



**Reflexivity in Reflective Practice:  
a case of EFL student teachers in practicum**

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**Abstract**

The epistemological tenets of sociocultural theory view teacher professional development as a continuous and reflective analysis of pedagogical practices and learner development. Accordingly, inquiry-based approaches to teacher professional development and specifically reflective journals can be an asset for teachers, in their endeavor for self-empowerment, by creating a mediational space in which they can exercise their agency and achieve more productive instructional practices. The purpose of this longitudinal study was to investigate the professional development of ten Iranian EFL student teachers through narrative inquiry, “which is conducted for and by the teacher” during one year of attending practicum. To this end, 100 reflective writings of 10 EFL student teachers, which were written during one year, were analyzed based on three functions of narratives as “externalization”, “verbalization” and “systematic examination” (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). The results indicated the importance of narrative inquiry in the development of the professional identity of student teachers. The results also implied the value of responsive mediation in L2 teacher education.

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## Introduction

Based on praxis-based perspective or pedagogical imperative which is at the foundation of Vygotsky's theory, a reciprocal relationship exists between theory and practice in a way that both inform each other, a cyclic relationship: theory-practice-theory or practice-theory-practice (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p.5). Therefore, it seems necessary to bridge this gap by interrogating how the dualism between theory and practice can be overcome. This suggests that a two-order theory of experience and inquiry comes into operation: the first order being immediate experience-the qualities immediately had in an experience undergone-the second order being relation, cognition, thought, meanings, or inquiry (Dewey, 1904/1974). It may not seem farfetched to explain the two-order theory through the "apprenticeship" and "laboratory" model (Elliott, 2012). While the "apprenticeship" model aims to introduce the skill and proficiency "as well as the control of techniques of instruction and classroom management" (Elliott, 2012, p.110) to the novice teachers in a way that corresponds with experience theory, the immediate aim of "the laboratory model" is to give meaning and reality to all the theoretical instruction related to the subject matter and pedagogical knowledge that meets the requirement of inquiry theory. In other words, "the laboratory model" which roots in inquiry theory considers teachers as "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1988) who are not only the passive recipients of knowledge but also the problem solvers of their contexts and can take actions and exercise their agency through discursive interactions (Bourdieu, 1977) and learn to liberate (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, 2012). Similarly, changing the view towards teachers' empowerment (Freire, 1986) necessitates the need for a "cycle of inquiry" named reflective practicing, which helps them in transcending their teaching (Schön, 1983). Teachers as "transformative intellectuals" can reflect on the process of teaching before and after a lesson, or they can go through the process of reflection while teaching the lesson. These two processes are referred to as "Reflection-on-action" and "Reflection-in-action," respectively (Schön, 1983). As Akbari (2007, p.200) stated, reflection cannot be separated from any parts of a real classroom and it is inevitable to have "reflection when the human interaction on a cognitive level is going on".

This necessitates the need to reconsider different approaches towards teacher education: "effective teaching" and "reflective teaching" (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006) that is put by Kumaravadivelu (2012) at the two ends of the continuum. As we move from effective teaching to reflective teaching, teachers become less dependent on the researchers and change their roles from the consumer of knowledge to the theorizer (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). It seems that in the long history of reflection, teachers' voices have not been heard (Akbari, 2007), and this view has gone under a change in the post method era (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006). Consequently, the reflection on practice moved from its traditional view to the postmodern one which is called reflexivity that can be defined as a "cognitive process" (Farrell, 2015). This helps in acquiring knowledge through "interpretation and reinterpretation of experience," which leads to "deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction of the teachers' assumptions of his/her profession" (Stingu, 2012, p.618). This new approach towards reflective practice tried to compensate for the shortcoming of the previous view that considers reflection "as a one-dimensional, intellectual exercise" (Farrell, 2016, p.224). Whereas the old approach overlooked the inner life of teachers, the new one leads to both awareness of teaching practices and self-awareness of reflective practice (Farrell, 2016). Back to the previous

discussion, it should be taken into account that both models: “apprenticeship of observation” and “laboratory model” are in practice and play a pivotal role in teachers’ transformation during the process of reflection that finally lead to professional development. Therefore, the traditional view towards professional development, which emphasizes activities such “as coursework, workshops, and seminars” (Johnson, 2009), should go under question while taking the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind into account (Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; 2016). However, teacher educators should consider that “dialogic mediation” as the cornerstone of teacher learning occurs in a social context, and disseminates across tools, persons, activities, and reflection while engaging in dialogue with others (Johnson, 2009). They should also be aware of “the complexity of change as being non-linear, fitful, and ongoing” (Johnson & Golombek, 2018, p.4). Just a “mindful teacher education” is capable of creating “the social conditions for the development of L2 teacher/teaching expertise” which is “about engaging in dialogic interactions that assists teachers as they transform knowledge, dispositions, skills, and abilities ‘in itself, for themselves’” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p.164). “Responsive mediation” as a psychological tool in the community of practice enables teachers to think dialectically while reflecting on their experiences (Johnson & Golombek, 2016 Johnson, Verity & Childs, 2020).

Accordingly, inquiry-based models of professional development are best recognized as a mediational space that can “provide assisted performance” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). Narrative activities are among those inquiry-based models that aim to engage teachers in a systematic collaborative process through reflection on their prior experiences, scrutinizing those experiences critically, and connecting their findings and the scientific concepts of language learning and teaching (Johnson, 1999; Golombek & Johnson, 2021).

For that reason, this longitudinal study tries to scrutinize EFL student teachers’ professional development while engaging in narrative activities during one year in practicum.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Sociocultural theory of mind (SCT), as a dialectical constructivist theory developed by Vygotsky (1987), can be considered one of the most significant theories that scrutinizes the impact of education on changing the mind. For Vygotsky, education was a major tool for bringing about cognitive change (Lantolf & Pohnner, 2014), and this change can take place in a sociocultural context in the presence of more knowledgeable others (Roth & Radford, 2010; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Based on the tenets of sociocultural theory, participating in a meaningful environment can play a key role in learners' cognitive development from the inter-psychological to the intra-psychological plane and how they interpret the situations (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Applying the sociocultural perspective in L2 teacher education, which explains learning and development are related to the links between the individual and social environment, can give the teachers an agentive role in acquiring their professional identities as L2 teachers (Johnson, 2009). Thus, it is vital to assist teachers in becoming successful in the process of mediation through the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and recognizing the teacher’s zone of proximal development as an indispensable role in a teacher’s professional development (Vygotsky, 1978). Applying Vygotsky’s theory (1986) to teacher context indicates that

scaffolding can help the teacher through the transformative process of internalization in which cognitive structure is changed and results in teaching development (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000). Appropriation as an additional aspect of internalization (Vygotsky, 1987) can help teachers to adopt a tool or concept from the mediators and creatively adapt it in a new unique way, not just by mere imitation, to the professional contexts of their work (Poehner, 2011). Keeping teachers continually in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which is possible through setting goals, is essential for changes and innovations and a prerequisite for teachers' professional development (Bailey, 1992). Inquiry-based approaches (e.g., peer coaching, self-directed, critical friends' groups, teacher study groups, mentoring, etc.) to professional development can provide such a continual meditational space that guarantees the success of this process (Johnson, 2009). This meditational space helps reshape the teacher's interpretations of teaching (Arshavskaya, 2014) and finally, the teacher's transformation. Therefore, teachers learn through experiences they acquire by participating in such a mediational space and by reflecting on those unique experiences (Dewey, 1916; 1920; 1933; Farrell, 2008). Reflection as the essence of inquiry-based approach (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987; Korthagen, 1985) helps "people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning" (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985, p.18). Similarly, narrative inquiry as a mode of representation of human experience (Bruner, 1986; 1990) is essential in educational settings. While it can be used as a method of studying experience, it is also a phenomenon through which a person can interpret their experience of the world and bring meaning to them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; 2000; 2006). Thus, narrative activity in teacher education from Vygotskian sociocultural view has such a transformative power that can fill the gap of "traditional theory/practice dichotomy" with a "more fluid construct of praxis" and foster teacher professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; 2016; Johnson, 2009; Freire, 1970 cited in Johnson 2009).

To know how narrative inquiry has the potential to facilitate teachers' journey towards professional development, Johnson and Golombek (2004) analyzed the narrative writings of three English teachers in different educational settings. The results indicated teacher's narrative is a semiotic tool that brings emotion to the surface as teachers recognize cognitive and emotional dissonance through their growth as professionals. The findings also emphasize the importance of systematic inquiry as an individualized and recursive process that can stimulate the unique way of professional development that each teacher follows.

In another study, Golombek and Doran (2014) studied the reflective journals of eleven pre-service language teachers during their teaching internships. The results showed how emotion, unified by cognition, can play a valuable role in increasing teachers' expertise. Inquiry-based activities like reflective journals can best be used as a mediational space if teacher educators appropriately respond to the affective necessities of pre-service teachers in purposeful and systematic ways.

The ubiquity and significant role of teacher educator' mediation for novice teachers as well as the ways novice teachers understand, respond to, and utilize the mediation as they are engaged in narrative activities were studied by Johnson and Golombek (2013). They examined the narratives of two novice teachers while engaging in a blog during a 15-week in teaching

practicum. Analyzing the practicum blog entries indicated that emotional processes, which are available in novice teachers' initial learning-to-teach experiences, work as a catalyst in the process of cognitive development. Results also showed that narrative activity has the potential of investigating the cognitive and emotive process.

In the same way, Arshavskaya (2014) studied one pre-service ESL teacher in the blog as she was introduced to teacher's concepts by teacher educator. Results showed the teacher's change towards a more professional life as she reframed her thinking, re-naming the everyday concepts to the scientific ones and applying the scientific concepts of teaching. The results also showed the importance of narratives in teacher education.

As previous studies in SLTE contexts revealed, narratives can be considered a mediational space to exploit ambiguity and fuzziness between theory and practice. To enhance teacher professional development, Johnson and Golombek (2011) introduced three functions of narratives as "externalization", "verbalization", and "systematic examination". The interplay between these functions as the consequence of cognitive processes which are generated while teacher and teacher educator engaging in narrative activities like writing a reflective journal and doing action research can inform both teacher and teacher educator and bring to the surface valuable information. While narratives as externalization as a means of self-regulation can bring experiences to the conscious awareness and provide opportunities for social influence, narratives as verbalization can regulate thinking in concepts, which helps teachers decipher experience and regulate both thinking and activity. And, narrative as a systematic examination gives a chance to teachers to make sense of the process and get through the transformed mode of transformation while new understanding emerges out of context.

Based on three functions of narrative as mediations, the current longitudinal study aimed to scrutinize the reflective journals/of student teachers' in practicum to see whether engaging in such a mediational space through teacher educator's scaffolding can/push student teachers towards teacher professional development. As reviewed in the literature, few studies focused on the deep analysis of EFL student teacher-teacher educator interaction to trace teacher professional development.

### **Undergraduate practicum at Farhangian University**

In Iran, a public university that prepares pre-service teachers for their future careers is Farhangian University which has different branches all over the country. Candidates are employed by the education ministry from the entering of the university. In 1393, there was a shift in the curriculum of the mentoring program towards inquiry-based approaches. The teacher education curriculum has two parts: theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part, student teachers spend four years at university studying different general, educational and technical courses (Mehrmohammadi, 1993). The practical part starts when student teachers are introduced to practicum courses as they start the third year of university. Student teachers spend four terms in the practicum and engaged in different inquiry-based activities (e.g., observation, writing journals, attending seminars, designing different tasks, micro-teaching, doing action research, and so forth) based on the syllabus of each practicum. One of the activities which is common in the syllabus of all practicums (from practicum I to IV) is writing a reflective journal based on the classroom observation which is done every week from the beginning of practicum

I. Student teachers are introduced to schools to experience what is going on in class by observing teacher's instruction, pedagogical issues, learners, the class's physical appearance, and whatever they think is important to be paid attention to. Besides observing the class, they also spend some time in the office to be more informed of other activities and events. Student teachers should spend 128 hours each term at school and seminars (Mehrmohammadi, 1993).

Student teachers are asked to write their reflective writings every week after each classroom observation. The precise steps that each student teacher is supposed to go through are like this: all the reflective writings are read by the teacher educator and different types of comments are given to them to help student teachers better scrutinize the world around them and learn how to revise their writings based on the given comments. Every two- or three-weeks, student teachers also attend the seminar to share their experiences with their classmates as they read their reflective journals in class and are informed by the teacher educator's comments.

Through reflection on their writings and teacher educator's mediation, student teachers should learn how to identify a problem in their context, find the evidence that leads to that problem, and finally justify their findings as they relate everyday concepts to theoretical concepts.

Informed by sociocultural theory, this study aimed to investigate student teachers' reflective writings during two terms in practicum (I & II) and investigates whether student teachers' reflective writing, as a kind of narrative activity, along with teacher educator's scaffolding has the potential to create a mediational space to transform student teachers' learning through what Johnson and Golombek (2011) called "externalizing", "verbalizing" and "systematic examination. In other words, whether the reflective writing of novice teachers which is based on mere observation, can lead to teacher professional development.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 10 EFL student teachers attending the mentoring program at Farhangiyar University. They were all female and were between 20 to 22 years with no experience of teaching. Two of the participants were from Bushehr, one from Bandarabas, and others from Fars province. The present study enjoyed a nonrandom sample selection method. The participants were selected according to convenient sampling selection principles.

### **Data collection & Data analysis**

To achieve the objective of this study, 100 reflective writings of 10 EFL student teachers, which were written based on classroom observation in practicum (I & II) during one year, were analyzed. To not be influenced by the research, their reflective writings were analyzed after completing the course. Thematic analysis was used for identifying, analyzing and interpreting themes within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015). In contrast to other approaches such as grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), thematic analysis is considered as independent theory of epistemology which informs the description of data (descriptive or interpretive) and the way its meaning is theorized (Clarke et al., 2015). Informed by a sociocultural theory, this study applied thematic analysis to see whether those recognized themes can be interpreted under three functions of narratives as "externalization",

“verbalization” and “systematic examination” (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Through data analysis, the researcher tried to find instances that could be related to each of the above themes.

Analyzing student teachers’ reflective journals led to the emergence of some recurrent themes that are discussed under the three main categories as follows:

### **I. Narratives as “externalization”: Scrutinizing the safe zone**

#### **Theme 1. Student teachers had positive attitudes towards entering the school context**

The first two reflective writings were based on the physical observation of school and classes and their atmosphere. Student teachers were guided in advance to observe everything from the structure of the school to the lights, the number of classes, students, teachers, and even the way they arranged the chairs in each class. The purpose of the first two reflective writings was to raise teacher’s awareness of a particular situation (Kessels & Kortagen, 1996) to get accustomed to examining their surroundings from different aspects. The first two writings showed that all the student teachers tried to have somehow a good description of the school. Incidents of enthusiasm of their first day of school experience with fears and anxieties of not being accepted by the community of school were reflected in the first two of student teachers’ reflective journals. Having such motivation seems essential and determines the length and depth of time student teachers will engage in activities (McInerney, Maehr, & Dowson, 2004). This motivation and desire of student teachers which show positive “emotional experience” (perezhivanie) and rooted in their prior knowledge can be considered as an asset for teacher educators (Vygotsky, 1986). It can accelerate the process of teaching/learning (obuchenie) while teachers engaging in a joint activity (Vygotsky, 1986) which results in teacher identity development (Prabjandee, 2020). Thus, teacher educators should support student teachers in forming an awareness of their emotions (Bloomfield, 2010), and provide an opportunity for them to understand how to deal with their new identity as a teacher when confronted with emotional flux (Yuan & Lee, 2016).

#### **Theme 2. Student teachers reflected superficially in their first four writings**

From the third reflective writing, students were supposed to write their reflective writings based on their classroom observation that they had every week. The analysis of reflective writings showed a surface description of the teacher’s instruction without paying attention to the details of the teacher’s instruction. Although student teachers were informed from the beginning of the term to focus on every aspect of teaching, it seems in practice they had difficulty in going through details. They focused very broadly on the process of teaching. To compensate for this shortcoming, teacher educator tried to mediate them implicitly. The following is one of these examples:

*“Today’s lesson was reading. The topic of the reading was “the value of education”. First of all, the teacher went to the board and asked students some questions like “why do you come to school?”*

*Then, she wrote the answers on the board and continued her discussion. After that, she asked the students to open their books and read the text and paraphrase each paragraph. Finally, ....”*

As the above extract indicates, the student teacher was not able to have a deep analysis of the situation and that's why she took for granted the teacher's instruction and students' learning. She is not mature enough to pay attention to the content of teaching and just observe teaching through her prior experience. Therefore, teacher's instruction explained insufficiently and the students' role was ignored in the teaching-learning process. Thus, teacher educator's responsive mediation at the internal development zone (IDZ) can push student teachers to move beyond their everyday concepts of teaching and get to the upper level of development. Consequently, teacher educators tried to draw students' attention to pedagogical content knowledge through dialogic interaction, which can later help students link everyday concepts to academic concepts. (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Yoon & Kim, 2019).

### **Theme 3-The fragmentation between different incidents was obvious in student teacher's reflective writing.**

As it was concluded from the previous excerpt, subject knowledge to the most degree was diminished in student teachers' reflective writings, and very partially pedagogical content knowledge came under investigation. While most student teachers focused on classroom management and it seems that this issue was more tangible to them, they were not able to link different classroom incidents to make a reasonable judgment. So, they tried to simplify the problems. As one of the excerpts reveals this issue:

*"While students were taking the quiz, they tried to get help from us. Although we did not give the answers to them, it made the teacher very angry. She came to us and shouted at those students: "you should rely on yourselves because no one can help you in your final exam". The students laughed at the teacher when she mispronounced one of the words which was related to the pronunciation part of the exam and this made the teacher so angry ...At this time, Then she pointed to us and said they are here to evaluate your performance so you should get prepared for the next session. all the suspicious eyes stared at us. The class was noisy and the teacher was getting used to shout every ten minutes but it seems that students lost their sensitivity to the teacher's voice."*

The above excerpt shows the pure description of the situation without justifying any reasons for that. That's why the teacher educator tried to mediate her implicitly by making her rethink what's happening in the class and asking her to underline the statements supporting her findings.

Teacher educator also asks her to make relations between different incidents (You've noticed some problems while observing the class, can you ...). When the teacher educator asked student teacher to put herself in that situation (Read this part again and rethink of the situation, how would you react, if you were in such a situation? Is it inevitable?), she is opening up the way of "dialogic thinking" for her. Accordingly, she is encouraged indirectly to speak to herself about what she is doing (Gal'perin, 1969) and is forced to draw on her prior knowledge or academic concepts to come up with conclusion (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). No trace of the academic concepts can be seen in the above excerpt. Therefore, the social relation between teacher educator and student teacher (Johnson, 2009) through questions and feedback on reflective writing (McNeil, 2018; Harvey, 2011) can provide such a mediational

space that make the student teacher think deeply which arms the student teacher with new cognitive tools and it can increase his/her capabilities for problem-solving in future (e.g., Can you think of the ways to solve the problems? ...) (Vygotsky, 1934; 1978 as cited in Arieviditch & Stetsenko, 2000).

#### **Theme 4: There was no consistency in student teachers' tones in their reflective writings**

Student teachers used different tones while writing their narratives which changed from appreciative to absurd. Here, is one of these examples:

*"Like the previous sessions, the teacher was punctual and without wasting a second of time asked the students to open their books to check their exercises..... I am so pleased that I had a chance to attend Ms. Ebadi's class because she is innovative...."*

As it is obvious from the above excerpt, from student teacher's repertoire, a good teacher is someone who is organized and as long as the model teacher does not ruin her images, she appreciates her. Seeing the teacher as a perfect model can blind the student teacher's eyes in a way that she unconsciously avoided critical tone. That is why the teacher educator tried to change her perception by asking these questions: *"You mentioned some positive points that a good teacher should have which are mostly laudable but what other features you can think of that they can improve her teaching (e.g. do you prefer to start checking the exercises as soon as you get to the class?).* Accordingly, the teacher educator tried to force the student teacher to observe the class through a critical lens.

In another example that came in the previous section, the student teacher has used an absurd tone in her writing (e.g., *"At this time, the teacher asked one of the students to see whether it is her quiz paper that does not have a name. When she is coming back to her desk, she is laughing out that got our attention. When we asked the reason, she answered the quiz was multiple choice but she asked me "is it your handwriting? After that, we burst into laughter and covered our face in order not to be seen by the teacher ...."*). Additionally, the way she describes the situation also revealed that she considers the teaching and learning process so routinized as if she cannot learn any new things. Therefore, she has just relied on her prior knowledge and can see what other students see and cannot expand her professional content knowledge and learn new things from her on action experience. To overcome such a pitfall, teacher educator mediated student teacher by asking her to go over her writing and scrutinize the situation and answer this question, *"list the positive and negative points in your observation (try to think of not only the teacher but students and other related issues) and explain why they are positive or negative."*

Based on the sociocultural theory, individuals have different interpretations of their environmental events, rooted in their different life histories. Therefore, teacher educators should consider the dialectic unity of the emotion and cognition that is inseparable from each other and they should be aware of student teachers' emotional experience (perezhivanie) in practicum which is crucial for teacher development (Vygotsky, 1987). Being aware of student teacher teachers' naiveté like the above examples that student teachers carried out through the practicum experience (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) is essential for teacher educators. They can mediate student teachers to transform and refine their prior knowledge (everyday

concept) to new or more sophisticated concepts (academic concept) (Rozenszajna, Snapira, Machluf, 2019).

### Orient the context

#### Theme 5: student teachers' self-regulation to some extent enhanced as they raised their awareness toward the context

Psychologically, cognitive control, self-regulation, or self-control is initiated as people “restrain their hearts, bodies, and minds away from the temptations of everyday life and to maintain focus on more longstanding goals” (Inzlicht, Bartholow, Hirsh, 2015, p.2). Accordingly, self-regulation emerged through the inter-subjectivity of student teachers and teacher educator as teacher educator tried to help student teachers to bring their prior knowledge (everyday concept) or their own goal of completing a task to the surface and linking it to the academic concept to move towards the professional goal of the task. As student teachers are mediated through an ‘*intermental development zone*’ (IDZ), (Mercer, 2000, p. 141 cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2016) they can regulate their cognitive processes through different phases of self-monitoring, self-control, and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 2001; Pintrich 2000, 2004).

Regarding this study, Student teachers were more or less aware of their surroundings after writing five or six reflective writings and attending the seminars. Although they tried to pay more attention to the process of teaching and learning, they still needed the teacher educator’s support to be self-regulated. The following excerpt which is part of the student teacher’s reflective writing can indicate this fact:

*“While the teacher was checking the answers to the test, she warned students of common mistakes that students were made and gave them some examples. Some students took notes but most of them were reluctant and did not listen carefully. I think, it was better to write the examples on the board and underline the important parts. Whenever the teacher looked at noisy students, they became quiet but again they started talking. I think it was better for the teacher to ask them to give the answers to each question and justify their answers in order not to make a noise or become a disturber. Then, the teacher taught them some techniques for answering the questions related to the “cloze test” and “reading comprehension”. She asked them to read the whole parts first and translate all the alternatives of each item to Persian and then tried to fill in the blanks with the appropriate Persian equivalents. And for the reading part, she asked the students to read the questions first to foster their speeds and then go through the text and underline the important parts to come up with the answers....”*

The above excerpt showed the student teacher is situated in a context and tries to interrogate some of the incidents (e.g., *I think it was better to write the examples on the board and underline the important parts or I think it was better for the teacher to encourage them to engage in the activity....*) but still is indifferent towards others. The reason is the student teacher is not competent enough on those issues as she has not passed the course on methodology of teaching and teaching skills yet. Based on the syllabus of the program, these courses are presented in the last year of the university. Thence, the teacher educator tried to help her to be

self-regulated by providing explicit mediations (e.g. You can refer to the book named “how to teach English?” by Jeremy Harmer or read the related articles) and implicit ones (e.g. Do you think just mentioning the common mistakes help students not to repeat them?). It is essential to introduce such psychological tools through theoretical learning to student teachers explicitly to regulate their cognitive processes. Student teachers do not have access to them and are not supposed to reinvent them (Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

### **Theme 6: Student teachers trapped in a dilemma of "adopting or adapting" while trying to overcome the emotional and cognitive dissonance**

Since student teachers' attentions shifted from superficial observation to the more sophisticated ones through teacher educator's mediations, they became more self-regulated. Accordingly, they experienced some incidents that were in contradiction with what they had imagined before and tried to reflect them in their writings. This moment which is named as “growth point” by McNeill (2002) and is reflected in the work of Johnson and Golombek (2016, 2004) was introduced earlier by Vygotsky's (1987) as cognitive/emotional dissonance that can act as a facilitator along with the appropriate mediation to provide a space which leads to L2 teacher's professional development (Childs, 2011; DiPardo & Potter, 2003; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Worden, 2014; Kubanyiova, 2012; Reis, 2011 cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2016). Here, is one of these excerpts that describes how student teacher's prior knowledge of not using the L1 in the classroom contradicts with her classroom observation:

*“I think it is annoying that the teacher speaks Persian most of the time in the class. We cannot expect the students to speak English while she is working as a translator and does not provide more opportunities for them to listen or use English. As soon as she writes a new word on the board or explains something in English, she shifts to Persian. To my opinion, L1 should be avoided in class and it should be used as a last resort. I think the reason why students do not learn to speak English even after six years at school is not speaking English in the class. When I was studying in the institute, I was not allowed to speak Persian and we were given negative points for that. Although it had some drawbacks (e.g. we were afraid to ask the question if we did not understand in English and it was stressful), it could help me to learn to speak English.*”

The above excerpt signals the student teacher's cognitive/emotional dissonance as she found the difference between what she experienced as a student and what she observed as a student teacher. It seems that she is entangled between two extremes, one which is flexible in using L1 and the other which is strict. The way she conveyed her emotion showed her negative attitudes towards using L1 in the classroom (e.g., “it's annoying”) but she confessed that she had a stressful time not allowing to use L1 in the classroom (e.g., *we were afraid to ask the question if we did not understand in English and it was stressful*). Since her experience finally led to the successful consequence, she prefers to apply it in her classroom. The teacher educator did not try to appreciate or underestimate any of these methods, but instead, she tried to take advantage of the potential of this growth point (cognitive/emotional dissonance) to co-construct an IDZ to stay attuned with her (e.g., *I know what you mean*) and then regulate student teacher's *perezhivanie* by providing responsive mediation (e.g., ask her to rethink reasonably about the

situation by considering students' different levels in these two situations: the difficulties she experienced and reading scientific articles) to help her interrelate her everyday concept to the academic one to come up with the logical decision.

Psychologically, the affective quality of conflict or emotion which is demonstrated as a feeling of worry, uncertainty, or caution has the capacity at recruiting attention if it goes through a cognitive process that monitors the thoughts that are inconsistent with the intended situation and as a result leads to action and self-control, or self-regulation (Inzlicht, Bartholow, Hirsh, 2015). Student teachers need to be consciously aware of this cognitive dissonance which makes them regulate their beliefs or behaviors or both (Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Moos and Ringdal 2012; Eisenhardt, Besnoy, & Steele, 2011-2012; Gordon & Brobeck, 2010; Panadero, 2017; Vosniadou, Lawson, Wyra, Van Deur, Jeffries, & I Gusti Ngurah, 2021). To achieve this goal, teacher educators should be aware of the fact that identifying properly the growth point is substantial as it has two important features: emergent and contingent that make its prediction challenging (McNeill, 2005; Johnson & Worden, 2014; Yoon & Kim, 2019). Thus, they should be present attentively in every moment of the practicum to take this opportunity and provide responsive mediation at growth point in a way that leads to student teacher development (internalization) (Johnson & Worden, 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

### **III. Narratives as a “systematic examination”: A move towards praxis**

#### **Theme7: Student teachers underwent a transformation while transcending theory to practice**

The previous part showed how teacher educators tried to mediate student teachers by encouraging them to infuse the theoretical construct as a psychological tool to their thinking process and as a result become self-regulated. The analysis of student teachers' reflective writings revealed the crucial role of teacher educators at this stage. By “providing mediation that is responsive to the immediate needs of each teacher” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p.159), teacher educators aimed at helping them to “go beyond immediate sensory perception” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p.10) and link both seeing and knowing (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Reflexivity that emerged through this internal dialogue can serve as a mechanism to assist student teachers in interrogating their prior conception and evaluating multiple perspectives in a context, and finally developing an adaptive epistemic cognition that is pivotal for their professional lives (Brownlee, Ferguson & Ryan, 2017). The following excerpt demonstrated how the student teacher who experiences cognitive/emotional dissonance in the previous part aimed at trying on different theories to make a logical decision and as a result, her learning “is fundamentally shaped by how it is learned” (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p.493).

*“Regarding the use of L1 in the classroom, I read different papers which helped me to get familiar with different views towards this issue . Although some researchers like Duff (1989), Morgan and Neil (2001)) and Kovacic & Kirinic (2011) recommended the use of L1, some others believed that the use of L1 should be limited in the classroom. I think I agree more with the second group who think the teacher should limit using L1 in the classroom which is the only place that they have the opportunity to use L2 (McDonald, 1993). What was interesting for me was*

*Ellis's view (2008) about using L1 which was like what I observed in the classroom. He thinks the overuse of L1 by teacher disincline the use of L2 by the students. I noticed that even some students who could speak English were discouraged since the teacher herself used L1 most of the time in the classroom and students also shirked their responsibility of speaking English. As Morgan and Neil (2001) mentioned L2 should be used as the main means of communication while L1 should be utilized for specific purposes like explaining the goals of the lesson or drawing a comparison between two languages to make the meaning clear. Therefore, I try to minimize the use of L1 in my class to provide more opportunities for students to speak English."*

The above excerpt showed how the student teacher drew on different scientific concepts as she read different articles related to the use of L1 to inform her everyday concepts by comparing and contrasting different ideas and as a result regulate her thinking while making a decision. While the student teacher investigated different articles, she experienced "the inner speech" stage (Gal'perin, 1969) and became "able to use the concept with the facility in different contexts and often in a creative way" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p.67). The internal dialogue assisted the student teacher in engaging in a reflexivity process that enabled her to evaluate different views and approaches towards using L1, and through the teacher educator's responsive mediation, she became aware of her context which helped her to create reliable ways to achieve the epistemic goals (Brownlee, Ferguson & Ryan, 2017).

### **Theme 8: Student teachers could exercise their agency through their initiative in interaction**

Agency as a social event which indicates "a contextually enacted way of being in the world" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008, p.163) can entail "the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.143). Similarly, the narrative inquiry which demands student teacher and teacher educator's collaboration can help student teachers to exercise their agency through initiative or self-regulation in a dialogical context (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008) and assists them to interrogate their prior beliefs while scrutinizing the new ideas with "a sense of agency to transform practice" (Habermas, 1973; Solits, 1984 cited in Orland-Barak, 2010, p.25). Consequently, being initiative in dialogic praxis can prepare student teachers to "rehearse agentive action" for the future (Bieler, 2010, p.421) which is vital for the teaching-learning process and "enhance decision-making" to improve students' learning outcomes" (Charteris & Smardon, 2015, p.121). The following excerpt revealed this"

*"Back to class, I noticed that some students cannot speak even a sentence in English when they were answering the questions. I assume that we should encourage them to use L2 at once without any preparation and also it took much of class time. However, setting some rules regarding the use of L1 & L2 and teaching them some prefabricated phrases can help them to get used to speaking L2. One of the activities that can increase their confidence is memorizing the reading text at home and retelling it in class. My teacher at school used this technique and it worked."*

Comparing to the previous excerpts, the agentive role of the student teacher is apparent from the above excerpt. Interestingly, the student teacher at this stage did not bound herself to challenge the current ESL theories but also displayed her agency as she “talking back to the theory” (e.g., *I think it would be difficult to encourage them to use L2*) (Sharkey, 2009 as cited in Selvi & Martin-Beltrán, 2016). Kumaravadivelu (1999) emphasized the agentive role of the teacher by stating that: “pedagogic knowledge, to be of relevance, must emerge from the practice of everyday teaching. It is the practicing teacher who is better placed to produce, understand and apply that kind of knowledge.” (p.35). Accordingly, the agentive role of student teachers during engagement in this narrative inquiry can provide opportunities for them “to theorize what they practice and practice what they theorize” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p.86). The result is also in line with other studies which indicated the student teachers' sense of professional agency can be promoted in a collaborative learning environment, (Juutilainen, Metsäpelto & Poikkeus, 2018; Hernández Varona & Gutiérrez Álvarez, 2020; Torres, & Ramos, 2021).

### Conclusion

The mentoring program as a form of a community of practice has the potential to provide a dialogic space to encourage student teachers' participation through teacher educators' responsive mediation (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; 2016). Writing reflective journals based on observation as a kind of narrative inquiry (Johnson, 2009) can raise student teachers' self-awareness (Shavit & Moshe, 2019) and assist student teachers not to take everything for granted. Thinking through the critical lens from the beginning of the course can assist them to be aware of their context and their professional role as a reflective practitioner as one of the student teachers reflected this in her journal: “there is more than to teach to be a teacher”. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for teachers to exercise their agency through reflexivity while practicing self-regulation during cognitive-emotional dissonance and shape their professional identity as prospective teachers. In other words, it is not a ready-made model which could make a professional teacher but engaging in a transformative model (Kumaravadivelu, 2012) in which the “continuous formation through choice of action” (Dewey, p.361) would help student teachers to quest the reciprocal relationship of theory and practice-praxis (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014) and become transformative intellectual (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The findings of this study have some crucial implications for teacher education programs. First, it indicated the sociocultural theory as an influential theoretical framework could provide a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the pre-service teachers' learning and development (Nguyen, 2019). The finding of this study indicated reflective writing based on classroom observation could allow student teachers to experience the real classroom vicariously (De beer, 2017) and is considered as one of the best models of narrative inquiry for the initiation of the mentoring program since it provides a “comfort zone” which is less threatening and let student teachers express their cognitive and emotions freely. Second, the result of the study confirmed the essential role of teacher educators' mediation in student teachers transformation. It also demonstrated how the teacher educator's awareness in providing the appropriate responsive mediation could help student teachers gain a deeper insight into the context.

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