



## The reflective process in initial teacher education: virtual diaries in distance education

O processo reflexivo na formação inicial de professores:  
diários virtuais na educação a distância

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### Abstract

Since the end of the 1990s, reflective diaries have been used and studied in teacher education courses in face mode education. However, the area lacks studies on the use of virtual diaries with Spanish language teachers in distance mode education. Thus, this study, qualitative interpretive in nature, aims to investigate the use of virtual diaries written by pre-service teachers as an instrument for reflection on action right after their teaching practicum, during the Supervised Practicum discipline, of a Spanish Language Arts Course, in distance mode education, of a major Brazilian university. The analysis of thirty virtual diaries revealed that the participants reflect about the teacher's and the student's role and about the content taught, but their main concern is to describe

actions and judge them, suggesting that the participants reached the first level of reflection out of the three proposed by Zeichner and Liston (1987). It also revealed that the reflective diary is a strategic tool for learning to teach in distance mode education. The results of this study and the reflection on them contribute to the current discussions on foreign/additional languages teaching-learning and teacher education programs, both in initial and continuing education.

**Keywords:** Virtual diaries. Research on distance mode education. Teacher Education. Spanish as a foreign/additional language.

### **Resumo**

*Desde o fim da década de 1990, diários reflexivos vêm sendo usados e pesquisados em cursos de formação de professores na modalidade presencial. No entanto, desconhecemos estudos sobre o uso de diários reflexivos virtuais em cursos de formação inicial de professores de língua espanhola na modalidade a distância. Nesse sentido, este estudo, de natureza qualitativa interpretativa, tem por objetivo investigar o uso de diários virtuais escritos por professores em formação inicial como instrumentos de reflexão sobre a ação logo após a docência, durante a disciplina Estágio Supervisionado do curso de Licenciatura em Letras – Espanhol, na modalidade a distância, de uma importante universidade brasileira. A análise de 30 diários virtuais revelou que os participantes refletem sobre o papel do professor e do aluno e sobre o conteúdo que ensinam, mas sua maior preocupação é descrever e julgar suas ações pedagógicas, sugerindo que atingem o primeiro dos três níveis de reflexão propostos por Zeichner e Liston (1987). A análise também mostrou que o diário reflexivo é uma ferramenta estratégica para aprender a ensinar na modalidade a distância. Os resultados deste estudo e a reflexão sobre eles podem contribuir para discussões já existentes sobre ensino-aprendizagem de línguas adicionais e sobre programas de formação de professores, tanto inicial quanto continuada.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Diários reflexivos virtuais. Pesquisa no Ensino Superior a distância. Formação do professor. Espanhol como língua estrangeira (adicional).*

## Introduction

The area of study in Applied Linguistics whose focus is on foreign/additional language teacher education suggest initial training courses to promote the education of reflective, critical and autonomous professionals to meet the demands of contemporary society. To do so, since the end of the 1990s, the relevant literature in the area has proposed to include instruments of reflection in initial training courses. Since then, reflective diaries have been used and studied in such courses in face mode education. However, in distance mode education, the use of virtual diaries to make pre-service teachers reflect on their action in practice is not a regular procedure, at least in Brazil. Besides that, there are no records of such use in Spanish Language Arts Course in distance mode education. This gap shows the importance of this study for the area, as it aims to investigate the use of virtual diaries as a tool for reflection on action right after pre-service teachers' teaching practicum, a requirement of the Supervised Practicum discipline, in the Spanish Language Arts Course, in the distance mode, of a major federal university in Santa Catarina, Brazil.

## The model of professional education

The theoretical basis of the critical reflective training model proposed by the Supervised Practicum discipline is based on the concept of training by Freire (2005); the concept of reflection on action by Schön (1983); the levels of reflection by Zeichner and Liston (1987); the reflective training model proposed by Wallace (1991); the critical reflective actions proposed by Smyth (1992); and, more recently, by Nóvoa's (2009) ideas about the need to conduct the teacher training into the profession, that is, in the place where teaching and learning occur.

The training concept adopted in the critical reflective model sees the teacher as a lifelong learner, and training as a project to be developed

throughout his/her professional life, that is, a continuous learning process, or, as Nóvoa (2009, p. 13) says, when talking about the current consensus on teachers' professional development:

[...] articulation of initial training, induction and in-service training in a perspective of lifelong learning; attention to the early years of profession and to the integration of young teachers in schools; appreciation of reflective teacher and teacher training based on research; importance of collaborative cultures, teamwork, monitoring, supervision and evaluation of teachers, etc.

This process is based on dialogue, as advocated by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire since the 1970s. That is, to educate is neither a mere deposit of ideas in other people's minds nor a simple exchange of ideas, but the place where reflection and action meet, where people identify what needs to be changed and why.

The concept of reflection on action (SCHÖN, 1983) opens possibilities for changes in teachers' mental representations. This concept is related to principles, not rules. Reflection inside the educational context implies to replace pedagogical knowledge by questions that emerge from practice. This is also the conception of knowledge construction by Freire and Shor (1986, p. 25): "a set of reflections recreated in the light of issues and discussions to illuminate reality".

The reflective model of professional education proposed by Wallace (1991) is in line with the ideas of Freire (2005), Freire and Shor (1986), Schön (1983) and Nóvoa (2009). In that model, professional competence is conceived as a learning process to be developed throughout life and, therefore, two elements are central: practice and reflection on practice.

However, the model of Wallace (1991) favors reflection on teachers' professional competence, leaving aside reflection on school and schooling as socio-historical contexts in which teaching-learning occurs, and teaching-learning as an activity conducted within the context where it actually happens.

In this sense, the three levels of reflection proposed by Zeichner and Liston (1987) - the technical, practical and critical - open the

possibility for teachers to engage in a more organic reflection on the diversity of meanings that constitute their representations, values, intentions and actions. In other words:

- a) the technical level of reflection focuses on the “what” and “how” the teacher works in practice, the technicalities of practice;
- b) the practical level of reflection, on the other hand, focuses on the learning objectives of the proposed activities, whether or not they are met and why; and
- c) the critical level of reflection, in turn, focuses on the educational goals and how they can lead to the education of individuals who work for a more just and egalitarian society.

Therefore, learning to problematize is the basis of this proposed training model.

### **The instruments of reflection**

The area of research in Applied Linguistics whose focus is on studying teacher education (and foreign/additional language teachers as well) suggests initial training courses to promote the education of critical reflective professionals to meet the demands of the context they live and work. In this sense, teachers may become more autonomous, creative and develop personally and professionally in a continuous way (CAVALCANTI; MOITA LOPES, 1991; MOITA LOPES, 1996; GREGGIO, 2009; PIMENTA; GHEDIN, 2005; SILVA, 2009; NÓVOA, 2009; ZABALZA, 2004).

In this line, some practical guidelines are offered for teachers in initial training to learn to organize their thoughts on their pedagogical actions in practice. Some researchers suggest reflective instruments, such as reflective diaries, to be used during the process of learning to teach (BERGMANN; SILVA, 2011; SILVA; BAZZO, 2011; CRUZ; REIS, 2002; LIBERALI, 2002, 2008; ZABALZA, 2004). The scholars claim that if teachers learn to make

notes about their practice right after it and reflect on them, they can learn to reflect systematically on their teaching and on the learning of their students, identify problems in practice and provoke changes in their teaching context.

Moreover, in the absence of other professional support during the process of reflection on action, the diary can serve as an interlocutor, someone teachers can share doubts and questions about their actions in practice (CRUZ; REIS, 2002). Besides helping teachers reflect systematically and serve as support and interlocutor, reflective instruments, according to Cruz and Reis (2002), may lead teachers to articulate theory and practice, while trying to understand and explain the records of their teaching and/or the learning of their students.

Other scholars suggest teachers to reflect on action in practice by using other procedures. Namely, analysis of lessons, reading of theoretical texts followed by discussions and dairies, class observation (VIEIRA-ABRAHÃO, 2002), semi-structured sessions of video recorded lessons, in collaboration with experts, to develop the teachers' critical reflective eye on their practice (MAGALHÃES, 2002), and self-monitoring (RICHARDS, 1990). They argue that such procedures are important mechanisms to understand and critically reflect on teachers' actions and attitudes in the classroom. Still, other scholars suggest teachers to write narratives and/or biographies to access their knowledge, rebuild experiences and understand concepts that guide their practice in the classroom (ORTENZI; MATEUS; REIS, 2002). And others propose narrative inquiry and/or educational research based on arts (TELLES, 2004, 2005), justifying that the narrative of experiences can reveal who the teacher is and what concepts underlie her/his practice.

Almeida Filho (1993, 1999), in turn, proposes the procedures of the analysis of the teaching approach, i.e., research procedures to reveal the concepts that support the teaching approach of the teacher. The researcher claims that if teachers describe, analyze and explain their teaching approach to uncover the configuration of the competences that drive their practice, they can start a trajectory of illuminations, practice with innovations and reflection that can lead them to transform their practice in the classroom.

In short, the studies in teacher education reviewed here tell us that there is a wide range of practical tools and procedures that can help teachers learn how to systematize the way they reflect on their actions in practice.

In this article, we present part of a larger study on the use of reflective diaries as a virtual tool for reflection on action, in initial foreign/additional language teacher training, in the distance mode education.

### **Research method**

This study, qualitative interpretative and conducted from a critical perspective of teaching-learning, analyzed thirty reflective diaries written by the best pre-service teachers of the course, which were compared to their respective lesson plans. We open the presentation of the research method quoting Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 19):

There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp all the subtle variations in ongoing human experiences.

As researchers, we assume a relativist ontological view, which means that we believe the world is made up of multiple realities; we adopt a subjective epistemological view, which implies that we believe meanings are constructed through social interactions; and finally, we assume a naturalist methodological view, which means that we believe knowledge can be constructed through naturalist procedures. This set of beliefs identifies us as socioconstructivist researchers and guides our research actions.

The present study, qualitative interpretative in nature and conducted based on a critical perspective of foreign/additional language teaching-learning, is part of a wider research project on foreign/

additional language teacher education. It focuses on the analysis of virtual diaries as a reflection tool used in an initial teacher training course in distance mode. More specifically, it tries to identify the levels of reflection on action pre-service teachers reach while writing their virtual diaries right after their teaching practicum. Thirty reflective diaries produced by the three best pre-service teachers of the course, constitute data.

This study is based on Zabalza's (2007) ideas on the topic, especially the one in which the author states that teachers, while writing their diaries, do not only describe their actions, but also take that moment to interpret them, reflecting on their practice and reassessing it. In this sense, the author states that the diary is "an instrument to convey teachers' thoughts. It allows teachers to self-explore their professional actions, provide themselves feedback and encouragement to improve, and study teachers' thoughts and dilemmas from their own perspective" (ZABALZA, 2007, p. 94, our translation). To Sá-Chaves (2004, p. 15), "when the narrator narrates, s/he narrates her/himself" and learn to look and listen to the other, learning and teaching in a continuous process of self-education.

The corpus consists of thirty reflective diaries written by the top three pre-service teachers of the Spanish Language Arts Course, who were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The corpus, which was compared to their lesson plans, was read and then categorized according to the three levels of reflection proposed by Zeichner and Liston (1987).

In order to prevent memory lapses, the participants were advised to reflect on their classes in their virtual diary right after the implementation of their lesson plans or, at least, 48 hours after that. Only one category of reflection emerged from the corpus, the technical level of reflection. However, we detected different themes and levels of deepness in the technical level of reflection in the virtual diaries written by the participants right after their teaching practicum. Data analysis and the discussion are presented in the sequence.



## Data analysis and discussion

Out of the thirty reflective diaries analyzed, the majority brings predominantly evidence of reflection at the technical level, expressed through objective step-by-step description of the lesson, having as reference what they had planned in their lesson plans.

In their reflective diaries, participants approach three main themes:

- a) the teacher and his/her pedagogical practice;
- b) the students and how they perform their roles in the classroom; and
- c) the content taught during the teaching practicum.

Nevertheless, due to the amount of detailed descriptions written in their virtual diaries, it is possible to say that, for the participants, the most important theme is the teacher and his/her pedagogical practice, as we can see in the excerpts below.

The participants' virtual reflective diaries portray their major concern: to describe in detail what they did in their practice and judge what they did and how they did it. The participants do not seek to understand why they did that in practice, neither from the teacher's perspective nor from the student's. They simply narrate actions and attitudes. The excerpt taken from Jackie's virtual diary right after her teaching practicum mirrors that situation:

*Fortunately or unfortunately, my class deviated from its focus a bit. I began the lesson as planned. I showed some pictures with different bedrooms. The students talked a bit about the pictures, but most of the time they used their mother language for that. I encouraged them to speak in Spanish and use the expressions written on the board. I modeled so that they could understand what to do. I took a picture and said, "La cama está a la derecha de la cómoda." [The bed is on the right side of the chest of drawers]. Then I asked them the position of the bedside table in relation to the television, always having the picture as reference. I took several pamphlets*

*of furniture stores to the classroom, showing complete bedrooms and used them for the first activity. I asked the students to describe the bedroom and the position of the objects in the bedroom. I distributed some dictionaries for them to use whenever necessary. I helped them write their texts and revised them. It took them the entire class to describe two pictures. Then, the description of their own bedroom was given as homework. I will check the activity next class. I always try to speak in Spanish, but the students insist on speaking in Portuguese. I checked their texts and showed them to teacher Solange [the in-service teacher] for double-checking. I believe that the lesson was productive, that students understood what I tried to teach them and that the lesson was not tiring. When we noticed it, the class was in the end. My next class will be next Monday. See you there! (Jackie, reflective diary on Aug. 25, 2011).*

As we can see in the excerpt, the participant is aware she did not meet the main objective of the lesson “my class deviated from its focus a bit”, which, according to her lesson plan, was to develop students’ oral production.

In addition, although the participant is aware she changed the main objective of the lesson, she does not know if it was productive in that context for those students: “*Fortunately or unfortunately, my class deviated from its focus a bit*”. The participant just states the fact. She does not seek to have a broader understanding of the classroom context to unveil the forces that acted upon the lesson, which made her “deviate” its focus.

In this sense, we can say that the participant’s reflection on her first day of teaching reaches the technical level of reflection, i.e., she reports actions and attitudes throughout the lesson, without relating them to her pedagogic and/or educational objectives, or even to the students’ personal and social life in the context they live in. This attitude implies the belief that the teacher is the center of the teaching-learning process, the holder of knowledge, and the only responsible for what happens in the classroom, vestiges of a conception of teaching as knowledge transmission.

The excerpt taken from Jackie’s reflective diary still portrays her concern to describe in detail what she did and how she did it in the classroom context: “*I showed the pictures [...]. I encouraged them [...]. I modeled [...]. I took a picture [...]. So I asked [...]. I took several pamphlets [...]. I asked*

*the students [...]. I distributed dictionaries [...]. I helped them write their texts [...] I reviewed them [...]*”.

In the participant's discourse, students seem to play a secondary role in the teaching-learning process although she is aware of their role: *“The students talked a bit about the pictures, but most of the time they used their mother language for that”*. Nevertheless, in the process of reflection, she does not ask herself why they participate so little in the class or why they use the mother language instead of the foreign/additional language during the proposed activity; she accepts the fact as given. Such attitude is in line with the conception of student as tabula rasa and passive learner, vestiges of a conception of teacher as knowledge transmitter and of student as knowledge recipient, thus passive in the learning process. Therefore, the focus of the participant's reflection tends to be on her and on her actions in practice, leaving the students as a background of the class.

In the end of her reflective diary, the participant states: *“I believe that the lesson was productive, that the students understood what I tried to teach them...”*. This perception of teaching as a product that can be transmitted is aligned to the view of teaching as knowledge transmission, strengthen the hypothesis raised earlier.

The reflective diaries that followed the first one revealed the same pattern of reflection, i.e., they did not go beyond the technical level of reflection, as shown the excerpt taken from Jackie's last reflective diary on her teaching practicum:

*I am writing about my last two classes as a pre-service teacher. Last Monday, 09/19/2011, I applied the finaltest. The students were calm and so was I. As there were not many students in class, it was not difficult to apply the test and avoid cheating during the test. It took them about 40 minutes to answer the test. As there was enough time, I collected the tests and highlighted the errors, which were few. Then I distributed dictionaries for them to correct the errors and rewrite the test in their notebooks. When they had doubts, they called me and I explained why they were wrong. I was very glad because the students did almost everything correctly. Based on the results, I was very happy to see that they managed to learn what I was*

*willing to teach. The review lesson on 09/21/2011 was just for fun. It was cool, they loved to play a little, relax. They reviewed the contents without realizing what they were doing. So Sila [the online tutor], I reached the end of the beginning of my teaching career, if I may say so. Honestly, I loved the classes, I loved the students, but I think they were a little distant from the real classroom, an extracurricular course in which the students go to because they want to learn. I imagine it is very different from a regular class with 50 adolescent students, a period of life that is very difficult to please (Jackie, reflective diary on Sept. 21, 2011).*

As previously mentioned, the focus of the participant's reflection is on her practice. In this excerpt, which describes her last day of teaching, the participant makes comments on the test and its correction. As we can see, the participant holds control over the actions in practice: "*As there was enough time, I collected the tests and circled the errors, which were few. Then I distributed dictionaries for them to correct the errors and rewrite the test in their notebooks. When they had doubts, they called me and I explained why they were wrong*". The participant holds the responsibility of teaching and learning with her: she highlights the errors and explains them; the students copy.

Still, some linguistic choices the participant makes are revealing. As for example, the test as a tool to check a transmitted content/product, the control to avoid cheating during the test, and the importance given to correctness are linguistic clues that reinforce the hypothesis that the conception of teaching-learning that underlies the participant's practice is the transmission of knowledge.

However, it is noteworthy that, while revealing clues that tend to a conception of teaching-learning as knowledge transmission, the virtual diaries also show us alternative paths of action with a view to transforming teacher's conceptions and practice.

In the reflective diary of the participant, for example, we know very little about the role of the students in their own learning process. We do not have the description of the explanation of the error to the student. Such description would allow us to know whether (or not) the participant created the conditions for the students to discover/understand the error,

whether she mediated learning through guiding questions, leading them to acquire knowledge, as proposed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), or whether the students only reproduced what she said.

This information gap in Jackie's reflective diaries (and her classmates' as well) alerted us to the importance of making pre-service teachers aware of how they guide the learning process of their students, not only through well-planned lesson plans, but also during the explanations of errors and/or lack of understanding of linguistic items that normally occur during the lesson. The description of error and/or linguistic item explanation can give us clues of changes in pre-service teachers' the conceptions of language teaching-learning and, therefore, indicate us ways to teach more effectively, besides showing where and how knowledge intervention can be done.

As in distance learning mode the supervising Professor is not present during pre-service teachers' teaching practicum, the virtual reflective diary becomes, then, a valuable tool to show the stage of development of beginning teachers in their process of learning to teach.

Although to a lesser extent, some pre-service teachers were able to deepen the technical level of reflection right after their teaching practicum in their reflective diaries, relating their pedagogical practice to the students' actions and to the learning objectives proposed in their lesson plans. In addition, the virtual diaries revealed that the participants acquired some linguistic jargon, as for example, "student pre-knowledge" (prior knowledge or world knowledge) and "input", which appeared in theoretical texts read in other disciplines, like Didactics, Teaching Methodology, Applied Linguistics, among others, as shown in the excerpt taken from Fran's reflective diary on the first day of her teaching practicum:

*It was the very ending of the afternoon and I was there at the grocery store buying the "ingredients", the input for my class: strawberries, oranges, bananas, peaches, grapes, apples, corns, lemons, avocados and nuts, which are my mother's products, actually. I had prepared myself in advance. I reserved the Datashow, recorded the videos on a CD, prepared the content to be explained, and it was essential for me to conduct the class. I organized the room for the class. I put the chairs side by side as in a movie*

*theater. I even set all the materials and the ingredients of the class on the table. I made a short speech, introducing myself again though they already knew me. I started a conversation asking what they had eaten during the day, what they like to eat better, trying to check their pre knowledge in relation to healthy eating habits. Then I invited the students to go to the movie theater. I made brief comments on the videos, we watched them and then discussed about them. Using the ingredients, I presented the plural of nouns. Then I distributed supermarket pamphlets for the students to circle the foods that were not recommended for a good health. Each student presented one, for example, soft drinks, ham, beer and Italian dressing. I organized the students in pairs and they answered the activities proposed. After, each student read an alternative and then we corrected the exercises. As not everything goes according to the "script", there was no time to prepare the "fruit salad". I then decided to propose a "picnic" and the fruits were distributed and eaten. And this fruit tasting was really cool! I am convinced that the goals of my class were achieved. The students were aware, the content learned and applied correctly, they reviewed the names of the fruits and we got closer with our "picnic". I like to have the control over the situations, and a classroom is a place where you cannot predict everything that will happen. So maybe I will have some difficulties in dealing with unplanned events. Only being in the real context, we can understand the difficulties and tenderness of being a teacher (Fran, reflective diary on Sept. 26, 2011).*

Although Fran's reflective diary presents a rich description of her class and helps us infer the role of the student and the teacher in the class and the learning objective of the lesson as well, it merely gives descriptions and opinions on the teacher's actions and the expected participation of the student in this context.

Despite writing in a more poetic way, Fran also seems to perceive herself as the central figure of the teaching-learning process. The description of her pedagogical practice predominates in her reflective diary. Moreover, she explicitly states that she likes to have control over situations: "*I like to have the control over the situations, and a classroom is a place where you cannot predict everything that will happen*". Thus, she prepares herself: "*I had prepared myself in advance... I reserved the Datashow, recorded*

*the videos on a CD, prepared the content to be explained, and it was essential for me to conduct the class”.*

Although Fran’s reflective diary (and her classmates’ as well) reveals her professional commitment and responsibility, it also reveals clues of a conception of teaching-learning as knowledge transmission. This suggests that the knowledge transmission model is still very strong in the local culture, despite the Supervised Practicum discipline proposes a reflective model whose conceptual bases rely on the view of teaching-learning as knowledge construction, teacher and student as collaborators in this process, and language as a social practice. Consider the excerpts taken from Fran’s last two classes:

*Two students. Only two students came to class today. It is all right if we consider that 05 students constitute the entire group. If we think mathematically, 40% of the students attended the class. I believe it reflects a trajectory of tests applied to frighten students and make them feel uncomfortable in testing situations. I planned a fun test with the content learned, something that, in my point of view, they could apply what they learned. The two students took the test. In the remaining time, we commented on the previous class, on the recipes viewed and copied. One of the students said that he showed his mother the Argentinian “chimichurri” recipe and that she prepared it for the barbecue on Sunday. I was very happy! It is the Spanish culture spreading. For the absent students, I asked their classmates to hand in the text with a message: “Answer the test as homework. It will be corrected next class”. In a way, they will not get rid of the test. Anyway, a test is a test and no one likes to be tested (Fran, reflective diary on Oct. 10, 2011).*

*It was fun! The students love challenges. We corrected the test orally. We cannot apply quantitative evaluation, since only two students had actually answered the test. I took to school three games based on the themes worked in class. First, we played the bingo. Everyone participated, including the in-service teacher. The second game was the memory game, played in pairs. These activities worked well because the class is small and very friendly. I had no problems with arguments. When a student turned a card up and before turning another one up, I asked the corresponding word in Spanish and*

*Portuguese or vice versa. Finally, I handed in the tales for them to organize. We reviewed the parts of the tales and what each part represented. After that, we organized the tales and read them aloud. The class was ending, but they wanted to continue playing. The in-service teacher asked me the games to play with them in her other classes. I was happy because she perceived the games as teaching tools* (Fran, reflective diary on Oct. 19, 2011).

On the last day of her teaching practicum, Fran makes interesting comments on the test. She justifies the absence of the students on the day of the test, making relations with her personal beliefs: “*I believe it reflects a trajectory of tests applied to frighten students and make them feel uncomfortable in testing situations*”. Based on that belief, she proposes “*a fun test with the content learned, something that, in [her] point of view, they [the students] could apply what they learned*”. These comments suggest that Fran’s beliefs guide some of her pedagogical decisions. However, she seems to do that intuitively, an implicit knowledge based on her life experience (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993, 1999).

It is also based on an implicit knowledge that she proposes fun learning activities; diagnoses the way students learn: “*students love challenges*”; and believes that learning a foreign language is also learning the culture of the other: “*one of the students said that he showed his mother the Argentinian ‘chimichurri’ recipe and that she prepared it for the barbecue on Sunday. I was very happy! It is the Spanish culture spreading*”. However, she seems to do that intuitively (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993, 1999), since she does not make any relation with the theory studied throughout the course. This would be an appropriate moment for tutor intervention on pre-service teachers’ implicit knowledge. It would allow them to interweave implicit and theoretical competence, transforming it into an applied competence (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993, 1999; SILVA, 2009; BERGMANN; SILVA, 2011), and opening room to transform the teaching approach of the teacher (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1993, 1999) as well.

In broad terms, the analysis of the participants’ reflective diaries right after their teaching practicum revealed that they think mostly about what they do and how they do what they do in the classroom



context. In other words, they reflect on the technicalities of their practice, reaching the technical level of reflection. Such reflection is done through class descriptions. Some descriptions bring more detailed and objective information on the step-by-step of the participant's teaching practice than others; others bring a more poetic description, probably typical of the participant's writing style.

The analysis also revealed the absence of the practical level of reflection, that is, a reflection on the learning objectives designed for the lesson and its relation to what happened during the class. In addition, it revealed the absence of the critical level of reflection, i.e., a critical look at how the proposed educational objectives can lead to the education of individuals who are much more involved in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society (BERGMANN; SILVA, 2011; FREIRE, 2005; LISTON; ZEICHNER, 1987).

Furthermore, the analysis also showed that, while describing their teaching practice, the participants did not seek to inter-relate it with the theories of teaching, learning, and language studied throughout the course. It also revealed that they also did not seek to inter-relate it with their life stories, to understand how they become who they are as language teachers, or to try to identify problems in their practice, with a view to rebuilding it.

Seeking to understand why the participants were able to achieve only the first level of reflection on action in practice, some explanations emerged. Among them, we can mention the initial purpose of the use of the reflective diary in the Supervised Practicum discipline. The initial idea was to open room for informal chats about the lessons between the pre-service teacher and the online tutor, the closer to reality as possible, a type of dialogue that distance learning mode does not privilege. The objective was to provide pre-service teachers emotional support and pedagogic (re)orientation during a crucial moment of their professional education: the teaching practicum.

Although naively conceived, the reflective diaries proved to be an extremely valuable tool in initial teacher training in distance learning mode. The tool allowed the identification of teachers' conceptions of foreign/additional language teaching-learning and models of education. It

also proved to be an important tool to identify teachers' level of current knowledge, a scaffolding tool for learning, since it creates a fertile terrain to develop the zone of proximal development, if there is tutor intervention, and a tool to transform teachers' beliefs, conceptions and knowledge.

### **Final remarks**

Based on the analysis, we can say that pre-service teachers who conceive teaching as knowledge transmission tend to systematize the processes of reflection on action in practice in the technical level, due to the conceptions of teaching, learning and language that underlie such conception of teaching.

Therefore, in order for pre-service teachers to go beyond and transform their conceptions, tutors need to make precise interventions through questions, clarification requests, among other strategies, in the reflective diaries posted on the virtual teaching-learning platform (Moodle). In this sense, pre-service teachers may understand the meanings of their pedagogical practice, deconstructing and reconstructing it whenever necessary and possible.

The analysis revealed that the genre diary as a pedagogical activity, in initial teacher training in distance mode, is an effective tool to minimize the physical distance between the supervising Professor and the pre-service teacher in the moment right after their teaching practicum. Moreover, it revealed to be an effective tool to unveil the current level of development of pre-service teachers' learning to teach process. In addition, it also revealed to be an effective tool to unveil pre-service teachers' perceptions of their actions in practice, as well as their perceptions of how their students learn.

In this sense, we can say that virtual reflective diaries open room for punctual intervention in the teaching-learning process, optimizing time and deepening the different levels of reflection. Finally, we noticed that reflective diaries were used by pre-service teachers as a place:

- a) to shelter other feelings besides teaching;
- b) to register discoveries; and
- c) to reveal beliefs, conceptions and tacit knowledge about teaching, aspects that usually emerge in moments of unsystematic reflection. This suggests that reflective diaries are potentially more powerful learning instruments than we initially assumed.

The findings of this study also lead us to think about some issues that go beyond the Supervised Practicum discipline itself. They involve a larger and more complex network. For example, the conceptions of language teaching-learning of the disciplines that constitute the curriculum of the Spanish Language Arts Course; the perception of the concept of practice and how it is developed in the hours of Practice as a Curriculum Component proposed in the curriculum of the course; the profile of the future teacher designed in the Educational Policy Project of the course; and the way the different disciplines of the course contribute to educate the future teacher within the profile proposed in the Project of the course.

In addition, linguistic clues provided by the participants that a model of teacher education – knowledge transmission –, which aimed to meet the objectives of modern society, is still going on today, alert us to the complexity involved in the training of the critical reflective language professional contemporary society demands. Good research topics are announced here.

We know that the issues raised here are not easy to disentangle, but the study on the use of a virtual tool for reflection on action shows us the complexity of the network involved in the education of the critical reflective teacher and increases its potential possibilities, besides the insights it gives us when thinking about our next experiences.

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