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## TEACHERS' CREATIVITY IN TRANSFORMING THE MANDATED CURRICULUM INTO A LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

*English language teaching in high schools in Indonesia is carried out based on a nationally compiled curriculum which tends to be standardized and prescriptive – one for all (Widodo, 2016). In reality, the situation in which English is taught and learned is highly complex, due to the interaction of a number of variables, such as political, economic, and geographical factors, as well as the school, the teachers, and the students (Richards, 2002). Therefore, in order to teach successfully, the teacher, as the implementer of the curriculum, needs to interpret this policy creatively in accordance with the situation and context in the field. According to Matsumoto (2009: 160), creativity is “the capacity to produce new art, ideas, techniques, or other products which are useful, aesthetically appealing, meaningful, and correct within a particular field.” In this paper, I will explain the different forms of the teacher’s creativity in teaching -- the knowledge and skills of the teacher in selecting and applying the appropriate teaching strategies for transforming the lesson (Huizinga, Handlezalts, Nieveen, and Voogt, 2013). In addition to broadening our understanding of the concept of creativity in the teaching of the English language, it is also hoped that this paper will provide input for teachers in the implementation of their pedagogical duties in the field.*

**Keywords:** *teacher’s creativity, mandated curriculum, pedagogical practice, and particular contexts*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

During the last 40 years, Indonesia has undergone six changes in the curriculum for primary and secondary school education, namely the 1975 Curriculum, 1984 Curriculum, 1994 Curriculum, 2004 Curriculum, 2006 Curriculum, and 2013 Curriculum (Hamied, 2014). Each of these curriculums has different characteristics, from the point of view of the language theory, the theory for language teaching, and the design of the lesson. The curriculums mentioned above are among five curriculum models proposed by Burns and Joyce (2007), namely the Centre to Periphery Model, Genetic Model, De Facto Model, Goals-Objectives Model, and Outcomes Model. From the point of view of the teacher’s role, some of these curriculums offer broad autonomy to the teacher for planning and implementing the lesson (for example the Goals-Objectives Model), while others leave little room for the teacher’s creativity (for example the Centre to Periphery Model). In the Centre to Periphery Model of curriculum, the teacher is required to follow as closely as possible the stipulations that have been set by the designers of the curriculum, which in general is on a national level, while in the Goals-Objectives Model of curriculum, the teacher is given the freedom to determine the objectives of the lesson, the lesson procedure, the type of activity, the text book used, and the

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model of assessment. The central government only determines the general goal of the teaching in relation to the level of language skill that should be acquired by the student.

In the Indonesian context, the 2006 Curriculum, which is known as Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan or KTSP (School Based Curriculum or SBC) is closer to the Goals-Objectives Model. As the name suggests, SBC gives the freedom to each school, or to a group of schools in the same area, to design, implement, and evaluate its own curriculum. This policy is founded on the assumption that the school understands its own needs in accordance with the context and situation in which the school exists. The central government only determines the standard of competence and the basic competence for each level of education as the minimum criteria that must be met nationally by all school graduates (The Decree of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Numbers 22 and 23 Year 2006). Schools with the potential to do so are encouraged to develop and implement a curriculum which is above this minimum standard (The Decree of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 24 Year 2006).

Unfortunately, before 10 years had passed, the 2006 Curriculum, which was in fact more suitable for the multicultural and multilingual nature of the Indonesian nation, was replaced with the 2013 Curriculum. According to Hamied (2014: 17-18), this change in curriculum was due to four main reasons, namely “current global challenges, required competencies, current negative phenomena especially among young people, and discouraging perceptions among Indonesians regarding education.” In connection with this, Widodo (2016: 127) states that the replacement of the 2006 Curriculum by the 2013 Curriculum “has much been driven by the ideological and political agenda instead of pedagogical benefits of interested stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers, and parents).” Based on its characteristics, the 2013 Curriculum is closer to the Centre to Periphery Model, which tends to be prescriptive in nature and allows little opportunity for the teacher to be creative (Burns and Joyce, 2007). The question is, what can the teacher do with this curriculum? This paper intends to answer this question.

(A curriculum is a set of plans and blueprints for students’ learning outcomes, teaching materials, teaching process, and assessments to run courses of study.)

## 2. CREATIVITY IN CURRICULUM REAPPROPRIATION

A curriculum is usually understood to be merely a document which contains goals, materials, procedures, and evaluation for teaching and is used as a guideline for implementing a lesson at a particular level of education. This presumption is not too far off the mark if we refer to the definition of curriculum according to Indonesian Law Number 20 Year 2003 about the National Education System, which states, “Kurikulum adalah seperangkat rencana dan pengaturan mengenai tujuan, isi, dan bahan pelajaran serta cara yang digunakan sebagai pedoman penyelenggaraan kegiatan pembelajaran untuk mencapai tujuan pendidikan tertentu.” (A curriculum is a set of plans and blueprints for students’ learning outcomes, teaching materials, teaching process, and assessments to run courses of study to achieve a particular educational goal) (Chapter 1, point 19). In response to this, Graves (2009: v) explains that “It is not a set of documents or a textbook... Rather, it is a dynamic system. This system can be conceptualized as three interrelated processes: planning, enacting (i.e., teaching and learning), and evaluating...” She states further that “these processes create a system that is at once stable, rooted in what has gone before, and evolving as it responds to change, to new ideas, and to the people involved.” (p. vi).

The dynamic nature of a curriculum is due to the fact that teaching does not take place inside a sterile space or a vacuum but rather in a complex context, situation, or environment which is formed by the functional interrelation between a number of aspects, such as political, social, economic, and geographical aspects, the school, teacher, and student (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2002; Nation and Macalister, 2010). The different contexts or situations in which the teaching takes place require certain attitudes or treatment. In this case, Tan (2016) states that “Humans do not simply act according to some predetermined pattern, but rather each action is influenced by a range of norms, traditions, overt formalised rules, and so on.” Thus, before a language teaching program is carried out, the school or the teacher must first make an analysis of the context, situation, or environment, as well as an analysis of the students’ needs. The analysis of the situation is intended to identify the factors which, whether directly or indirectly, are predicted will support

and/or hinder the implementation of the language teaching program (Richards, 2002). This is where the importance of the teacher's creativity lies, since the teacher is the person who develops and implements the curriculum and needs to be supported by a design expertise which includes curriculum design expertise, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curriculum consistency expertise (Huizinga, Handlezalts, Nieveen, and Voogt, 2013).

In general, creativity is understood to be "the ability to juxtapose ideas in a new and unusual way to find solutions to problems, create new inventions, or produce works of art." (Strickland, 2001: 167). More specifically, creativity refers to certain aspects, which Kozbelt, Beghetto, and Runco (2010) refer to as the six Ps, namely person, process, product, place, persuasion, and potential. A similar view is expressed by Richards and Cotterall (2016), who state that creativity can be regarded as a person, process, and product. If it is viewed as a person, then creativity refers to expertise, such as that of mathematicians, architects, writers, and other groups in terms of the traits that may be indicative or contraindicative of creative potential. If it is viewed as a process, creativity refers to the nature of the mental mechanisms that occur when a person is engaged in creative thinking or creative activity, which typically specify different stages of processing. And if it is viewed as a product, creative products include works of art, inventions, publications, musical compositions, and so on, which can usually be counted, thus permitting considerable quantitative objectivity (Kozbelt, Beghetto, and Runco, 2010).

If this is applied to a curriculum, creativity is needed in the planning process, the teaching process, and the evaluation process (Graves, 2009). The planning process includes the activity of analyzing the students' needs and the analysis of the situation; the determining of the main goals and the objectives of the teaching; and the transformation of the goals into the material and activity of the teaching. The teaching process includes the activity of using a particular approach or method and material for teaching that is appropriate for the needs, competence, and interests of the students. The evaluation process includes the activity of selecting and using the right evaluation techniques for reviewing the effectiveness of the teaching process and measuring the learning outcomes of the students. In addition to these three processes, creativity is also needed in class management, especially in managing the role of the teacher and the students and the effects caused by the distribution pattern of these roles (Mayes, 2013).

With this in mind, it can be concluded that creativity in a curriculum refers to the activities of designing, implementing, and evaluating the teaching in an appropriate and dynamic way in accordance with the context, situation, or environment in which the teaching is taking place, so that the lesson will be conducive to achieving the goals that have been agreed upon beforehand.

### **3. THE CONTEXT OF THE MANDATED CURRICULUM**

The curriculum discussed in this section is the 2013 Curriculum, which is the Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Education issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This is the curriculum currently being used in Indonesia, having replaced the previous 2006 Curriculum which was known as School Based Curriculum or SBC. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the first of which will discuss the 2013 Curriculum in general and the second of which will discuss the curriculum for English language lessons. The general discussion about the 2013 Curriculum focuses on four areas, namely the standard of competence for graduates, the teaching material, the teaching process, and the evaluation.

The 2013 Curriculum aims to prepare Indonesians so that they have life skills, both as individuals and citizens of the state, and become human beings who are God-fearing, productive, creative, innovative, and affective, and are able to make a contribution to the life of society, the Indonesian nation, and global civilization (Attachment to the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 69 Year 2013 about the Basic Framework and Structure of the High School/Madrasah Aliyah Curriculum). In order to achieve this goal, the government determined a standard of competence for graduates (SKL), which is the criteria for the qualification of the student's competence that is hoped to be achieved after the student has completed his or her primary and secondary education, including attitude, knowledge, and skills. This standard of competence is used as the main reference for developing the standard of content, standard of process, standard of educational evaluation, standard of educators and educational staff, standard of equipment and facilities, standard of management, and standard of costs. The standard of competence is

divided into three levels, namely primary school level, junior high school level, and senior high school level, each of which has a different scope and depth (Attachment to the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 54 Year 2013 about the Standard of Competence for Graduates of Elementary and Secondary Education).

The teaching material is developed based on competence so that it fulfils aspects of compatibility and adequacy. While previously the competence was derived from the subject taught, it has been changed so that the subject taught is now developed based on competence. The material also accommodates local, national, and international content. In order to accommodate the concept of equal content between public high schools and vocational high schools, a curriculum structure has been developed for high school education which is made up of a group of compulsory subjects and another group of optional subjects. The optional subjects are intended to provide an additional feature for the function of the education unit, and contain choices to suit the interests of the student (Attachment to the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 69 Year 2013 about the Basic Framework and Structure of the High School/Madrasah Aliyah Curriculum).

The teaching process is oriented towards achieving competence in the student, including attitude, skill, and knowledge. The implementation of the teaching uses a scientific approach which gives priority to discovery learning and project-based learning. The standard of the process, which was originally focused on exploration, elaboration, and confirmation, is now complemented with observing, asking, processing, presenting, concluding, and creating. In its implementation, the teaching not only takes place in the classroom but also in the rest of the school environment and also in the community. Therefore, the teacher is not the only source of learning. Attitude is not taught verbally but rather through example (Attachment to the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 65 Year 2013 about the Standard of Process in Primary and Secondary Education).

The teaching evaluation is implemented on a competence basis. There has been a shift in evaluation, from evaluation solely through tests (in which the competence of knowledge is measured based on results alone) to more authentic testing (in which the competence of attitude, skill, and knowledge are all measured based on process and results). In order to maintain the quality of education, the criteria for achieving competence are based on criterion-referenced evaluation, which is the achievement of learning outcomes based on the position of the score obtained by the student in comparison to the ideal (maximum) score. Evaluation is not on a level of basic competence but also core competence and the standard of competence for graduates (Attachment to the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 66 Year 2013 about the Standard of Evaluation in Education).

In connection with the English subject matter in the 2013 Curriculum, Agustien (2014) focuses her review on the theory of linguistics, the theory of applied linguistics, approaches and methods. Agustien argues that the 2013 Curriculum adopts a systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory, “that sees language as a resource for making meaning, for interacting with others, and for communication.” (p. 40). In connection with this, Derewianka (2004: 3) states that “A functional approach looks at how language enables us to do things ... It is concerned with how people use real language for real purposes. At the heart of a functional model of language is an emphasis on meaning and on how language is involved in the construction of meaning. It sees language as a resource for making meaning.” Hence, in the opinion of Gerot and Wignell (1995: v), “good functional grammar can help language teachers be more effective teachers, since language teachers usually find they need to be discourse analysts in their own classrooms.”

The theory of applied linguistics in the 2013 Curriculum is related to the primary goal of language teaching, which is building communicative competence among students (Agustien, 2014). Brown (2007: 219) refers to communicative competence as “that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within a specific context.” In order to achieve this competence, a language learner must have a command of the six pillars which make up this communicative competence, namely linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence, formulaic competence, interactional competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence (Murcia, 2007). Of these six elements, discourse competence lies at the centre of the construction of communicative competence. According to Murcia (2009: 46), discourse competence refers to “the selection, sequencing,

and arrangement of words, structures, and utterances to achieve a unified spoken message. This is where the top-down communicative intent and sociocultural knowledge intersect with the lexical and grammatical resources to express messages and attitudes and to create coherent texts.”

Consistent with the theory of linguistics discussed above, the 2013 Curriculum adopts a genre-based approach (GBA), which aims to develop both verbal and written communication (Agustien, 2014). Referring to Derewianka (2011), Agustien suggests two cycles (verbal and written) and five steps, namely building knowledge of the topic, learning about the text type, guided practice in using the text type, independent use of the text type, and reflecting on the text type and its use. Here, Agustien (2014) sees a discrepancy between the linear approach to language teaching and the linguistic theory on which it is founded, that is between the genre-based approach (GBA) and the approach suggested by the Ministry concerned, which is a scientific approach (SA) that is derived from the framework of science teaching. In the 2013 Curriculum, all subjects must use this scientific approach.

After looking at the 2013 Curriculum in its entirety, Widodo (2016: 138-139) sees that the curriculum is inclined to be prescriptive in nature since it “dictates what and how to teach and learn English within the remit of pre-determined competencies. Both core and basic competencies are set based on the ideological and political agenda.” He goes on to elaborate four weaknesses of the 2013 Curriculum. First, its core competence and basic competence do not reflect communicative language competence or the totality of the competences that students have to develop to become competent users of English. Second, the 2013 Curriculum marginalizes the role of the teacher as the person who designs the curriculum and develops the teaching material. Third, pedagogically, the teacher must follow five teaching steps (in the scientific approach), as specified in the curriculum, which may not be appropriate to the real condition in the field. Fourth, in the 2013 Curriculum, evaluation still places priority on cognitive evaluation through formal assessment.

#### **4. DESIGNING A LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE**

In this section, I will elaborate on three things, namely the criteria for creativity, forms of creativity, and the prerequisites for creativity to appear in language teaching.

##### **4.1 Criteria for Creativity in Teaching**

As I have already mentioned, in this paper, the teacher’s creativity in teaching refers to the creativity of the teacher in selecting and applying the appropriate teaching strategies for transforming the lesson (Huizinga, Handlezalts, Nieveen, and Voogt, 2013), so that the student can develop his or her competence, including attitude, skill, and knowledge. In this context, creativity in teaching is not just any kind of creativity but rather focussed or directed creativity with a basis. Creativity with a basis means creativity that is designed intentionally based on the methodological repertoire of the teacher. Directed creativity means that the creative actions of the teacher are directed towards the goal of the teaching. Creativity in teaching is considered to have value if it produces a positive effect on the quality of the process and outcome of the teaching. If the creativity does not have a positive effect on the quality of the teaching, the creativity is meaningless.

##### **4.2 Forms of Creativity in Teaching**

I propose five forms of creativity that can be implemented by teachers in a variety of different teaching situations and contexts. The five forms of creativity are as follows: (1) Selecting and using an appropriate teaching strategy, (2) Combining two or more teaching strategies, (3) Changing strategies while the teaching process is taking place, (4) Adapting the teaching strategies, and (5) Creating new teaching strategies. These five forms of creativity will be outlined briefly below.

###### **4.2.1 Selecting and using an appropriate teaching strategy**

For practical reasons, I use the term strategy in this paper to include approach, method, design, and anything else associated with the ways used by a teacher to teach. To date, we already know numerous different approaches/methods/techniques, such as the audiolingual method, communicative language teaching, cooperative language teaching, the silent way, and the natural approach (Freeman, 2000; Richards

and Rodgers, 2014). Selecting and using an appropriate teaching strategy means selecting and using a teaching strategy that suits the context or situation in which the teaching is taking place. Context plays an extremely important role in the selection and use a teaching strategy. Different contexts should produce different teaching strategies. This is what led Kumaravadivelu (2003: 1) to say that “there is no best method out there ready and waiting to be discovered.” It may be that a strategy which is considered appropriate and which works in a particular situation or context does not work well in another context. Appropriateness is measured based on a number of parameters, such as the goal of the teaching (For what purpose is the teaching being implemented?), the competence of the students (Are they fast learners or slow learners?), and the teaching facilities available (Are there teaching facilities available that are needed for the effective implementation of the teaching?). As an illustration, discovery learning is more suitable to be used in teaching where the outcome is related to the process rather than the product (Westwood, 2008). Therefore, the teacher needs a comprehensive outlook of the context and situation in which the teaching activity is being implemented.

#### 4.2.2 Combining two or more teaching strategies

A teaching strategy is created or invented with a particular assumption, and when this assumption is not met, the teaching strategy will not achieve optimal results. The implication of this is that every teaching strategy has its own strengths and weaknesses (Westwood, 2008). It is natural, therefore, that teachers are advised to use more than one teaching strategy. The use of more than one teaching strategy will help cover up the weaknesses and at the same time optimize the strengths of the teaching strategies used so that the goal of the teaching will be achieved to a more optimal level. Richards and Cotterall (2016) refer to the use of more than one teaching strategy as “principled eclecticism”. However, they both suggest that the combining of teaching strategies should not be random but rather by design, in accordance with the context and situation and depending upon what is needed in the field. Richards and Rodgers (2014: 352) give the following example: “Are there aspects of Audiolingualism that are compatible with Communicative Language teaching? How can Grammar-Translation be used in a text-based approach? How can I combine a task-based and a text-based approach? Can cooperative learning and competency-based approaches be used together?”.

#### 4.2.3 Changing strategies while the teaching is taking place

The context and situation in which the teaching process takes place is not stable but rather dynamic and unpredictable in nature. The situation in the classroom is continuously changing from one moment to another, whether it is only momentary or for a longer period of time. Noise, fatigue, power cuts, sudden activities, students’ learning styles, and teaching at different times of the day are just a few examples of variables which often alter the situation in the classroom. The logical consequence of this is that the teacher needs to be alert and anticipative, as well as flexible in the use of his or her teaching strategies. It may be that a particular teaching strategy that has been prepared in the document for the lesson plan cannot be applied due to these changes in situation. In connection with this, Kumaravadivelu (2003: 2) suggests the following:

To shape the practice of everyday teaching, teachers need to have a holistic understanding of what happens in their classroom. They need to systematically observe their teaching, interpret their classroom events, evaluate their outcomes, identify problems, find solutions, and try them out to see once again what works and what doesn’t. In other words, they have to become strategic thinkers as well as strategic practitioners.

#### 4.2.4 Adapting the teaching strategies

The context or situation in which the teaching takes place may not be the same as the context or situation that has been assumed for a particular teaching strategy. Therefore, a teaching strategy cannot always be applied before it has been adapted to suit the local context. As an example, communicative language teaching (CLT) will be more suitable if it is used in a class with a small number of students. If the communicative language teaching strategy is used in Indonesian schools, where class sizes are usually large

(between 30 and 40 students), the teacher needs to adapt the teaching strategy. On this subject, Richards and Rodgers (2014: 350) give the following suggestion:

A more flexible way of considering approaches and methods is to see them as a resource that can be tailored to the teacher's needs. This view of the relationship between teachers and methods assigns a greater role to teacher creativity and individuality and positions method in a supporting rather than a controlling role. The method is viewed as providing a core set of principles and procedures that can be adapted and modified to the teacher's teaching context.

#### 4.2.5 Creating new teaching strategies

The teaching strategies that a teacher possesses and uses are generally acquired while they are at university or from various academic activities such as seminars, workshops, focus group discussions, upgrading courses, and training courses. In general, these strategies are created by experts who are already considered established theorists. Hence, in this context, the established theorists are the producers of teaching theories or strategies and the teachers are the users, who attempt to apply the theories of these experts in their teaching practice in the classroom. In reality, not all of the strategies (theories) created by these established theorists are applicable in the field, and not all teachers have the ability to apply the strategies of these experts in the proper manner. In relation to this, Richards and Ridgers (2014: 354) state that, "Research on teachers' use of methods has often found that at the level of classroom practice, methods are often more similar than different ... teachers using different methods implemented them in the classroom and found that many of the distinctions used to contrast methods, particularly those based on classroom activities, did not exist in actual practice."

For this reason, on the subject of postmethod pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (2003: 1) states that "an awareness that the artificially created dichotomy between theory and practice has been more harmful than helpful for teachers." It is only natural, therefore, that "...teachers are encouraged to develop their own teaching philosophy, teaching style, and instructional strategies" (Richards and Rodgers (2014: 353). Furthermore, they say that "Teacher training, teacher experience, as well as the teacher's personal philosophy and understanding serve as a source of principles and practical knowledge that can be applied across different situations as well as in specific situations" (p. 353).

#### 4.3 Prerequisites for Creativity in Teaching

In order to think and act creatively in teaching activities, as I have already suggested earlier, a teacher must at least have a wide repertoire of teaching strategies. These strategies provide a rich source that can be made use of at any time in accordance with the needs and goals of the teaching (Richards and Cotterall, 2016). In my opinion, a teacher can be said to have a good understanding and command of a teaching strategy if he or she has the ability to explain at least the elements of the strategy, such as the definition, theoretical basis, procedure, and also its strengths and weaknesses. When I ask teachers to explain the theories that underline the strategies that they are using, for example, they are often unable to provide an explanation. This is an indication that their understanding and command of the teaching strategies used is still extremely limited. Hence, it is only natural that their teaching competence is also not at a maximum level.

In order to make use of a number of different teaching strategies in a creative way, teachers must have a holistic and deep understanding about what is taking place in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). For this reason, teachers need knowledge and solid skills about reflective practice in teaching. Farrell (2013: 4) describes reflective practice in teaching as follows, "Reflective practice means more than fleeting thoughts before, during, or after a lesson; it means examining what you do in the classroom and why you do it. Reflective practice also means thinking about the beliefs and values related to English language teaching, and seeing if classroom practices are consistent with these beliefs and values." In order to implement reflective practice, teachers must systematically gather information about the events that take place in the classroom, and then analyze, evaluate, and compare them with their underlying assumptions and beliefs so that they are able to make changes and improvements in their teaching.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The topic of this paper is teachers' creativity in transforming the mandated curriculum, which has been established by Central Government, into a teaching practice in a variety of different contexts and situations, such as is found in Indonesia. I have discussed a number of important issues related to this topic, such as creativity in curriculum reappropriation, the context of the mandated curriculum, and designing a linguistically and culturally diverse pedagogical practice. The final topic, which is the main idea I wish to present in this paper, comprises three sections, namely the criteria for creativity in teaching, the forms of creativity in teaching, and the prerequisites for creativity in teaching. There are five forms of creativity that teachers can use in their teaching, namely selecting and using an appropriate teaching strategy, combining two or more teaching strategies, changing strategies while the teaching process is taking place, adapting the teaching strategies, and creating new teaching strategies. The implication of all this is that teachers need to have a wide repertoire of teaching strategies which can provide them with a source that can be used in accordance with the needs and goals of the teaching. In addition, teachers also need to have knowledge and solid skills about reflective practice in teaching.

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