very strong. As colleges become more common, there are already enough people with college degrees. In this condition, a university diploma is regarded as an important indicator to prove the person's ability. The university diploma became the essential certification to obtain a better job than other people. (Department of Mathematics education, Y)

At the same time, pre-service teachers worried about the future educational environment when they would become teachers. Society has changed continuously and along with these change, science and learning have been developed constantly. In order to teach expertly, teachers should possess insight noticing the change in the society. The future society will be different from the current society. According to the change of the society, students' characteristics and educational environment also will be altered. Therefore, teachers should try to learn new knowledge and teaching-methods continuously and pay attention to the trends of the social change.

Our society has changed continuously. According to this change, science and learning also have been developed constantly. Education field has been subdivided and each major in scholar fields cannot exist separately. Therefore, teachers must learn and study various domains in academic field. Giving an eye to the trends of the society, teachers should attend on students' interest and tendency also. And teachers should try to search proper teaching ways and effective learning methods constantly. (English language education, K)

I think that teachers have to help their students to search their life dream and find it out at last. I believe that teachers should help students to find the dream of their own and realize the dream surely. Teachers should guide students to know what they truly want and lead to realize their dream step by step. (History education, K).

#### **4.2. The Experience of Introspective Thinking about Themselves**

Reflective writing leads writers to do self-examination by offering the experience of introspective thinking. It seemed that pre-service teachers could organize their thought about the secondary school teachers' role systematically by reflective writing. At the same time, they could also look back about themselves earnestly while they tried to write reflectively. It was surprising that pre-service teachers could recognize the fact that their behaviors at the present time were inconsistent with what they had believed.

By the way, it comes to my mind that the aim of studying has barely changed since my secondary school days. Even now, I am studying only to obtain a teachers' license. Although I regretted my past learning attitude when I was a secondary school student, until now I study the same way as that time. I recognized that I was studying only to pass teacher certification examination as I had studied to enter the university when I was a secondary school student. (Korean language education, L)

It is true that most students of Teacher College study hard to pass the teacher certification examination. Of course, me, too. Because the competition ratio in teacher certification examination is higher than ever before, I have no choice but to prepare the exam. In this situation, I have battled with my conscience over what my learning's aim should be. (Department of Mathematics education, I)

Pre-service teachers believed that the most important teaching objective was to assist students to grow as a whole-person. They emphasized that the secondary school teachers' role should be a life mentor. On other hand, they worried about whether they could keep behaving according to their beliefs regardless of the social commands for schooling or situations which they would meet. Although there are growing criticism of the 'credentialism' in recent days, most students and parents still overvalue the importance of high achievements in the subject learning. Because it is not easy to change the persons' perception on school education, pre-service teachers worried about the educational condition what they would confront in the future. However, they emphasized that teachers should not abandon their passion as teachers, even if a given educational condition was awful. Therefore, pre-service teachers claimed that teachers should have educational conviction and teacher should try to be a respectable teacher. At this point, we can see that reflective writing may be not only one method to think introspectively on education, but it is one step for pre-service school teachers to rebuild their faith on education.

I believe that the aim of education is to help the students' self-realization. However, I should face reality at the same time. Generally, students and parents of the secondary school in our society hope to enter the college they want to. For this, teachers are forced to do their best to satisfy the parents and students' demand. In this circumstance, it is very difficult for teachers to behave according to their belief. (Department of Mathematics education, K)

Above all, to be a respectable teacher, I think that teachers should have educational belief. Teachers should do their best to find out the best ways to perform ideal education. Of course, if the educational circumstance does not change better than now, it will not be easy for me to act according to my belief on education. However, teachers as a model of

life ought to have affection on their students, passion on teaching and vindication on human life. (Art education, L).

It is another fruit that pre-service teachers came to realize the difficulty of writing and necessity of reflective writing in the learning process to be secondary school teachers. Many pre-service teachers admitted that it was difficult for them to write reflectively on the given topic. Naturally, writing is not a strange work for undergraduates, but reflective writing is different from others. For writing reflectively, a writer should analyze the topic objectively and try to have holistic approach on it. Furthermore, a writer should check whether their writing is consistent with their belief. This puts the writers into difficulty and rough times.

At first, I didn't know what I wrote about even if writing topic was clear! I felt abased on that situation and I spent times agonizing what I wrote about. Above all, the presented topic to me is a familiar topic and my usual concern as a teacher college student. Therefore, at first I assumed that I could easily write about that topic. However, it is not easy to write my inner thoughts introspectively. I realized that I did not truly know myself. (Department of English literature, L)

Although pre-service teachers had a hard time writing reflectively, it was amazing that they became interested in the potential of reflective writing as a learning method to promote the teacher professionalism. Pre-service teachers in this study recognized that reflective writing tended to improve introspective thinking ability which was an essential factor in the teacher professionalism. Above all, they were surprised at the fact that they did not know about themselves and were not interested in what they would be truly. Education should help students to shape their personality, and teachers have obligation to do so. In this context, pre-service teachers emphasized that the person to become a teacher should recognize how important the self-examination ability was for a teacher. They also suggested that reflective writing would be an available learning method for pre-service teachers to examine themselves sincerely. For this reason, they wanted to have more opportunity of reflective writing than now.

Teachers ought to engage in self-examination and introspection about education and teaching. To be respectable teachers, they always have a question about whether their teaching will contribute to students' life in the future. I wish I would like to derive students' potential ability from them and give a place to rest when they have hard time. To be a respectable teacher, I will work hard to be an expert in my subject and try to be a humanistic teacher who is full of love about students. (Art education, L)

Since I started writing on the secondary school teachers' role, I have been confused because I couldn't grasp my perception on the topic. Above all, I wondered whether what I thought was consistent with my faith. For that reason, I hesitated to write on the topic. I recognized how difficult it was to know myself and to express my thought in writing. So the writing was hard for me but it was also a new experience. I think that this kind of writing will be helpful to be a good teacher. Therefore, I hope to have more opportunity of such experience than now. (Department of English literature, L)

## 5. Conclusion

This study was carried out to assure the usefulness of the reflective writing not only as a research method but also as a teaching method under the promise that it is important to promote the pre-service teachers' introspective thinking ability in teacher training curriculum. From the results of this study, it is verified that the experience of reflective writing leads writers to the reflective thinking world and help to enhance the introspective thinking ability. The conclusions drawn from this study are as follows.

First, reflective writing has a merit as a pre-service teachers' instructional method which can help to promote the introspective thinking ability of writers [4]. Pre-service teachers who participated in this study said that they had new experience to look back on

themselves through reflective writing. They embraced their current circumstance and sincerely recognized themselves as a being-in-the-world. They could also elicit their experience with their teachers from their secondary school. Additionally, reflective writing offered educational opportunity to writers, such as self-examination, recognition of the difficulty in reflective writing, and necessity of introspective thinking ability. Although the right ways of writing is offered to students by various means in educational courses of universities, most students still have trouble in putting their own words on the paper [1]. Reflective writing can improve students' writing ability by leading them to the deep thinking world. In this study, pre-service teachers wanted to have more opportunities of reflective writing during teacher preparing period, emphasizing the importance of teachers' self-examination and introspection about education. Introspective thinking ability on education is more important in that pre-service teachers are anxious about disparity between their ideal and the educational reality. Thus, educators who have responsibility for teacher training should pay attention to improving their students' reflective thinking ability.

Second, reflective writing can help teachers to organize the teaching project customizing students' needs and interests. Reflective writing provides teachers with meaningful data to understand their students' perception. The results of this study showed that pre-service teachers' perception about secondary school teachers' role was different from realistic demand of the society. Pre-service teachers believed that one of the most important roles of secondary school teachers was to help their students to discover future dreams by inspiring them with self-affirmation. Then, it was revealed that this belief was affected by their own secondary schooling experience and their teachers. Just as pre-service teachers' perception about the role of secondary school teachers was affected by their secondary schooling and their teachers, the current educational curriculum in teacher training institutions will clearly influence pre-service teacher's views about their future education [6]. Therefore, it is crucial to provide more proper curriculum and teaching methods that students want and need [15]. Reflective writing can help educators to understand the inner world of their students.

## Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the 2015 Hannam University Research Fund.

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