

AM I A BORN OR A MADE TEACHER?: STUDENT TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Neny Isharyanti & Frances Sinanu

Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia
Neny.isharyanti@gmail.com & frances.sinanu@gmail.com

Abstract

Although substantial evidence of various studies in teacher education have indicated the benefits and the advantages of teacher training (Darling-Hammond, 2000); Hogan et al., 2003), thus confirming that good teachers are made/trained, the myth that good teachers are born remains popular even among teachers themselves (as indicated in the results of a study by Bullough & Kauchak, 1997). The debate whether good teachers are born or trained leads to a question whether a field experience program in teaching will influence their opinion regarding the necessity of a teacher training program and whether such a program adequately prepares them to be qualified teachers.

In this paper, we will pose the debatable question, contrasting teaching as a talent or as a skill that needs to be learned, to 75 student teachers before and after they attend a field experience program of teaching English in six schools in Salatiga, Indonesia. We specifically will explore whether the field experience program which focuses more on providing opportunities for the student teachers to get firsthand experiences in a real classroom situation, affects their perspective on the importance or the non-importance of having such a training to become good teachers. The results of this study may benefit the process of designing a better field experience program.

Key words: teacher training, pre-service training, student teachers.

Introduction

"Teachers are born or made" has proven to be one of the most debatable issues similar to "which comes first: chicken or eggs" among teachers especially those who are involved in the teacher training program. While some believe that teachers are born, others stick to the opinion of teachers are made. Of course there are also some who stay in the middle saying that talent is nothing without training. This leads to an interesting thought of posing this question to those who are not yet teachers to see how they, who have no or little experience in teaching, would say.

At the Faculty of Language & Literature of Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia, students are prepared to become future English teachers with language & literature courses as well as teaching methodology courses. At the end of their study, students are required to participate in a teaching practice program, the PPL program. This program allows students to become the student teachers and teach English at primary and secondary schools in Salatiga, Indonesia. Although students will graduate from this department with a Bachelor of Education degree, not all students would like to be a teacher. Most of them do not even realize that upon their graduation, they will have "Sarjana Pendidikan (S.Pd)" or Bachelor of Education as their academic degree. It is then easily assumed that the majority of the students will not believe in themselves as English teachers. They also participate in the teaching practice program at schools in Salatiga simply because they are required to

by the curriculum and not because they wanted to be teachers. They are indeed a unique group. However, the same question is still relevant to be asked to this group especially as an initial step in evaluating the teaching practicum program: Am I a born or a made teacher?

Review of Literature

Looking at the body of research in the field of teachers training, the general tendency of results suggest that a teacher training program has positive effects on preparing prospective teachers to be more competent in teaching which eventually affects students' success compared to those without preparation. Darling-Hammond (2000) who reviews previous research over the past 30 years concluded that teachers who are fully prepared and certified are "generally better rated and more successful with students" than those who are unprepared (p. 167). Although, there is awareness that the training for teachers is not free from shortcomings, she still maintains the importance of teacher training program.

Brandt and Gunter (1981) in response to the budget cut of state legislatures and colleges in the USA that was aimed to teacher education program even wrote a bold article, advocating strongly that teachers are made, not born. They pointed out the positive effects of sending teachers to teacher education program in classroom practices and students' learning processes, particularly in the areas of understanding child behavior, constructing and monitoring tests, monitoring and increasing academic learning time, and applying principles of child growth and development.

What needs to be considered is what are the components or approaches or activities of teacher training program, in particular a field experience program that prepares student teachers in managing daily routines and tasks of teaching. In response to this particular question, Hogan et al. (2003) suggest that the selection of those components must be based on results of research, rather than on convenience and familiarity. They particularly refer to the suggestions of Dunn & Shriner (1999) and Klein & Hoffman (1993) of how to structure a professional development program for teachers in order to gain the level of expertise in teaching.

Dunn & Shriner (1999) suggest six activities that may assist novice teachers in the development of expertise when they are practiced deliberately. These activities, identified as important for effective teaching, are:

- preparing materials needed for instructional activities;
- mentally planning instructional strategies and activities;
- evaluating student progress using graded, written work, and projects;
- informally evaluating students through observations and non-graded performances;
- written planning; and
- evaluating student progress using teacher-made tests (as cited by Hogan, et al., 31)

Klein and Hoffman (1993) recommended that in order to gain expertise in teaching, novice teachers need to be put into practice situations which may provide opportunities to gain learning experiences. Those situations include:

- Personal experience, where the student teacher is challenged with various tasks in different levels of difficulty.
- Direct experience, where the student teacher is doing job training under an expert mentor.
- Manufactured experience where the student teacher is doing a simulation and/or role playing to sharpen his/her abilities.

- Vicarious experience, where the student teacher is reading or visualizing a complex task and asked to analyze the situation in the task and suggest a solution to the task.

In the case of the field experience program, student teachers are experiencing two learning opportunities: the personal experience and the direct experience. During the field experience program, student teachers are required to do both team teaching either with their mentor or with their fellow student teachers, and individual teaching where they are given the responsibility to teach on their own.

As research indicated, teacher training programs such as the field experience program may bring benefits to the student teachers in their teaching performance (both for equipping them with necessary skills, experiences and tools to teach well and for increasing their expertise in teaching) and to the students in their successful learning. Thus, it suggests that to be a good or qualified teacher, one must have adequate and proper training. The myth that teachers are born is not supported by the body of research in teachers training. However, such myth does exist among student teachers. A study by Bullough and Kauchak (1997) who interviewed student teachers involved in a field experience program conducted in three high schools in the USA found that there is a common belief/view that teachers are born, although they valued the theories and field work that they received during their secondary teacher certification program.

Similar to Bullough and Kauchak study, this paper record the view of the student teachers involved in the PPL program conducted at the English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia, whether teachers are born or made. In doing so, it also discusses if the field experience program brings any changes in the student teachers' view, particularly if the participants of the program view any positive impacts of the program in their teaching expertise.

Methods

This research aimed to investigate the student teachers' opinion on whether a teacher is born or made. Specifically, we wanted to know if their participation in the PPL program influenced their opinion about whether a teacher is born or made. The respondents were 54 student teachers participated in the teaching practice course (PPL course) at the Faculty of Language & Literature, Satya Wacana Christian University in trimester 2 of 2005/2006 academic year. This research used pre & post questionnaires to record which one of the two opinions that the student teachers believe is valid.

There were originally 75 pre-questionnaires & another 75 post-questionnaires distributed before and after the student teachers take part in the PPL program. However, due to the limitation in collecting the questionnaires since the student teachers filled the questionnaires in their free time voluntarily, we could only get 54 matches of the pre and post questionnaires.

From the 54 questionnaires returned, both pre & post, their answers were then grouped into 1: Born, 2: Made, or 3: Both. Grouping is done in team by first giving each member's grouping and then discussing reasons for any difference in grouping until consensus was achieved. Then, the reasons underlying their choice are listed before conducting a descriptive statistic to see the number of supporters for each opinion. Finally, an analysis was made and conclusions with some suggestions were drawn.

Findings & Discussion

From the 54 pre-PPL program questionnaires returned, 61% of the student teachers believed that teachers are made (n=33). Only 24% have the opinion that teachers are born (n=13) and 15% of the student teachers think that both are important (n=8). Figure 1. presents the results of the pre-PPL program questionnaires:

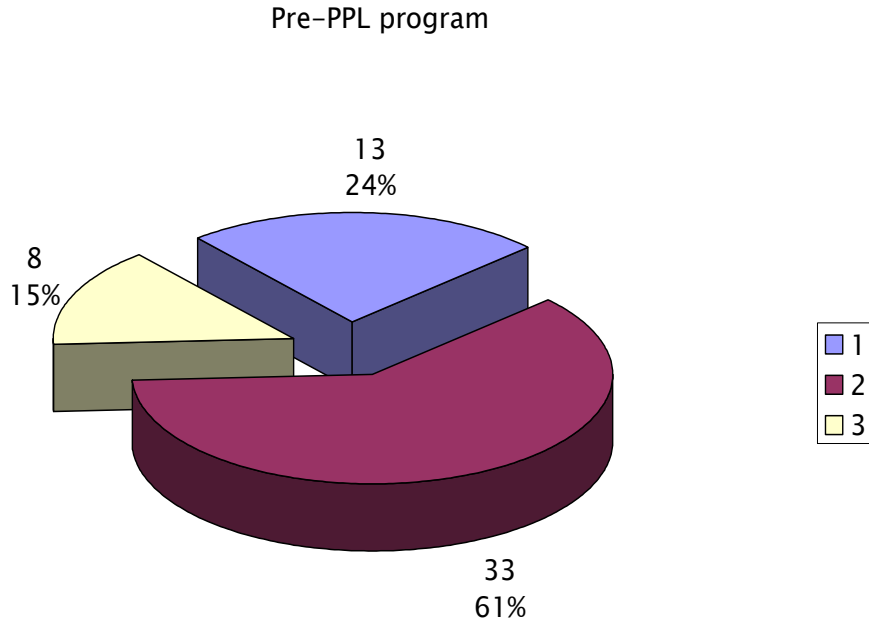


Figure 1. Results of pre-PPL program questionnaires

This result suggests that more than half of the student teachers have a positive attitude to the field experience program prior to attending the PPL program. They seem to realize that in order to be a good teacher, talent only is not sufficient to help them to manage and teach the students. In their reasons, there are some qualities or capabilities that they think to be important to be a good teacher and they can get those by attending the program, such as practice, training, professionalism, efforts, experience, knowledge and hard work.

After doing the PPL program during December through early March 2006, the student teachers received a post-PPL program questionnaire. From the questionnaires returned, 61% of the student teachers believed that teachers are made (n=33), 19% have the opinion that teachers are born (n=10), while 20% of the student teachers think that both are important (n=11). Figure 2. presents the results of the post-PPL program questionnaires:

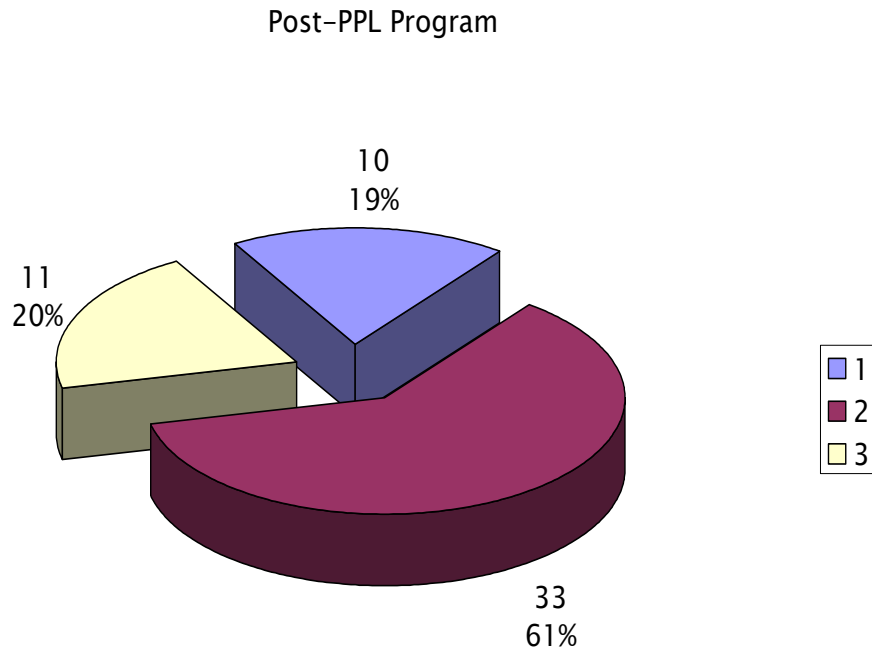


Figure 2. The Results Of The Post-PPL Program Questionnaires

When compared to the results of the pre-PPL program questionnaires, the number shows that there is no change in the number of student teachers who choose that teachers are made. However, there is a 5% decrease of the number of student teachers who choose that teachers are born and there is a 5% increase of the number of student teachers who choose both.

These results may indicate that the student teachers who first believe that teachers are made did not change their opinion after they experienced the PPL program. It may lead to the conclusion that the PPL program may sufficiently meet their expectation to gain some capabilities to help them improve their teaching skills/abilities.

There is a similarity in the number of decrease and increase of percentage of the other two options (5%). This may suggest that after the PPL program, 5% of the student teachers may switch their choice from the opinion that teachers are born to the opinion that teachers can be both born and made. In general, it may be assumed that after the PPL program, the student teachers who originally feel that in order to be a good teacher, no training whatsoever is necessary, change their opinion and include the necessity of proper training and practice to be a good teacher. However, this conclusion is only based on the total number of choices that the student teachers made. This may not be a clear and valid representation of individual student teacher cases.

Further analysis on the individual student teachers generates the following results, presented in Figure 3.:

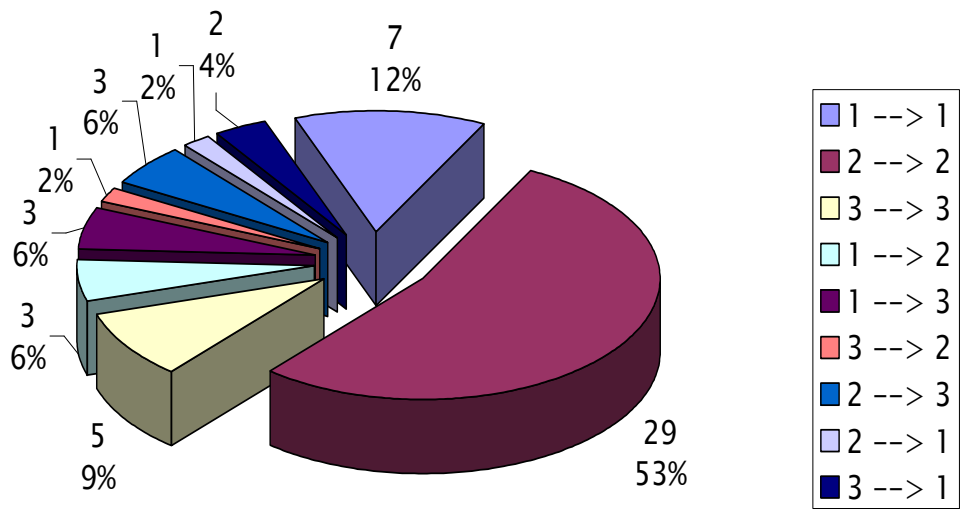


Figure 3. Changes of Opinion in each Individual Student Teacher

As suggested by the general analysis, 74% (n=41) of the subjects did not change their opinion after experiencing PPL program with 53% of the student teachers did not change their opinion that teachers are made, 12% of the student teachers maintain their opinion that teachers are born, and 9% of the student teachers still consider both opinions to be valid.

In total, 26% (n=13) of the subjects experienced changes of opinion after the PPL program. In the total of 14% (n=7) of the subjects, there seems to be a growing awareness that the program is useful for them in their efforts to be a good teacher. 6% of the subjects changed their opinion from the opinion that teachers are born into teachers are made, 6% who first chose that teachers are born then included the opinion that teachers are made, and 2% who originally prefer both opinions as valid changed their preference into teachers are made only.

Meanwhile, 12% (n=6) of the subjects seem to perceive the opinion that teachers are born to be valid, as 6% of the subjects change their opinion from teachers are made to include teachers are born into their opinion, 2% of the subjects "converted" from believing that teachers are made into teachers are born, and 4% of the subjects gave up the opinion that teachers of made from their initial preference of both opinions to be valid.

If we take the perspective of PPL program as a useful program to provide the student teachers with some practice and experiences of teaching, it can be concluded from the results that 62% (n=34) of the subjects have already had the opinion that for being a good teacher, training is necessary and after the program they still maintain that opinion. There are 14% (n=7) of the subjects which did not think that being a good

teacher requires training, but after the program they changed their opinion and accepted the idea that PPL program does provide them the opportunity to practice teaching to be a good teacher.

In the case of 12% (n=7) of the subjects who maintain their opinion that teachers are born and the other 12% (n=6) who turned to the opinion of teachers are born after the program (even though they originally believed that training is necessary for being a good teacher), we shall look for various factors that may affect these phenomena. From their answers in the post-questionnaire, there are some contributing factors of their preference of teachers are born. Motivation seems to be the first reason that the student teachers noted in the opinion that teachers are born. They seem to link that having a talent as a teacher will boost their motivation in working as a teacher or upgrade their ability to teach. They also connect talent with confidence level in teaching in being able to deliver the content well. They think that by having the talent, they will have a better confidence level. One of them actually compared her ability of teaching with another student teacher and she thinks that this other colleague has the talent in teaching as she wrote:

I believed that teachers are born because through PPL I've seen that one of my friends was very good at teaching and I thought he had a special talent as a good teacher that I and other PPL students teacher didn't [sic] had [sic]. Based on my experience, I can't be a good teacher even though I had enough training through microteaching and PPL itself.

One other interesting finding is that one student teacher described teaching as explaining and she thought that the ability to explain comes with a talent. Therefore in order to be a good teacher someone needs to have the talent of explaining. She wrote:

In order to be a qualified teacher, someone should have a basic and special talent that s/he is born with, that is explaining. Not all people are good at explaining something. In fact, teaching is explaining something to the students. If someone does not have this talent, how would s/he deliver the material to his/her students?

Conclusion & Suggestion

From the study, it may be concluded that prior to the PPL program most of the student teachers were aware of the importance of training and experience for being a good teacher. Explanation for that ranges from the nature of the program itself to the student teachers factors.

Since PPL program is a required course for students to graduate from the faculty, it gives them no choice than to participate in the program and thus some of them may perceive themselves as having no talent in teaching and made them chose the opinion that teachers are made. Some seem to enter the program with the great faith in the program, believing that the program would help them to be a teacher. However, the results of the study also suggest that there are some student teachers who changed their opinion about the importance of training and experience for being a teacher. This phenomenon may lead to the question of whether there are some factors in the program that make them lose faith of the relevance of training and experience in the process of them becoming a good teacher.

Also, as a part of their preparation to do the program, the student teachers had received some theoretical basis on teaching through courses related to language teaching and learning. They seem to be eager to apply the theories that they have learnt in those courses. This is probably another factor why they have faith in the importance of the program as a playing ground to experiment with those theories. The problem is whether they actually succeeded in their experiment during the program or not. If they think the theories were applicable, they probably would not change their opinion about the importance of the program. When the experiment failed, it may likely lead to the question of whether the program is actually beneficial for the process of becoming a teacher.

As the implication of the results, some matters need to be explored to provide further explanations. One of the questions that require a deeper level of answer is in the matter of reasons in changing opinions. Are there any factors in the program that discourage them to see the importance of training and experience in the process of being a teacher? The second matter is in the background knowledge of the student teachers prior to their involvement in the program. Have they been sufficiently equipped with teaching methodology and knowledge in learners' learning psychology before they do the program, so that they are ready to apply those in the program? Relevant to this matter is to find out what methodology, skills/strategies, and theories that are applicable and useful in the program. Research to find out answers to these questions is in our future agenda, with the objective of creating a program that is more student teacher-oriented and meet the expectations and needs of the student teachers.

References

- Brandt, R. M. and Gunter, M. A. (1981). Teachers are made, not born. *Educational Leadership*, 39, 149-151.
- Bullough, R. V. and Kauchak, D. (1997). Partnership between higher education and secondary schools: Some problems. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 23 (3), 215-233.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). How teacher education matters. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 166-173.
- Dunn and Shriner. In Hogan et al., Representation in teaching: Inferences from research of expert and novice teachers. *Educational Psychologist*, 38 (4), 235-247.
- Hogan, T., Rabinowitz, M., and Craven, J. A. (2003). Representation in Teaching: Inferences from research of expert and novice teachers. *Educational Psychologist*, 38 (4), 235-247.
- Klein, G. A. and Hoffman, R. R. (1993). In Hogan et al., Representation in teaching: Inferences from research of expert and novice teachers. *Educational Psychologist*, 38 (4), 235-247.