Reflection from the Perspective of New Reflectors: Investigating What Teacher Learners Find Valuable in a Reflective Task

This paper aims to understand the experience of reflective activity from the perspective of Teacher Learners (TLs) encountering reflective ideas for the first time. By identifying elements of a pedagogic reflective task they found most valuable and plausible, the study seeks to provide insights to improve educators' presentation of reflective ideas. It investigates the experiences of twenty language teachers writing reflections on classroom teaching during a programme of formal instruction. Writers' decisions are examined intensively to identify which phases/elements of an idealized cycle they chose to extend while engaged in a reflective task. Writers' commentaries on their writing, collected after the period of their instruction, were also analysed to discover the elements they found plausible and valuable beyond their utility for their course. The study found that writers looking back at their accounts tended to locate most value in practical, 'descriptive' sections of their writing rather than those linking to academic theory, or more 'critical' modes of reflection. Nevertheless, interviewee responses indicated that many had a nuanced sense that such higher-level modes of reflection might have value outside the formal circumstances of the programme.   The results suggest that learners might benefit from presentations and tasks that acknowledge the complexity of reflective practice for new learners, accepting more explicitly the limitations of reflection generated as a performance within a formal programme.

Keywords: writing; written reflection; critical reflection; teacher education; language teaching

Introduction

At the turn of the century, Jay and Johnson (2002) observed that reflection had become 'the current grand idée in education', a preoccupation of educators recognizing it as a previously under-acknowledged avenue for teacher growth. Its influence has continued, so that Farrell (2012: p. xi) observed that 'within the field of education reflective practice has had a major impact on virtually all areas of a teacher's life from teacher education programs for novice teachers to professional development programs for experienced teachers'. Within language teaching, the context of this study, it has also attained an increasingly central position (Farrell, 2012: p. 8; Mann and Walsh, 2017: 4). As

the idea of reflection has taken root in professional life, Teacher Learners (TLs) worldwide are asked increasingly to provide reflections on their classroom experiences as part of their training, development and ongoing practice. This requirement has become a mainstay of an increasing variety of professional and academic language teacher training courses such as the Trinity CERT TESOL, university-based TESOL Masters programmes and ongoing INSET development. TLs are frequently required to reflect on recent lessons as well as generate accounts of the professional changes these experiences have prompted.

The twenty TLs investigated for the purposes of this study were either language teachers or students undergoing training to enter the language teaching profession. Mann and Walsh (2017) have noted that intensive, entry-level training for many language teachers does not always support really dialogic, teacher-oriented reflection. TLs may struggle in their first encounters with the idea as it is presented within the constraints of a formal language teacher development programme. This study indeed builds on a strand of findings from an action research project (Author1 and Author2, xxxx) aimed at improving assessment of reflective writing, which found that TLs frequently experience difficulties in identifying which elements of their thinking to include in their accounts. Luk (2008) has suggested that the reflective account has emerged as a new and increasingly well-defined writing genre with its own requirements and conventions. TLs must learn to observe these writing traditions as part of their entry into a community of teaching practice. At the same time, new reflectors are also often conscious that outputs of reflective activity will be assessed. As reflection has gravitated to the centre of professional development practice, so too has the need to assess it as another component of teacher performance (Mann and Walsh, 2017: p. 6). These pressures add to writers' anxieties and can restrict their performance of reflection to those elements they hope will be assessed favorably.

Nevertheless, within the language teaching field there is a special argument that can be made for exposing teachers to ideas surrounding reflection. Historically, the profession has relied on insights from background disciplines such as applied linguistics, psychology and philosophy to discover relevant theory that can be applied at the classroom level (Richards and Rodgers, 2014; Howatt, 2004). Teacher development at advanced and postgraduate levels has conventionally focused either on delivery of such theory, or methods held to implement their principles. Yet this has been challenged by recent movements in language teaching, such as a "post-methods" tendency (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) encouraging teachers to use techniques they find practical and plausible, and calls for the greater consideration of context in decisions about teaching (e.g. Ur, 2013). The ethos of reflective practice, locating the teacher rather than the scientist or academic as the capable expert, is consistent with these trends.

To support the goal of increased uptake of reflection practice in language teacher education, this paper seeks to discover which elements of reflective practice TLs find plausible on their first encounter with reflective ideas. So far, much of the literature has focused on educators' and teachers' efforts to identify valuable features of reflective writing and assess effective practices. Luk (2008), looking at reflective writing, uses the evaluations of assessors as a means of determining features of stronger reflective accounts. Actual TL perspectives are rare; Hobbs' (2007) study, undertaken when the writer was herself a participant in a TL programme, is notable as such. This study attempts therefore to offer precisely the perspective of the learner, who is struggling to make sense of reflection as a challenging new practice.

Two Traditions?

Discourses centered on the idea of reflection as means of professional learning tend to claim origins in foundational work by Dewey (esp. 1933) and Schön (1983). These authors share an interest in professionals' ability to gain understanding through their experience of work. However, commentators (Anderson, 2019; Fendler, 2003) have noted that they tend to frame the phenomenon of reflection somewhat differently. Dewey's much-cited definition of reflection is that it is the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it' (p. 9). The description captures Dewey's sense that it is a critical, intellectual process in which the teacher actively interrogates beliefs to pursue new directions. While Schön's notion of reflective practice is frequently cited as a successor to, or continuation of Dewey's tradition, Schön conceptualizes reflection as a more practical form of knowledge accumulation that results from professionals' engagement with challenges in their work (Anderson, 2019).

At the core of the writers' differences is the role that theory—especially abstract, academic theory–plays in TLs' learning from experience. Dewey certainly considered it necessary for the reflective teacher to engage thoroughly with theoretical issues. As Sellars (2013: p. 3) comments, the process of reflection in Dewey's view depends on teachers' use of theory 'so the current and emerging scientific theories of that time are the predominant criteria in the evaluative processes of reflection' (also p.3). Schön's writing, meanwhile, is critical of professionalism that is too closely identified with the 'technical rational' position, where the abstract, theoretical knowledge that professionals gain from their academic training is considered the source of best practice. Schön distinguishes between the areas of practice where technical, rational theory can be applied directly to problems, and those messier situations where only practical experimentation can reveal new results (Schön, 1983, p. 43). Kinsella (2008: p. 109) believes that Schön attempts to overcome, rather than establish a sense of opposition between the two ways of accumulating professional knowledge. Yet others (e.g. Anderson, J. 2019. Fendler 2003), observe that disparities between the two authors' positions do exist and have

affected subsequent literature. As a result, the discourse is 'riddled with tensions between Schön's notion of practitioner-based intuition, on the one hand, and Dewey's notion of rational and scientific thinking, on the other hand' (Fendler 2003: p. 19). This tension between these famous, influential conceptualizations of professional reflection is relevant to the findings that emerge from this study.

Reflective writing

The participants investigated in this study carried out reflection by generating written accounts, rather than by other available means such as dialogue, discussion, or diagramming. The use of writing as a medium for reflection has received mixed attention in recent literature. Studies can be identified that promote reflective writing in a variety of written genres. These include learning journals (Moon, 2000) portfolios (Tanner, Longayroux, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2000) and teacher narratives (Cortazzi, 1994). Writing, these studies suggest, gives teachers an opportunity for intensive personal reflection, offering them a private space in which they can attend to their own voice. Within language teaching, Farrell's (2013) *Reflective Writing for Language Teachers* commends the practice of writing as an effective means of recording and processing classroom events. Considering his own experience of journal-keeping, Farrell suggests that the particular value of written records rests in their capacity to lay down an enduring record that can be revisited to reveal otherwise unobservable patterns of experience. Nevertheless, as written reflective accounts have become commonplace as a component of teacher development, researchers have registered concern at the neglect of alternative modes of engagement. Mann and Walsh criticize institutional 'reliance on written forms' (2017: p.5). Their view is that while the practice of reflective writing is not redundant, it needs to be balanced with spoken procedures that support dialogic, interactive modes of experience-based learning. Other writers have noted how expectations concerning writing under institutional conditions may constrain learners (e.g. Lee, 2007; Luk, 2008; Stierer, 2002). These positions –for and against writing—inform the analysis of the data in this research. While writing offers the TL a quiet space for personal reflection, accounts that are produced for the purposes of assessment in a formal setting are frequently shaped to meet the expectations of expert markers.

Pedagogic models of reflection

The TLs investigated in this study were exposed to familiar pedagogic models developed to illuminate the process of reflection or (more broadly) 'learning from doing'. TLs' writing in this project was constrained by such frameworks, not least since they used a template informed by common models. Two model "types" can be distinguished for the purposes of the study. The first type presents reflective activity as a sequence of stages, represented visually as a process or cycle. Kolb's (1984) influential four-stage cycle for 'learning by doing' proposes four distinctive phases through which

practitioners may develop new understanding from their work: *stage one*, having an actual concrete experience during work; *stage two*, reviewing the experience; *stage three*, drawing conclusions; *stage four*, planning new actions based on what has been learned. Gibb's (1998) seven stage framework expands Kolb's four-stage cycle, structuring a practitioner's "debriefing" concerning their experience. A useful additional stage, described as a 'Feelings' phase, elicits the practitioner's recovery and processing of experience, including their emotional response to events as a dimension of the transformative cycle. The second model type distinguishes between 'levels' rather than 'stages' of reflective activity. Farrell (2012; p. 9) notes that literature in this tradition converges on three identifiable levels of reflective activity: *descriptive*, *comparative* and *critical*. Jay and Johnson's (2002: p.77) presentation of these strata is as follows:

Descriptive, where the teacher describes concrete events, feelings, but also considers whether pedagogic steps are having their desired effect.

Comparative, where they consider events from the perspective of other actors , considering viewpoints from literature and other professionals

Critical, where, having considered alternative positions and their implications, they arrive at a renewed perspective on the issue at hand.

Materials and methods

To discover which elements of reflection learners found most plausible and valuable in their attempts at reflective writing, two strands of investigation were followed. The first was to analyse the writing TLs generated. In the instructions of the writing task itself, TLs had been asked to select a single issue from their experience of observed teaching, then to develop an account of their thinking by following a task template. In its organisation, four elements in the template resembled phases of Gibbs' cycle. These were as follows:

Description. The cue elicited details of classroom events so as to encourage 'noticing' of events such as learners' responses, instances of 'talk', etc.

Recall of emotions. TLs were asked to make a note of emotional responses to classroom events (either their own, learners' or a class "vibe").

Analysis. This was glossed as an opportunity for TLs to step back and 'make sense' of what had happened, suggesting intuitive explanations for what they had experienced.

Changes in future practice. Corresponding roughly to Gibb's final "Action Plan" phase, in this stage teachers were asked to suggest improvements based on their experience.

The template however also included two categories corresponding to the more challenging ('comparative' and 'critical' level) modes of reflection depicted in the hierarchical, three-level models described in the literature review. These were as follows:

Principles and theories. This encouraged writers to make connections to literature and theory, promoting integration of insights beyond their own intuitive thoughts.

Evaluating perspectives on teaching and learning. Here the writers were asked to consider ways in which their perspective as teachers had changed as a result of their experience. This was an effort to provide an opportunity for writing approaching the kind of 'critical reflection' proposed by Jay and Johnson (2002) involving cognitions that challenged existing moral and social frames.

When writing, teachers were asked to attempt every stage of the process but *expand one passage* under the category they felt best illuminated their chosen issue. Since TLs were invited to expand only one section in their writing, their choices could be analysed quantitatively, identifying most and least commonly attempted stages. While TLs' decisions could not be held as direct evidence of their fixed preferences concerning the usefulness of sections (since choices would depend partly on the issue they had selected), these figures helped to suggest where TLs felt most and least comfortable in attempting more in-depth reflection. The accounts also provided a useful stimulus for the TLs in the second, interview stage of data collection, where they were invited to re-read their short accounts.

The interviews allowed writers to assess in retrospect—and without any pressure of assessment—how personal and enduring their written reflections now seemed. After re-reading their accounts to prompt recall of the experience of writing, TLs were asked to provide:

1. a subjective rating, between 1 (useless) and 6 (invaluable), as to how useful they now considered each section of the writing as a record of their learning from experience;
2. Some commentary on the rating;
3. Two further opinions: firstly, which section they would have *removed* from the task template had they been given the option; secondly, which category they would have *kept* if asked to write meaningfully in only one section.

Quantitative data were processed in Microsoft Excel. The qualitative data gathered from interviews were recorded and either transcribed completely, or in some cases selectively with a

focus on TL commentary relevant to the research goals. For coding, the main categories for analysis were the template categories (e.g. description, feelings) referred to in interviews, which provided 'provisional codes' (Saldaña, 2009) or a 'template of codes' (Dornyei, 2007) as a starting point for analysis. Sub-codes were developed, however, to group themes observed in interviewee's responses to each section.

Results

By recording the number of instances where TLs expanded a category to provide longer reflection (see Chart 1) it was possible to derive some quantifiable, more objective evidence of TLs' preferences. The main trend was that most TLs chose to expand their writing in the phase of 'Analysis', corresponding to the Gibb's cycle stage of the same name; few expanded the stage of 'Evaluating perspectives on teaching and learning'. The value of these findings was limited by the fact that TLs were only permitted to expand writing in one of the four categories indicated by the chart. It is also likely based on interviewee comments that choices made *while* writing (*prior to* assessment) were affected by TLs' motivations concerning assessors' opinion of the writing. Nevertheless, most overall trends were broadly confirmed by the later interviews.
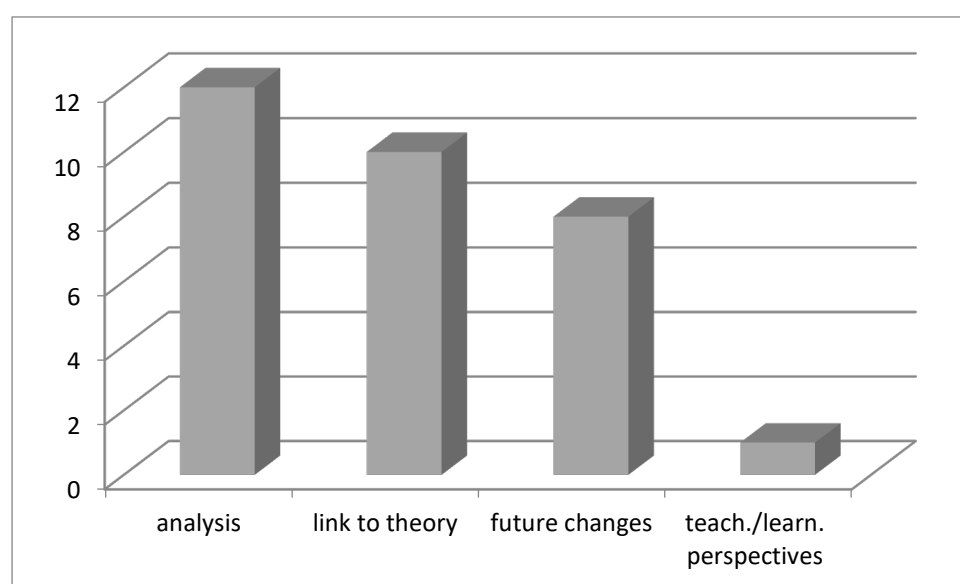

Figure 1: Stages in the writing template that writers chose to expand

Writers' quantified (1 to 6) ratings of the value of writing produced in each template section varied considerably; every category was considered 'extremely useful/essential' by at least one writer. However, as Table 1 indicates, Analysis was again seen as the most useful category; Critical Reflection was also again perceived as the least useful. As for writers' responses concerning which

section they would remove from the task if given the option, 'Principles and theories' (7/20) was selected as the most disposable. 'Analysis' was the section most (12/20) students would keep if they could only answer in one category.

	Average	Median	Std deviation
Description of events	4.53	5	0.85
Recall of emotions	4.32	4	1.08
Analysis	4.68	5	0.83
Principles and theories	4.13	4.5	1.53
Changes in future practice	4.55	5	1.02
Evaluating perspectives on teaching and learning	4.11	4	1.18

Table 1: Writers' ratings of the "value" of writing generated in each section.
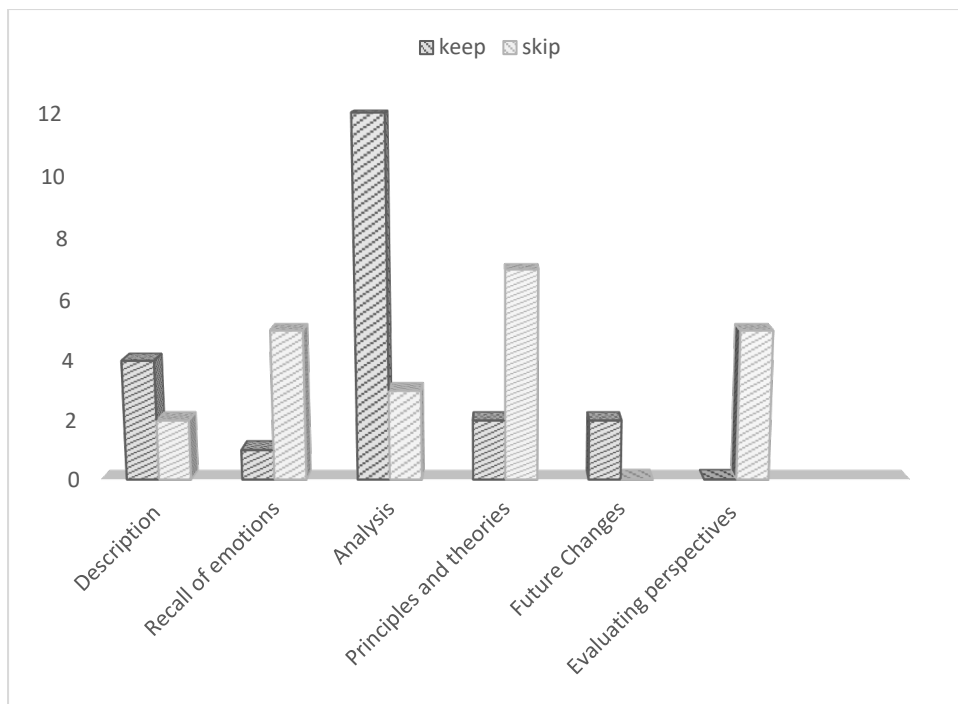
Figure 2. Chart indicating which stage TLs would skip, given the choice, and which keep if restricted to writing in one section

At least as revealing as these impressionistic ratings, were interviewees' open-ended commentaries explaining their opinions. Interviewee comments concerning three categories–Analysis, Principles and Theory and Evaluating Perspectives on Teaching and Learning —were particularly relevant to the project aims.

Analysis:

The 'Analysis' section of the reflective process was glossed to TLs as a stage in which to 'step back' from events and 'make sense' of what had happened. It was both the most frequently expanded section in TL's writing and the category of reflection rated as most useful by participants. Reinforcing this, in interviews twelve of the 20 writers identified it as the stage they would retain if restricted to writing in only one template section (nine exclusively, three mentioning other sections as equally irreplaceable). In their comments expanding on these impressions, three participants portrayed analysis explicitly as the essential, core stage of the reflective process. Layla said that the writing she generated here was 'the main part of this reflection, actually', while David explained that that for him reflection was '"just" analysis', the actual phase of the process where reflective activity occurred. The most common theme in these responses was that the writing produced for this section had the quality of revealing or exposing the significance of the events they had experienced. Lexis frequently suggested this theme. Mike said that it was useful because 'if it is not written […] it will not give me

insight to *dig deep.*' Mary mentioned that it shows '*what you can't see* while teaching'. Sarah explained that she thought it focused her 'to think of *underlying* problems,' and that it '*reveals* the authentic/real problem you've got.' On similar lines, for some teachers the value of their writing in this section was to reveal missteps in their teaching that would otherwise remain undetected. Kate said it 'helps me to realize where the problem was'; Tracey that 'it was important to do because it lets you notice all the mistakes'.

A further subset of these responses emphasized that the writing they produced for this Analysis stage provided a critical, or sense-making dimension to their account. Mandy stated that she believed that it was at this stage that 'critical thinking' occurred. Clare appreciated the focus it permitted: 'sometimes it's good to focus on one thing, it's useful to explain it to yourself in detail'. Kevin explained that he thought analysis of this kind came naturally to him, as 'I'm always analyzing what happens in real life'. In his writing he had identified that his lesson plan had been overly mechanical. He felt the insight was easy since 'I'm used to reflect a lot'. Bob mentioned that it was 'important to be able to stand back' in reflection and this was the stage to see things 'from the student perspective', or apply 'different perspectives'. The implications of TLs' preference for this stage (considered as merely 'descriptive' according to the three-level model, since it draws solely on teachers' own intuitions) shall be discussed below,

Principles and Theories

TL's impressions concerning the stage of theory-linking in their writing varied greatly. While their average rating of its usefulness was high (average 4; median 4.5), it was the most contentious of the categories in terms of students' responses, with a standard deviation for scores (1.5) far larger than for other categories. It was also the section that the most (7/20) felt they would skip if they had been given the option. Layla did not enjoy writing under this category, mentioning that she 'did not pay attention to references' which she felt unproductive and unnecessary. Sarah admitted that she did complete the section but was 'writing for the marks', so finding a theory for the sake of the task. Two respondents, Zoe and Patrick, agreed that they found theory less illuminating than opportunities for discussion with colleagues. Patrick expressed his view that 'I feel experience is really important but theory is still a bit important'. Kacey offered a nuanced position. The section 'forced me to do something […] if I was an experienced teacher, I could do this […] but for me this is tough'.

Bob felt that focusing too strongly on theory carried the risk of losing focus in reflection; there was a danger that 'you could get stuck in the weeds'. Linda suggested that theory was not useful since 'all students and classes were different' and later said that 'we need reflection, not a cliché". She doubted

that it was possible to 'identify specific principles' from an experience that could be generalized in a theoretical way, to 'provide an ideal framework'.

A theme in the comments of those who perceived it positively was that it provided an opportunity to gain an alternative and broader perspective on their problem. Mary said that the stage allowed them to 'take what you know and combine…it with theory'. Jen said 'practice, experience should link to theory'. Clare commented that it is 'useful to see if I do exactly the same as hundreds of others'. These students' views, while not typical of their group, indicate a sensibility similar to Jay and Johnson's insistence that a *comparative* stage of reflection is necessary to move beyond the immediate perceptions of the reflector.

Evaluating perspectives on teaching and learning

This stage was presented to TLs as an opportunity to think more deeply about what they had experienced, considering any way in which their perspective as teachers had changed as a result of what had happened. Overall, TLs did not value critical reflective writing as highly as theorists who prize it as the highest level of the reflective process. While TLs' average rating of its usefulness was "4"; "quite useful", five said they would drop it if allowed to lose a category, making it the second least popular category (equal with 'Emotions', less popular only than 'Principles and Theories'). Negative comments fell into two main categories; those (three TLs) who felt simply that they did not know what to write, and those (four TLs) who stated that the while idea of deep reflection was good in principle, it was unrealistic in the context of such an exercise. In the first category, Clare felt reluctant to contribute at this stage, seeing it as a negative step: 'I don't want to be too bothered by what I did wrong […] rather be more positive'. In the second, more nuanced camp, Kelly felt that while critical reflection was interesting in theory, she felt it 'did not happen!' in her writing. Jenny, similarly, said 'I understand why it exists but 'I can't see how it can help me'. Bob wondered 'how many times a person's perspective can be changed' and whether therefore it was realistic to imagine that a profound change of perspective should be achieved as the result of a single, routine reflection. He was 'not looking for a grand change of perspective' but felt rather that development would come by 'tweaking, improving, small pieces at a time'.

However, those TLs who did value it, did so highly. Mike remarked of the writing he produced in the category: "that's the deep understanding". He considered that the extended passage of writing he provided in this section brought about a "radical change in [his] teaching attitude" concerning the use of L1 in classrooms. Others agreed that the writing they provided in the section had had a transformative effect. Layla said that when she was writing the section, a change in her stance about her chosen issue did occur; the 'idea came doing writing'. Mary said that exposure to the task of writing in this section made her re-evaluate her overall attitude to teaching; "I thought [beforehand] teaching was easy". The exercise had deepened her sense that there was more to teaching than met the eye.

Discussion

Models like Jay and Johnson's three level (descriptive, comparative, critical) scheme describing reflection assign even activities like analysis of classroom events to the first, descriptive tier of their framework. Higher, more transformative modes of reflection require the synthesis, at the comparative and critical levels, of positions other than those of the teacher. Yet the clearest trend in the data is that when participants looked back at their accounts, they considered writing in the Analysis section to have the greatest value. Some indeed characterized the thinking expressed here as the core activity of reflection; that reflection is indeed 'just analysis'. TLs therefore located this stage as the nexus of learning, rather than the two advanced elements – 'Principles and theories' and 'Evaluating perspectives on teaching and learning'—added to provide an opportunity for writing at, respectively, Comparative and Critical levels of reflection. The finding indicates that writers favored a more Descriptive," Gibbsian" approach, locating instinctual, personal reflections as the real mechanism for learning rather than the idealized higher levels posited by the three-level model.

To account for TLs' positions, three possibilities will be considered. A first, simple explanation is that TLs' perceptions are consistent with their status as new reflectors, engaging with a challenging framework for the first time. Taking the perspective of the student, stages involving theory or the consideration of broader, social and political factors might simply appear as remote—'later' or 'higher' than—the procedures of description and common-sense analysis that they acknowledged as useful. A second explanation relates specifically to teachers' reservations concerning the usefulness of theory in their writing. Bob's concern that students might get 'stuck in the weeds', or Linda's fear of 'cliché' demonstrated a concern that something might be lost, rather than gained by insisting on reference to the abstractions of generalizable theory. TLs' positions on this matter might be explained with reference to an idea described in the literature review: the different roles for theory in reflection

ascribed by foundational writers Dewey and Schön. Dewey regarded the incorporation of theoretical, scientific elements in a process of reflection as essential. Schön meanwhile emphasized the ability of professionals to learn from their own practice-based cognitions. A possibility is that teachers were identifying a sense of reflection that is closer to Schön's than Dewey's. Their preferences suggest a sensibility that conforms to Schön's view of reflection as a practical, instinctive route for professionals to gain knowledge from experience, relying on sensitive noticing, personal intuition and insight rather than the authority of literature and contemporary theory. The findings suggest that, for TLs coming into contact with reflection for the first time, Schön's intuitive, learning-from-doing approach feels more plausible than Dewey's more intellectual position.

A third explanation for the findings relates mainly to teachers' more nuanced opinions concerning the inclusion of a dimension of critical thinking in their writing. In the task template, the instructions for "Evaluating perspectives on teaching and learning" were as follows: "Has your reflection on this issue caused you to change your perspective on teaching and learning language in some way? How?". As we have seen, TLs' quantified ratings indicated overall skepticism concerning the stage. However, Kelly and Jenny offered the more nuanced position that while the idea of such writing was good in theory, it was hard to implement within the scope of the task. These more ambivalent responses suggest that TL skepticism was not necessarily rooted in doubts concerning the actual possibility of deeper, long-term transformation arising from reflection. Rather, it related to the likelihood of such an outcome within the confines of a particular formalized task. TLs thus demonstrated a certain level of insight concerning this 'highest' form of critical, transformative, reflection. By its very nature, powerful insights are unlikely to emerge as the result of reflection: i) based on a relatively limited set of classroom experiences; or ii) performed for institutional purposes, including evaluation, where synthesis with literature may be more valued than the insights themselves. The distillation of insight from practice requires an engagement with problems that may not translate easily or predictably to the idealized final outcomes of a three-stage model. TLs' perceptions in this respect converge on views expressed by writers familiar with the challenge of reflection. The notion of 'puzzling' (Hanks, 2017; Mann &Walsh, 2017) captures the same idea that the work of developing insights and solutions to classroom problems is not predictable and mechanical. It is a messy, iterative struggle, requiring multiple encounters with a practical issue to resolve its puzzles. If indeed it can ever be resolved, since transformative insight is rare and not to be assumed as the given product of a reflective process. TLs' resistance to the idea that transformative thinking should be routinely demonstrated may even in fact represent a deep-seated respect for its potential, and an unwillingness to 'perform' cognitions simulating transformation.

A goal of teacher development programmes is to inculcate reflection as a valuable practice that teachers should maintain in their future work. To support this objective, reflection must be presented

as something achievable and plausible. Yet contemporary models in literature, like Jay and Johnson's, may be presented to favour a view of reflection that sees teachers' intuitions concerning classroom events as merely descriptive, a starting point only. To attain the level of the second Comparative stage the reflector needs to synthesize other perspectives, including voices from literature. To approach the final stage of Critical transformation, they must also integrate broader social and political views. This approach is consistent both with Dewey's view of the necessity for teachers to make extensive use of theory, behaving as classroom intellectuals. The perspective is also convenient for academic, institutional environments that seek to embed reflection as a practice that can be regarded on an equal footing with other forms of academic production. Reflection observing a three-level procedure that includes a literature stage will necessarily require such features as citations and references to academic models. These provide evidence of depth and scholarship and can be assessed along similar lines.

Yet the expectation that any given reflective process will result in such higher-level insights is unlikely to foster TLs' sense of the plausibility of reflection as a regular, ordinary teaching activity. TLs should be supported in their instinct that not every reflective cycle will generate critical, transformative insight. This does not mean that TLs should not be encouraged to attempt elements of a reflective process they are likely to find new or challenging. Tasks can scaffold learners towards attempting, even if primarily through imagination, a brief and/or tentative response for such stages. This suggestion is consistent with the findings of the research. Even those TLs who were skeptical about the ('Evaluating perspectives') Critical Reflection stage, for example, conceded that a profound pedagogic reorientation *might* occur as the result of long-term thinking that extended into broader personal, social and political issues surrounding a topic. Learners can be invited to "have a go" at difficult stages, writing honest and tentative responses rather than elaborate performances of reflection whose value does not endure beyond the exercise. Even if the writing here is brief, it can least showcase the potential of such stages to the learners, priming them for the possibility of real revelation in their future work.

In applying the research findings to identify practical implications for similar future training, care must be taken not to over-generalize these TLs' experiences. Reflectors' choices are shaped by the nature of the specific classroom problems they encounter and may vary widely by programme. Nevertheless, three suggestions might be offered that summarize the insights offered in this discussion. Firstly, tasks should be designed and presented to support TLs' choices in writing, indicating that they can concentrate their efforts where they feel most insight can be gleaned. Templates, instructions or visual guides can be included to support preferences, like those of these research participants for gaining intuitive understandings of problems, making their flexibility

explicit. A second suggestion is to encourage TLs to attempt, even if primarily through imagination, more challenging stages of theorization and critical reflection—without indicating that these are the prized, only valued outcomes of their thinking. This goal can be realized again in the design and presentation of reflective tasks. But it can also be encouraged by modelling appropriate language to support such thinking, asking students to write tentatively, briefly or in a hedged way where they do not feel entirely confident of their own ideas. This can raise writers' confidence in attempting such stages, while discouraging "displays" of higher-level reflective thinking that TLs might otherwise furnish as a performance for assessors. The findings of this study suggest that most elements of a traditional reflective cycle, including opportunities for linkage to theory and more critical cognitions, can be usefully attempted by TLs. Thirdly and most practically, appropriate methods of assessment should be applied to support these decisions. In the literature review, it was observed that TLs' reflective writing is frequently shaped to meet the expectations of expert markers. Several of the participants' comments in this research support this view. Flexible assessment criteria can encourage writers to engage most fully where they sense most insight can be captured, and according to the requirements of their particular problem. At the same time, criteria can include the expectation that they attempt, at least briefly, every stage of an ambitious cycle that includes opportunities for more challenging theoretical and critical reflection.

Like any relatively small-scale project, this investigation benefitted from its tight focus on learners sharing a similar context of learning. It also gained from having access to participants willing to share their understanding openly and often very thoughtfully and honestly. At the same time, inevitably, the scale of the project also limited its power to derive findings that are more fully generalizable to related contexts. Further projects in this area might make use of a larger sample of learners. This study sought to apply a mixed methods approach, but the quantitative data in particular was limited. While this kind of research lends itself to a deep, qualitative data collection approach, much might be gained from an instrument such as a widely-distributed survey, collecting experiences of TLs across numerous institutions. An irreplaceable element of this project's procedure was its inclusion of a "stimulated recall" stage, allowing participants to remember and review their own writing as a starting point for discussion. A further project would benefit from this approach, supporting research in which it is the TLs, rather than assessors or tutors, who are the key informants on the experience of early reflective learning.

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