

Using Blogs to Enhance Critical Reflection and Community of Practice

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ABSTRACT

Using the theories of critical reflection and community of practice, the aim of this paper was to explore the use of blogs as a reflective platform in the training processes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers, who were learning to teach English for future employment in Taiwan. They made use of blogs as a platform to critically reflect on their learning processes as well as to gauge the impact of blogs on their own professional growth. Forty-three student teachers in two teacher-education programs at two science and technology institutions in central Taiwan participated in this study. Two instructors created a blog for use as a discussion forum so that the student teachers could engage in and examine their own reflection process. The data collected was qualitative in nature, consisting of student teachers' posting messages and comments on the blog, surveys on the student teachers' reflective experiences using blogs as reflection tools, and group reflective dialogues recorded by instructors in class meetings over the implementation of blogs during the course. The results showed that the student teachers actively discussed teaching theories and their implications through blogs. All of the 43 teachers who took part in this study were reflective, and some critically reflected on their thoughts and made significant comments; and the participants considered technology a useful platform for reflecting and communicating with each other. The positive implications for the use of blogs as a medium to provide and promote critical reflection for EFL teachers are discussed.

Keywords

Blog, Hypermedia instructional programs, Virtual community, Reflective journal for language learning, Technology for language learning, Computer-mediated communication

Introduction

Learning through reflection

Ng, Lan, and Thye (2004) point out that a professional teacher is one who regularly reflects on his or her teaching through critical thinking. According to Dewey (1933), reflective thinking is “the kind of thinking that consists of turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration” (p. 3). Burnett and Lingam (2007) show that critical reflection helps teachers and administrators rethink the purposes of education and reshape the programs to meet students' needs. Brandt (2008) also indicates that when feedback and reflection are integrated in the form of reflective conversations between teachers and students, both teachers and students could benefit from the reflective practice. Sockman and Sharma (2008) also show that through peer feedback, reflective journal writing, and reading, teachers could uncover the obstacles and discover how their teaching beliefs need to change in order to implement transformative teaching strategies. Therefore, reflective practice not only makes change possible, but also provides information needed to develop guidelines for setting new needs, goals, and plans.

The process of reflection includes reflective thinking and self-examination during or after teaching (Liou, 2001). Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) similarly divide reflective practices into reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, where reflection-in-action teachers continually examine their teaching process to make any suitable changes in their pedagogy, and reflection-on-action teachers plan their teaching process in advance and then evaluate their teaching process afterwards. Critical reflection, as opposed to mere reflection, refers to how teachers learn to challenge their own teaching beliefs in a critical self-analysis and become responsible for their actions (Korthagen, 1993; Sockman & Sharma, 2008). Critical reflection on experiences allows teachers to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their students. Liou (2001) expresses that critical reflection raises teachers' awareness about their own teaching and triggers positive changes. Critical reflection fosters the most effective teacher interaction in a professional setting by encouraging teachers to take a stand through questioning and challenging others' underlying assumptions, which is a way for teaching practices to be improved and for the conditions in which schooling takes place to be made more just (Carr & Kemmis, 1983; Manouchehri, 2002; Burnett & Lingam, 2007).

However, critical reflection and inquiry do not come naturally to most teachers, so the appropriate opportunities for reflection should be provided to teachers who are attempting to absorb knowledge at their initial stage of learning to teach and to bring newly learned knowledge back to their classrooms. Researchers also point out that peer collaborative reflection helps each individual develop his or her professional knowledge (Manouchehri, 2002). Writing journals or learning logs have gained popularity over the last decade as educational tools (Commander & Smith, 1996). Journal writing is effective in developing students' metacognitive and reflective skills (Morrison, 1996). Furthermore, collaborative writing affords students the opportunity to share ideas and provide each other with feedback (Storch, 2005). A blog seemingly transpires to be a helpful tool for teachers to establish an encouraging and nurturing discussion space that enhances students' reflection.

In summary, reflective teaching and reflective practices play important roles in teacher education. These processes prepare teachers to think critically and reflectively, enabling them to enter their careers with the capability for continuous professional development (Lester & Mayher, 1987; Mule, 2006). Lester and Mayher comment on critical inquiry and reflection as follows: "To be a professional is not to have all the answers. Rather, a professional is someone who can reflect on tentative solutions, collaborate with others on the possible avenues available, and risk making mistakes because mistakes are an inevitable part of building new roads" (p. 209).

Communities of practice and reflective practice

Recently, computer-assisted learning environments have provided both teachers and learners with an alternative avenue, unlike the traditional face-to-face meetings or discussions, to foster their personal knowledge development through meaningful negotiation and communication (Lord & Lomicka, 2004; Ahern et al., 2006). One of the most successful models is the application of community practices in which group members are able to explore their knowledge and exchange information through a synchronous discussion board, such as MOO and BBS (Godwin-Jones, 2003). The web-based technology supports collaborative learning that enriches learning performance, both for individual knowledge construction and group knowledge sharing (Liaw, Chen, & Huang, 2008).

Wenger (1998) submits an overall and clear conception of what communities of practice are. The definition of community of practice varies depending on what the community is about, how it functions, and what capabilities it has enabled. Members' beliefs and interests exercise a profound influence upon the formation of communities of practice. In other words, a successful community of practice is one in which the contribution of each member is highly regarded. The nature of the community of practice, its goals, and its communicative procedures are all co-determined by the individual members in a way that allows for continuous change and self-development. In consequence, a community of practice usually serves as an effective platform for people to exchange knowledge and localize new information based on their personal needs and living environment. Furthermore, a community of practice tends to encourage every member to take responsibility for information-sharing and problem-solving, to develop their personal identities in the community, and to foster unification of the community. Given that reflective practice is "the relationship between an individual's thoughts and action and the relationship between an individual teacher and his or her membership in a larger collective called society" (Leo, 1990, p. 204), a community of practice could be an alternative avenue for reflective practice among teachers. This was one of the key connections investigated in this study.

According to Zeichner and Liston (1996), by means of a community of practice teachers are able to 1) examine and attempt to resolve their teaching problems, 2) realize their teaching beliefs and goals, and 3) take responsibility for their professional development through continual participation in the community. Stiler and Philleo (2003) report the successful use of blogs for reflective practice among preservice teachers based on their findings from self-report questionnaires. They claim that reflection through blogs empowers teachers to give and receive more positive and immediate feedback from peers to resolve personal and professional problems. Therefore, teachers have more opportunities for critical reflection upon their own and others' teaching and learning through the use of blogs.

Blogs

Due to the rapid expansion of technology over the past decade, hypermedia instructional programs have become commonplace in both educational and business markets (Kozma, 1991). Learners of all ages have increased access to

technology such as the World Wide Web, which provides a seemingly limitless amount of information. New technologies such as Mp3, podcasting, and social networking are booming. In contrast to more traditional environments, technology offers greater opportunities for interactivity and learner control (Kozma, 1991; Rodzvilla, 2002). There are more educators and language teachers using the Internet in language teaching as well (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Lord & Lomicka, 2004). Many computer applications, especially asynchronous computer-mediated communication such as email and electronic bulletin boards, promote interactive learning (Arnold & Ducate, 2006). With the booming growth of technology, blogs have become another learning platform for language teaching (Richardson, 2005).

A blog is an online journal that users can continuously update, in their own words, online (Matheson, 2004). Blogs utilize a simple interface to make it easy for any user to construct, without having to understand HTML or web scripting. Thus, anyone who can create a basic Microsoft Word document can create and maintain a blog. In addition, users can even add pictures or audio files to enhance their blog's attractiveness. Furthermore, a blog is interactive (Rodzvilla, 2002) in the sense that readers can respond with comments in just a few steps.

Most blogs on the Internet are personal or journalistic (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Richardson, 2005). However, there have been increasing numbers of people using blogs in education (Richardson, 2005). Blogs are well suited to serve as online journals for users (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Richardson, 2005). In terms of language teaching and learning, "language learners could use a personal blog linked to a course as an electronic portfolio, showing development over time" (Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 13). Hence, blogs could be used to monitor and assess students' work as well as to encourage interaction among students and between teachers and students. The following sections outline the characteristics of blogs that make them useful tools for language teaching and learning.

Blogs can stimulate reading and motivate learning

Many studies have shown that it can be difficult to motivate language learners when it comes to reading texts (Kozma, 1991; Ho & Richards, 1993; Dewitt, 1996; Davis, 1997). Studies have also shown that Internet access motivates many students to read extensively (Rodzvilla, 2002; Stiler & Philleo, 2003; Liaw, Chen, and Huang, 2008). The use of blogs is a way to provide such motivation for reading in a language other than one's mother tongue, through the interactive nature of the blog. One can read and also comment on what one reads in expectation of a little discussion and a quest for common interests and individual differences. By responding on blogs, people can get feedback from other audiences throughout cyberspace. Students have an opportunity to read things in which they are interested and write things they truly wish to write, thereby determining their own texts in language education and combining text with conversations in a very personal and stimulating way. Efimova and Fiedler (2003) characterize blogs as "personal diary-like-format websites enabled by easy to use tools and open for everyone to read" (p. 490). Godwin-Jones (2003) also indicates that through blogging, people are able to document their reflections about things relevant to their daily life experiences, sharing such things with their friends, families, and/or group members. He further points out that blogs and other social networking sites provide new opportunities and incentives for personal writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008). In other words, blogs allow people to exchange information without space and time constraints, to broaden their knowledge, and to meet personal needs and interests at the same time.

Community building through blogs

Computer users with access to the Internet can access some blog sites that are open to the public and welcome viewers to make comments or post messages. Language teachers can use blogs to ask students questions, share viewpoints, and encourage students to discuss issues and express their concerns. Learners are allowed to collaborate with others to establish a particular topic of mutual interest. More specifically, a blog is constructed by people who share mutual interests to collaboratively set objectives, regulations, and formats, and this is what distinguishes blogs from other forms of websites (Godwin-Jones, 2003, Richardson, 2005). A blog is like a small learning community (Efimova & Fiedler, 2003). Members tend to get more involved than they do in other pedagogic and web-based environments, thus producing a stronger sense of community (Wegner, 1998; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Efimova & Fiedler, 2003; Godwin-Jones, 2008). For example, a pair of readers was highly motivated to read different types of

novels, so they collected any related information and compiled it to share the information with novel lovers. A global community therefore forms through blogs.

Blogs provide hyperlinks to other resources

According to Udell (2001), blogs are a “genuinely new literary/journalism form” (p. 2). In addition, blogs can make use of other Internet resources for learning. Users and teachers can create more learning resources by adding hyperlinks within the blogs (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Efimova and Fiedler (2003) explain that the use of hyperlinks makes it possible for new readers to learn the previous course of the discussion more easily and to make the blog more enjoyable with pictures or sounds.

There are many ways in which users or teachers can create more learning resources by adding hyperlinks in their blogs. For example, teachers can have links to online testing sites to allow students more time to practise certain tests and exams. In addition, teachers can make good use of other sites embedded with audio and visual materials to enhance students’ learning motivation. As a result, students gain more knowledge through links to many sites if they choose to follow the hyperlink. The inclusion of these hyperlinks also allows for self-directed exploration within the topic (Efimova & Fiedler, 2003).

Blogs provide a learning space

Blogs do not merely establish scaffolding for beginners, nor do they merely allow students to learn from multiple perspectives or receive support from advanced students. They also create a relatively learner-centered environment that allows students to learn at their own pace (Efimova & Fiedler, 2003; Godwin-Jones, 2008). However, if the information that the students are learning is incorrect, then all of the students are being misinformed.

These points have already been made in the discussion above, but here we draw attention to the way in which blogs pull together several of the most recommended pedagogies from learning theory: scaffolding, student-centered learning, the incorporation of multiple perspectives, and the use of learning communities. However, the spreading of misinformation is self-governed within the community, and it’s the responsibility of people adding hyperlinked material to ensure that the material doesn’t contain misinformation.

In summary, blogs can be treated as virtual language classrooms. People from all over the world can share opinions and express ideas by using a language they all understand. Language teachers can use blogs as discussion forums to increase time and opportunities for students to learn the target language. While blogs are used in education, there is little research about the use of blogs for language learning and teaching in EFL contexts.

The study

Participants

This study focused on 43 EFL student teachers in two teacher training programs at two science and technology institutions in central Taiwan. Twenty-eight students were from one school and fifteen were from the other. The student teachers who were participants of the study were 22-year-old junior students who enrolled in the teacher training programs at two different universities in the fall semester of 2005. The courses they took were second- and foreign-language teaching methodology. The courses mainly covered major theories concerning English learning, teaching methodologies, and practical teaching.

Setting

The study was a self-study of two English teachers’ classrooms. Two instructors organized their class schedules similarly. Forty-three student teachers met weekly for two hours to learn language-teaching methodology in the first half of the semester (nine weeks) and practised teaching in class in the second half of the semester (nine weeks). The

assignments and the settings for these two classes were the same. These student teachers were required to design lesson plans, practise teaching, and keep reflective journals.

The instructors created a blog to be able to communicate with all 43 student teachers. In the first class meeting, the instructors explained the syllabus and introduced concepts such as critical thinking and reflection. Every class member was asked to record his or her thinking and reflections about each class, including the teaching methods they learned. After each class meeting and practical teaching session, participants were required to go online and write a reflection of their teaching experience, while electively making comments or expressing thoughts about their peers' messages. The two instructors also commented on the student teachers' postings and challenged their thinking by asking pertinent questions for the students to consider.

Research questions

The aim of the study was to investigate the reflection process in blog postings. In order to see if participants could critically reflect on what they have learned and enhance the effectiveness of community of practice, three specific research questions served as guides in the data analysis:

1. What types of reflection were involved in student learners' reflection? Were they descriptive or critical?
2. What were the teacher trainers' roles in the process of blogging?
3. How can a blog promote critical reflection and community of practice?

Methodology

Data collection

The primary data for this qualitative study consisted of: (1) student teachers' posting messages and comments on the blog; (2) group reflective dialogues recorded by instructors in class meetings over the implementation of blogs during the course; and (3) an end-of-semester questionnaire given to each student teacher.

The end-of-semester questionnaire was given to all student teachers to gather their opinions about blogging following their experience with it. Other data were examined as well, including email dialogues among group members, other teaching information shared in class, and reflective journals from both the student teachers and the two instructors.

Data analysis

Postings on the student teachers' blog were sorted into five categories and then analyzed with supplementary analysis of the other data sources in relation to the same five categories. The five categories were derived through a modification of Ho and Richards' (1993) framework (See Appendix 1) for qualitative research on student teachers' journals. Ho and Richards' framework includes four categories that match topics that the two instructors in this study covered in their courses: (1) theories of teaching, (2) instructional approaches and methods, (3) evaluations of teaching, and (4) teachers' self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses. However, as Ho and Richards' framework focused on the in-service teachers' views on the teaching theories, a modification of this framework to fit the interests of this study, focusing especially on the views from those EFL pre-service teacher participants, resulted in the following five categories:

4. Theories of teaching
5. Instructional approaches and methods used
6. Teaching evaluation methods and criteria
7. Self-awareness
8. Questions about teaching and requests for advice

Data was organized into these categories and analyzed. A more detailed explanation of each category is provided immediately below:

1. *Theories of teaching*: Comments made or posted by the student teachers about the second-language acquisition theories they were taught in the courses.
2. *Instructional approaches and methods used*: Comments and postings of the student teachers' referring to their own use of methods in the classroom, as well as their expression of beliefs and knowledge related to these practices.
3. *Teaching evaluation methods and criteria*: The feedback and discussion provided by the whole class after each student practised teaching in front of the class.
4. *Self-awareness*: Comments, postings, and discussion based on self-awareness and self-evaluation.
5. *Questions about teaching and requests for advice*: All questions asked by the student teachers that pertained to teaching practice and theory, plus all requests for advice made by the student teachers.

In the results section below, the analysis based on this sorting procedure is presented in relation to the research questions.

Results

The findings of this study are arranged by the three research questions presented earlier in this paper.

What types of reflection were involved in student learners' reflection? Were they descriptive or critical?

Table 1 displays the topics reflectively addressed on the blog. Generally, there were both descriptive and critical reflections on their own teaching and on others' teaching after observation. Table 1 shows the topics and number of student teachers discussions on the blog.

Table 1. Topics and number of student teachers' discussions on the blog

Topic category	Total number	Descriptive	Critical
Theories of teaching	324	243	81
Approaches and methods	106	73	33
Evaluation teaching	125	53	*72
Self-awareness	354	202	152
Questions about teaching	68	31	*37
Total	977	602	375

Number of students = 43

* indicates where the number of critical reflections was greater than the number of descriptive reflections

From Table 1, it is obvious that the number of descriptive reflections far exceeded the number of critical ones. Additionally, there is evidence that students were more comfortable critiquing themselves than critiquing others. During the study, participants often questioned the applicability of the second-language teaching theories and methods used in the EFL contexts. Participants brainstormed a lot of solutions and adjustments for EFL classrooms. Some agreed that EFL teachers should combine the advantages from those teaching theories and create a new improved theory for the classes. Some even complained about the EFL environment for learning the target language. They pointed out the fact that once learners step out of the language classrooms, they don't speak or practise the target language.

In addition to writing, because everyone could access and read the blog postings, many participants pointed out that their English writing skills improved greatly. Because they were afraid of losing face, they would double-check the content and grammar before posting on the blog.

What were the teacher trainers' roles in the process of blogging?

During the study, every time these student teachers posted their reflections on the blog, the two class instructors would go online and read those reflections. Sometimes, the instructors would challenge student teachers' thinking by

posting questions and asking for further reflection in order to raise participants' critical reflection. Twenty student teachers reported that due to such challenges set by the instructors their thinking went deeper and became more critical. Table 2 displays the number of student teachers' critical reflections in each category in these two classes and the increased number of reflections each time after the instructors intervened.

Table 2. Numbers of student teachers' critical reflection in each category between two classes and the increased number of reflections each time the instructors intervened.

Topic category	Total number	Class A (<i>n</i> = 28)	Class B (<i>n</i> = 15)
Theories of teaching	81 (21.6%)	33	48
Approaches and methods	33 (8.8%)	10	23
First instructor intervention			
Evaluating teaching	*72 (19.2%)	41	31
Second instructor intervention			
Self-awareness	*152 (40.5%)	68	84
Questions about teaching	37 (9.8%)	17	20
Total	375	169	206

* indicates that the number of postings increased after the instructors challenged student teachers' thoughts

During the course, the instructors not only pushed their student teachers to think further but also encouraged them to express more. When two instructors were not satisfied with the level of thinking and critical reflection displayed in blog postings, they asked "what do you think...?" and "what would you do if...?" to foster their student teachers' thinking. Table 2 shows that initially 22 percent of the total number of reflections (81/375) were critical but for the second topic, the posting numbers dropped. After the first instructor intervention, this percentage steadily rose from 19 percent and eventually reached 40 percent. The two instructors also provided explanations when students received or posted misinformation on the blog and said that a blog was a good platform for two classes from different universities to share ideas with each other and exchange thoughts.

It is not difficult to see that teacher educators did play a vital role in promoting these student teachers' views. The two instructors gave feedback and developed their student teachers' own views and a capacity for self-critique and self-reflection. In this study, the roles of these two instructors were like those of directors and counselors. When instructors found the discussion not active enough, they took initiative and wrote reflections on their own teaching for this particular class in order to model the process. Thus, student teachers perceived the instructors as active learners and instructors who continuously reflected critically and made themselves vulnerable to share their thoughts with student teachers. The instructors served as role models to demonstrate to what extent critical reflection can lead to more thinking. They also built a bridge for two classes to communicate with each other by blogging without the restrictions of time and space.

How can a blog promote critical reflection and community of practice?

Instructors did promote critical reflection and community of practice on the part of their students using the blog tool, but the extent of this critical reflection and its duration remains problematic. The student teachers expressed many concerns and asked a lot of questions to each other during the semester. Many of them pointed out that due to the use of a blog for discussion, there were no limitations of time and space, and discussions were therefore easier and more inviting. Generally speaking, nearly two thirds of the 43 student teachers expressed very positive attitudes toward the use of blogs as a platform to reflect their learning and teaching. Twenty-one participants said that it was easy and comfortable to post comments and challenge their peers on the blog instead of discussing the issues in a face-to-face context, allowing comments to be more critical. Two classes' students could exchange thoughts and ideas as well as sharing experiences in the blog.

During the course, members from two classes participated actively. All student teachers appreciated the opportunity to use technology to communicate with people from different classes. Many student teachers wanted to post concerns about EFL issues to other English learning and teaching associations. In addition, the two instructors sometimes made reflections and comments or posed questions in class meetings. They also asked their student teachers to pay attention to others' writing styles. The two instructors spent a little time giving comments on student teachers'

grammatical errors and basic writing structure. By so doing, the two instructors believed their student teachers could reflect not only what they learned but also practise basic English skills through the course. Furthermore, student teachers could examine their reflections and thinking by dates on blogs. They could see their learning process and perspectives on certain issues at different periods of time. Therefore, the blog was considered a great tool for these student teachers to record their growth and changes as well as build a learning community.

In summary, blogging did provide a more flexible time and space for student teachers to reflect and discuss once instructors encouraged student teachers to participate in blogging. Posting messages did lead to a kind of inquiry that accentuated critical reflection. Community of practice is driven by this process of stepping back, reflecting, and analysing (Freeman, 2000). Johnson and Golombek (2002) further “[renders teachers] increasing control over their thoughts and actions; grants their experiences enriched, deepens meaning; and enables them to be more thoughtful and mindful of their work” (p. 7).

Anonymity on the Internet

According to the survey collected from the student teachers and two class instructors, the issue of revealing identity on the Internet remained a concern during the whole semester. The two instructors reported that students were afraid that their messages would be read and might hurt their friendships among class members even though all students used pseudonyms on the web. Some students even felt that they would jeopardize their final grade by posting some aggressive responses toward this course.

In conclusion, the two instructors believed that anonymity is a big issue when grades and friendships are at stake. Cultural differences and educational background might be the other reasons, as highlighted by the Class A instructor. The instructor indicated that most Taiwanese students are taught to be moderate and gentle, based on Confucian teachings. In a Confucian society, a good student is supposed to be diligent, persevering, well behaved, and obedient to authority (Tamney & Chiang, 2002). Therefore, speaking sharply (questioning and/or challenging) is not considered a good personality trait. Unlike western education, criticizing or questioning in class might not be favored in Taiwan’s education. However, the instructors stated that the education in Taiwan is changing toward a more western style. Traditional thinking and behaving in classrooms are changing through the influence of western culture. Questioning in class is becoming more welcome.

The two instructors in this study gave positive views of using blogs as a medium for reflection; however, encouragement and intervention were needed from time to time to push student teachers to think further and become more comfortable with expressing critical thoughts.

Implications

When student teachers came together to discuss or give feedback on each other’s work and teaching, it was not clear that they would engage in critical reflection. However, by using blogs as a platform for reflection, participants got more opportunities to make comments and challenge each other’s viewpoints. They could still converse about or express what had been left out in the traditional classrooms. Quite a few participants admitted the usefulness and the convenience of using blogs to reflect and give comments. They even suggested voicing the EFL issues and concerns to other educational organizations. The findings displayed the importance of feedback and risk-taking in language education, which can reinforce students’ confidence and motivation in language learning.

This study indicates that the blog studied here demonstrates a community of practice in that it was used by the participants as a discussion space. It was a forum that prepared each of the student teachers to relate theories to practice by discussing beliefs, learning from each other, demonstrating to each other how they would act in their actual classrooms. The blog was a place for these student teachers to voice their doubts, struggles, discomforts, and successful and unhappy teaching and learning experiences because the participants shared very similar experiences of being EFL language teachers and learners. Dewey (1933) claims that if we want to make our experience educative, it is essential to support ongoing growth in a process of continuing new inquiry. Freire (1985) argues that inquirers not only are problem-solvers but also problem-posers. The posing of questions in the process of their inquiry served as the anchors to help these student teachers explore further. As Short, Burke, and Harste (1996)

propose, “As we work through inquiry, we do not usually end with one answer or even a set of answers. Inquiry does not narrow our perspective; it gives us more understandings, questions, and possibilities than when we started. Inquiry isn’t just asking and answering a question. Inquiry involves searching for significant questions and figuring out how to explore those questions from many perspectives” (p. 8–9). Getting together in a group armed with the same concerns for EFL contexts enabled these student teachers to reflect and identify the lingering questions, work together to think through the questions, and push their thinking further as a group.

As a result, learners generated more inquiries that would take their conceptions further. The negotiation phase made it possible for the student teachers to make sense out of the new knowledge and ponder its potential utilization in EFL contexts. Also through group discussions in class meetings, one issue tended to raise another, propelling the inquiry towards a clear comprehension of EFL pedagogy.

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Appendix 1: Differences between descriptive and critical reflection

Topic category	Descriptive	Critical
Theories of teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A belief/conviction 2. How a theory was applied 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A justification 2. A personal opinion 3. Contradictory practice between theory and practice
Instructional approaches and methods used	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approaches and methods 2. The content of the lesson 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teachers' knowledge in teaching 2. Sociopolitical impact
Teaching evaluation methods and criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School context/classroom management 2. Solutions to problems: from experts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluating lessons 2. Diagnosing problems 3. Solutions to problems: alternative ways
Self-awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perceptions of self as teacher: style and comments on language proficiency 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognition of personal growth 2. Setting personal goals
Questions about teaching and requests for advice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asking for advice 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asking for reasons 2. Problematizing

(Adapted from Ho and Richards, 1993)