

*From student to teacher:
Professional development through blogs*

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Abstract

The present study considers the role of a weekly blog in the professional development of pre-service world language teachers. In conjunction with student teaching, candidates take a seminar course devoted to practical and professional issues in world language instruction. Over a fifteen-week semester, participants posted on a weekly blog prompt designed to encourage individual inquiry and collective sharing within the cohort. Using an inductive qualitative research design, the blogs were reviewed at the end of the semester for discursive indicators of professional development in the areas of identity, critical thinking, reflection, and community of practice. Such analysis is consistent within a sociocultural framework, where language is the medium of thought and practice (Vygotsky, 1986). Results showed that the blogs can serve as a witness to the transformation from student to teacher as well as growth in critical thinking and reflective skills. While there was some indication of peer interaction, a re-design of the tasks associated with the blog would be needed in order to encourage additional dialogue and cooperation within the community of practice.

Keywords: blogs; teacher preparation programs; professional development

1. Introduction

The transition from student to teacher poses unprecedented challenges compared to years past. In the current environment of high-stakes testing, value-added

instruction, and increased accountability, pre-service teachers need to be more prepared than ever to meet the demands of the profession. Not only do they need to know their respective subject matter and corresponding pedagogy, they need to be able to readily adapt to the 21st century classroom. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2011) posits that the modern classroom engages students and teachers in community, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, and technological literacy. The Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession (n.d.) also push for collaboration and communication within a context of technological literacy. They encourage teachers to “assume responsibility for professional growth, performance, and involvement” and to engage in “continuous, purposeful professional development” (p. 1). Professional development is seen as an ongoing stance toward life-long learning designed to directly improve the quality of one’s teaching and overall school environment.

Blogs, or weblogs, can serve as a viable means to further develop this stance. Hramiak, Boulton and Irwin (2009) used blogs as a means to enhance trainee teachers’ professional development; they found that blogs had a positive impact overall and provided multiple opportunities for reflection and guidance. McPherson, Wang, Hsu and Tsuei (2007) note that blogs provide flexibility in that they can be used in a variety of ways. They can be used synchronously or asynchronously; its online structure allows for remote learning that transcends time and space (Zieger & Pulichino, 2004). Ellis (2018) found that the use of an asynchronous online discussion forum by teacher-learners to debate and consider new methodologies did contribute to the deepening of their professional identities as EFL teachers. Worthington, Reniers, Lackeyram and Dawson (2018) found that blogs can be used by individuals as a tool for brainstorming, feedback, and reflection. The opportunity to identify one’s areas of strength and improvement sets the stage for future growth (Bener & Yildiz, 2019). Blogs can also be used collectively by offering a forum for cooperation within a cohort of peers (Satar & Akcan, 2018); the ease of online communication promotes equal and facile collaboration between group members (Kuo, Belland, & Kuo, 2017). Given its potential, the present study seeks to investigate the role that a weekly asynchronous blog in a world language teaching methods class had on the professional development of pre-service teachers.

There are several reasons to explore the use of blogs in teacher education. First, the use of technology in education preparation programs is shown to increase its familiarity and likelihood of future use (Chism, 2005), supporting the previously stated goal of technological literacy. Second, the flexibility of blogs means they can be structured in a variety of ways. The writing of the blogs themselves can give rise to an objectivity that is necessary for critical thinking and reflection to take place. Scriven and Paul (1987) define critical thinking as “the

intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action" (p. 1). This can occur at various stages of the blog process, including preparation, writing, reviewing, and sharing. As such, critical thinking is inextricably tied to reflective practice; that is, the capacity to look back on an action or event while making a conscious decision to examine the emotions, experiences, actions, and responses therein (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Critical thinking and reflection are considered fundamental to developmental and pedagogical insight (Sellars, 2012). Pre-service teachers gain from these insights while continuously integrating them with new knowledge (Ward & McCotter, 2004) as they move through their zone of proximal development (ZPD), the arena where learners can complete a task with assistance from an expert (Vygotsky, 1986). The expert can be the instructor, a peer, or a community. Blogs can be used as a forum for pre-service teachers to advance within their ZPD by encouraging the formation of a community of practice (CoP). Lave and Wenger (1991) define a community of practice as a "[a] group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact [with others] regularly" (p. 1). Engagement in such a community has the potential to contribute to their advancement as well as increase feelings of belonging.

The present study will use discourse and content analysis of the blog postings to ascertain the role of a weekly blog on the professional development of pre-service world language instructors as well as to address the research questions. This study will contribute to an on-going investigation into the ways that technology can be best implemented in teacher preparation programs. By better enabling future teachers to reflect, problem-solve, and collaborate with others through the use of technology, they will be in a more empowered position to serve as advocates and enactors of positive change in their careers.

2. Literature review

The foundation for this study is sociocultural theory, which holds that the origins of thought and behavior emerge from participation and engagement in a socially constructed environment. In such a setting, language is the primary tool for the negotiation of meaning. This provides the context for future thought and practice (Vygotsky, 1986). Viewing teacher education through a sociocultural lens (Johnson, 2006; Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995) is considered to reveal more of the learning process than other perspectives. As such, an analysis of the discourse can provide insight into where participants are in their understanding and mastery of a concept.

While the transition from student to teacher can be challenging, providing a venue for self-expression and exploration can mitigate this journey. Pittard (2003) elicited narratives from five novice instructors surrounding their student teaching experience and discovered that underlying tensions surrounding this transition were such that they actually impeded overall development. Her study highlights the importance of valuing the voice and input of novice teachers in order to promote feelings of autonomy.

As the evolution from student to teacher is complex and multi-dimensional (Draves, 2012), it requires an ongoing examination of the underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. Schmidt (2012) surveyed existing research on pre-service music teachers' developing beliefs and concluded that they need multiple opportunities for self-assessment and reflection. This deliberate and careful review can facilitate awareness and integration of philosophy and practice. Phipps and Borg (2009) also examined the link between beliefs and practice in a study of three English teachers working in Turkey. The teachers were observed and interviewed over a period of 18 months; the observations provided insights into their praxis while the interviews explored their overall mindset. They found that core beliefs, over peripheral ones, had the most influence on instructional decisions. An additional exploratory study conducted by de Vries, Jansen and van de Grift (2013) revealed that greater participation in continuous professional development resulted in more a student-centered practice.

Instructional technology has a long history in pre-service teacher education programs (Betrus, 2012) that continues today. The popularity of Web 2.0, SMART boards, wikis, blogs, and social media provide multiple possibilities for exploration. Savas (2013) investigated the thematic use of blogs and found that they positively increased a sense of autonomy among pre-service foreign language teachers. Badrinathan (2013) however, cautions that blogging alone does not result in autonomy but can contribute to its formation. Funkhouser and Mouza (2013) investigated pre-service teacher beliefs via blogs in the context of an introductory educational technology course. They discovered that the blogs facilitated the conceptual transition from a teacher-centered belief to that of a more student-centered one. Also, they noted that the blogs served as a reflective forum, and, to a lesser degree, as learning tool for pre-service teachers.

Fisher and Kim (2013) explored the use of blogs for pre-service language teacher education in both the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). They investigated their use in two different ways: as an avenue of self-reflection (UK) and as a space for idea-sharing and collaborative learning (US). The self-reflection group felt that the blogs gave them the necessary objectivity to examine their professional development and identity whereas the collaborative group perceived the blogs as a safe space to share their thoughts and contributions.

Membership in a collaborative and forward-thinking community offers guidance, feedback, and mentorship to both new and seasoned professionals (Chism, 2005). This type of support appears to be key to a successful transition and continued retention in the field (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Ajayi (2009) cites the use of asynchronous discussion boards (ADB) as a viable tool for sharing ideas, experiences and perspectives in ways that facilitate pre-service teacher knowledge. Yang (2009) found blogs to be an ideal forum to enhance both critical reflection and a community of practice. Interaction with others in a sociocultural setting provides the opportunity for scaffolding to take place, leading to higher order thinking (Donato, 1994). Blogs offer a unique forum for this scaffolding to occur; Ellis (2018) writes “when dialogue is in written form, this process is deepened” (p. 283). Sardeqna and Dugartsyrenova (2014) explored pre-service foreign language teachers’ beliefs about the value and usefulness of employing technology-enhanced activities in a methods course; the results indicated that participants found those activities beneficial for bridging theory and practice, enhancing critical thinking, and promoting professional growth. They also believed that “the technology-based activities provided increased opportunities for varied and richer interactions, peer feedback, and reflection; helped develop their learner autonomy and sense of belonging to a community of learners; modeled effective technology uses; and fostered a deeper appreciation of technology-enriched practices” (p. 147).

3. The study

3.1. Setting

The present study seeks to investigate the role of blogs as a means of professional development in pre-service teachers. The study took place at a large, Midwestern American university where candidates major in a world language and minor in education. The minor includes general education, reading, and sequential methodology courses. Students also take courses in instructional technology. The final seminar, *Inquiry into Professional Practice*, is taken during student teaching. The course meets over fifteen weeks and is devoted to practical and professional issues in the field. The once-a-week, face-to-face setting provides an opportunity to check in with the candidates and offer insight and feedback. Prior to student teaching, candidates observe 80-100 hours of classroom instruction. Seminar topics included lesson and unit planning, differentiation, and career preparation, amongst others. Since the course is intended for a variety of language majors with education minors, the course is taught in English. In addition to the weekly blog postings, assignments include scholarly article readings

and discussions as well as a professional career portfolio. Teacher candidates also submit an Educational Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA), an online project housed with a national educational testing company. The TPA requires teacher candidates to respond to specific questions in three major areas: planning, instruction and assessment. It is designed to showcase a teacher candidate's ability to describe factors that influence student performance as they design, implement, and individualize instruction and analyze results. Lastly, for their final project, they summarize and reflect upon their student teaching experience in the form of a digital story.

3.2. Research questions

The data was reviewed using a general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis (Thomas, 2006) whereas the goal is to identify and generate groupings in order to best respond to the proposed research questions. Based on the review of literature as well as a scan of the document itself, several areas were designated by the researcher/instructor as markers of professional development. Once these were established, the blogs were reviewed for discursive or contextual features of these topics. Research questions include the following:

1. In what ways do online blogs promote a culture of professional development?
2. How do online blogs promote critical thinking and reflection?
3. In what ways do online blogs encourage a community of practice?

3.3. Participants

The course in Spring 2013 consisted of seven female students: three in American Sign Language (Students A-C), three in Spanish (Students D-F), one in French (Student G), and one in Latin, who declined to participate in the study. Six of the students were undergraduates; one was a post-undergraduate. One of the students took classes in another state's world language teacher preparation program prior to enrolling in this course. Two of the students were about ten years older than the others; one had prior teaching experience through her church; the other was teaching, but did not have licensure.

3.4. Procedure

The format of the seminar in Spring 2013 was consistent with that which has been previously described, only the TPA was being piloted and was graded by the researcher/instructor instead of by the national testing company. Since it constituted a major portion of the course and was being implemented for the

first time, many of the class discussions, and subsequent blog postings were based on this particular assignment. The blogs, as well as additional course material, were hosted by an online learning management system (LMS) provided by the university. Generally, the LMS is fairly easy to use, and the students were already familiar with it. However, one student complained that sometimes the blog she was writing would disappear before she could post it. It appears this was due to issues with the student's home internet system. Each week, the researcher/instructor introduced the blog topic with an accompanying image (see Appendix A). The subject matter of each week's blog was decided upon and posted by the researcher/instructor the day after the weekly face-to-face class meetings. Postings centered around class discussions, upcoming assignments, or any other relevant content. Students were encouraged, but not required, to respond to each other's blogs. They also were encouraged to provide additional resources if they discovered something they deemed to be helpful. Points were awarded if they were on topic, wrote least a paragraph, and completed it on time. The blogs were worth fifteen percent (15%) of their overall grade. The blog topics were designed to extend the thought process beyond the classroom setting and to encourage ongoing reflection, to brainstorm ideas, and to participate in an online community. In this scenario, collaboration was viewed as the sharing of one's thoughts within the cohort. At the end of the semester, the blogs were collated and printed in order to facilitate the reading of them, as well as to better scan the entries in their totality. The blogs were modified to protect the identity of the students; any spelling or grammatical errors were corrected by the research/instructor.

3.5. Data collection and analysis

The designated categories were determined to be those of identity, critical thinking and reflection, and membership within a community. The researcher/instructor ascertained the descriptive elements of each topic in order to better identify discursive or contextual examples within the postings. For instance, when reading the blogs under the lens of identity, indicators included references to student to teacher transition, mastery of skills, professional development goals, etc. When reading the blogs under the lens of critical thinking and reflection, indicators included references to deeper inquiry, realizations, discoveries, etc. Lastly, when reading the blogs under the lens of community, indicators included references to peer support, mentorship, status in the school environment, etc. Any comments that did not readily fit into one of the designated categories but seemed relevant to the study nonetheless were also considered. At times, there was no distinct reference to these domains and/or some overlap existed. The researcher/instructor quantified the number of blogs each student completed, and the number of comments made on other blogs as described in Table 1. Individual blogs were

chosen and expanded upon to serve as qualitative examples in order to more fully address the research questions.

Table 1 Blogs

Student	Percentage of blogs completed	# of comments
Student A	100%	3
Student B	53%	0
Student C	80%	0
Student D	20%	1
Student E	93%	0
Student F	80%	2
Student G	93%	0

4. Findings

4.1. Identity

The first broad category within professional development was that of identity. As previously mentioned, the written discourse from the blogs was perused for markers of such, including transition from student to teacher, the mastery of skills associated with teaching, and goals for future professional development. The first blog (Blog 1) asked the candidates to self-assess their preparation as teachers and to identify specific goals and objectives for themselves. Overall, these goals and objectives tended to center around improving classroom management, differentiated instruction, and assessment. All but one mentioned feeling nervous about the start of their internship. This nervousness, and overall lack of confidence, reveals uncertainty in their status and abilities. For example, Student A said:

I am going to be completely honest. I am scared out of my mind to be an official teacher. I do not understand why I am so scared. I have been pretty much a teacher all my adult life with church and my own children (...). The only thing that is different is that now it is in front of a ton of people that know what I'm doing.

Even though Student A was older and had served as a teacher in her church, she did not yet see herself as established in this new environment. A later blog (Blog 11) asked students to revisit their professional goals beyond "to graduate in May". Student A then wrote:

I feel my teaching has come so far in this semester. I have really gotten a handle on the lesson plans, but not the scaffolding and building. What I mean is I can teach a lesson, but do I connect the lessons together? I feel sometimes I can, but it is not consistent.

This is indicative of her increased mastery of skills and a move toward embracing her identity as a teacher. Although the students did need to be guided toward

deeper reflection on their professional goals (Blog 11), eventually they were able to name the areas where they had grown, the areas they still needed to work on, and most importantly, how to work on them. Student D observed:

My professional goals have a lot to do with my training NOT ending as soon as graduation is over. In the past 3 years I have strengthened my opinions and strategies about teaching, and I know that the endeavor to be a GREAT teacher doesn't end with a bachelor's degree.

This shows a true stance toward on-going professional development.

Blog 4 asked students to consider how they know when they are having an impact on students. Student A said:

Now as for impact (...) I have no idea! I'm very overwhelmed right now. I am just happy to get things taught so that I can collapse.

Blog 13 revisited this topic, this time asking them if they had witnessed their impact. Student F pondered:

This is a tough question, but an important one to ask. If I am not making a direct (positive) impact on my students, then what am I doing here? It's not always possible to have this type of influence on every student every day (or even close) but that should be my goal. I am a student teacher, so my job is to learn how to make this type of impact.

Again, this is characteristic of professional development in that she recognizes her role as a teacher. In her Blog 11, Student E exclaimed:

I love witnessing the impact of my teaching! My favorite thing in the world about teaching is the light bulb moment. There is nothing better than witnessing the instant that the concept makes sense within the mind of a student. I look forward to those moments.

This is indicative of not only her awareness of her impact, but also her passion for teaching. Other signs of their growing confidence as future teachers were evident when they began to share useful resources with their peers. Here, they demonstrated more assurance in their role as expert. For instance, Student D offered a graphic (Appendix B) with accompanying text for Blog 14 to explain her thoughts on 21st century skills. The picture she offered provided a much more succinct and effective illustration of the blog topic. Student A had previously stated in Blog 9 that she had not really sure what was meant by 21st century skills. However, by Blog 14, she shared a website on such skills with her peers that she found particularly useful. Throughout the trajectory of the blogs, one can see shifts in their identity from student to teacher.

4.2. Critical thinking and reflection

The second broad category within professional development was that of critical thinking and reflection. Again, when reading the blogs under the lens of critical thinking and reflection, markers included references to deeper inquiry, realizations, discoveries, etc. Essentially, all of the blogs promoted some type of reflection; however, there were some notable examples. For instance, Student E wrote in Blog 3:

Today the students completed translation sentences practicing the indirect pronouns that will be on the quiz tomorrow. We did the first one as a class, and then I had them complete 3 on their own. Upon reviewing the answers, I missed an opportunity for one peer to help another achieve the answer. After the student read his or her answer aloud, I put the correct answer on the board. I should have asked more than one person for their answers and seen if together they could come up with the correct phrase. I changed my strategy the second time around.

This shows how the student is becoming aware of, then actively integrating, improvements in her teaching. Comments about the desire to improve were frequent throughout the blogs. Blog 7 specifically asked students how they approach deep reflection; Student G's response showed the thought she put into her response:

When reflecting deeply upon my student teaching experience, I often begin by considering what I wanted to achieve by completing the task at hand. Then I look at all that I did to accomplish it. Did my students actively participate? Were they showing content knowledge acquisition? I also consider how I performed as a teacher. Did I communicate activities and new material clearly? Did my lesson engage my students? If I am not content with what I did during teaching and on my lesson plans I often consider what I would have done differently. For example, during a stations activity, I found that students struggled to stay on task during the speaking station and upon reflecting about the day I found that I did not circulate around to their station as much as I probably should have (...) I think overall deep reflection needs to be considered from several different viewpoints. How did it affect me? How did it affect others? How could I make a greater difference in the future? It is deep reflection that causes growth not only in a career field or in education but also as a person.

This type of awareness is the kind of inquiry and discovery that teachers should be continuously engaged in to encourage critical thinking. Student A, when asked about differentiation in Blog 8, was quick to point out:

I have had an awakening for this topic. I have made some major mistakes and am trying to learn from them. I have several students in my classes that need the extra support. I have all intentions and then forget. When I have tried to do things, it BOMBS. I have

made two of my students upset with me and had to apologize. At least I'm learning now and not later when I'm all alone. It has been a rough couple of weeks.

Student G noted:

Differentiated instruction is really confusing and difficult to me but one area that interests me, and that I learned about through my article summary, is small group instruction. I have found through my research as well as my own practice that it is very helpful and that it is fairly natural and easy to incorporate into lessons.

In this example, the student was able to use the blog as a means to record her realizations. Student B in Blog 10 said about the TPA:

One of the pluses of this project was that it allowed me to look at my teaching and figure out what else I can do besides stand up in front and lecture at them. It also showed me some of the tendencies that I have that I need to change. One example of that are my attention getters, when I wanted to get the students attention I would start saying "you guys" over and over and over again until they listen. Another thing that I noticed is how I interacted with my students. I noticed with some students I tend to be more willing to help them and others I would just give short answers. I am now working on that. I also noticed that I need to work on my classroom management. In some of the videos that I took I noticed students not doing what they were supposed to be doing, so it's something I am working on.

The blogs revealed other insights as well. Student C realized in Blog 15:

Although I didn't remember to do most of the blogs, they allowed me to reflect on topics in class and also see what others are thinking about the same topic.

As the instructor/researcher of this project, it was encouraging to see that the student made the connection between the blogs and reflection supporting more critical thinking and practice.

4.3. Community

The third broad category within professional development was that of community. When reading the blogs under the lens of community, these markers included references to peer support, mentorship, status in the school environment, etc. Peer support was shown throughout the blogs in a variety of ways. First, students made several encouraging comments to their peers. For example, in Blog 1, Student A wrote,

This will be the first time that I will be evaluated by real professionals in my degree. To add to the stress, I have chosen a language that is very protected by the natives

that use it. I am also a perfectionist, and really beat myself up if I make mistakes. I know that when I finally get into the groove and relax that I will ROCK!

Student C replied:

You will ROCK=] It just takes time to find each person's individual "groove" This is a trial run, plus you should know nobody is perfect so don't beat yourself up about the mistakes you make.

These types of comments, as well as inquiries to the class as a whole, appeared more frequently in the beginning of the semester. As the semester progressed, comments between peers dropped off. Student A mentioned her frustration in Blog 15 about the lack of ongoing dialogue between her and her peers via the blogs:

I think that the blogs need to be utilized more if we are required to do them (...) the first week I commented on a few, and then nothing (...) make dialogue a must.

Students A and C in particular used the blogs as an emotional outlet, an appeal to their peers for support, or as a way to clear up confusion. In Blog 2, when asked specific planning questions for the TPA, Student A wrote that she was "feeling very overwhelmed". Student C, in Blog 5 concerning the TPA, went on rant:

Sorry for the big ramble and it didn't quite answer the question but knowing that we are all on different levels of the TPA but "supposed to be on the same level" is frustrating to me. I know this is the first year, and maybe things will be way better structured next year- or so I can hope.

It is evident that the students felt free to use this forum as a means to emotionally regulate the tensions that emerged as part of their internship and assignments.

The blogs also pointed to the pre-service teachers' status in their individual school environments. There was definitely an awareness of the differences in power. For instance, Student B wrote in Blog 1:

My cooperating teacher has told me that I have most of the same power that she does but I'm afraid to take it because again I really don't like stepping on toes or getting in trouble.

This blog entry shows how the pre-service teacher sees herself as more student than teacher at this point in the semester and perceived the power structure as such. However, other students enjoyed a more equal relationship with their cooperating teachers. Student E wrote in her Blog 1:

I hope to continue to have a meaningful relationship with my cooperating teacher, who has become a significant mentor in my life over the course of the last few months.

This shows how important it is to make student teachers feel valued and involved in the school environment. Some recognized the importance of building relationships in their schools, not just with their mentors, but with their students. Student E in Blog 3 said:

I have done my best to create a relationship with each and every one of my students. Having each of my students create a notecard with information about them (Thanks [Student F]!) allowed me to learn their names quickly and a little bit about each of them individually. One of my students even made a comment the other day - I can't believe you know all of our names! That makes me feel so special". It made me so happy to know that she realizes that I care about each of them and their own individual success.

Strikingly, she made a point of thanking one of her peers for the idea! The notion of peer support through blogs was present throughout. Student F, in Blog 1, said:

I am glad that we are all on this journey together. I wouldn't want to do it with anyone else!

Student D in Blog 11 shared:

Earlier this week I heard a performance of this poem as a song on the radio, and I think it definitely applies to educators, too. I thought it was beautiful, so I wanted to share it, maybe some of you have heard/read it before.

4.4. Technology

Despite the fact that these students are considered digital natives, several expressed frustrations with technology. Student A had difficulty with blog postings. In Blog 8, she vented:

This stupid thing denied me again! I am at home on my internet and it made me log in twice! Make sure you save as draft before you try to post! What is up with that?

And several others experienced technical difficulties with the videos for their TPAS. Student E experienced an unusual situation, as noted in Blog 10:

One of the things that was more frustrating than most was videotaping because the students would constantly be messing with the camera or making faces or doing something in front of the camera that I didn't want to show in my videos.

Nevertheless, in spite of technical difficulties, Student F talked about using blogs in the future:

I think I would also like to take class, go to seminars, or do research technology in the L2 classroom. I struggle with how to integrate technology in my student teaching experience. If this were my own class, I would have blogs set up for my students to use frequently. I would use them as both formal and informal types of assessments (Blog 11).

This supports that exposure and/or use of technology can lead to future implementation.

5. Discussion

When considering the first research question on how blogs promote a culture of professional development, the data supports that blogs can serve as a witness to the transition from student to teacher. The earlier blogs were written by nervous students; the latter blogs showed more confident emerging teachers. The blogs also provided the opportunity for students to recognize their own growth and to consider future possibilities for professional development. Mostly, the blogs served as a vehicle to reassess and articulate their reflections and insights; a training ground for future endeavors. A professional stance toward the assignment of the blogs presented itself in the form of the candidates' level of participation; that is, even the mere completion of the assignment showed a dedication to the process. In addition, the more they wrote, the more they revealed. Even when they used the blogs as an emotional outlet, they were honest in where they were in their progress. The one area that was less palpable in the results was the sense of community. The nature of the blog postings was not conducive for true collaboration to take place. While there were initial attempts to engage their peers, these efforts were quickly abandoned for lack of response. While there was an occasional nod to each other, it did not require any type of acknowledgement.

6. Conclusions, limitations and implications

There were several limitations to the present study. First, the TPA was being piloted for the first time in the course. As a result, there were naturally some unanticipated obstacles and challenges. Also, the majority of the blog topics were geared specifically toward the TPA and not necessarily toward more specific topics in regard to professional development. A future study could entail re-designing the blog topics to better reflect their evolution from student to teacher. The questions posed in the blogs were a type of structured inquiry with questions

posed and monitored by the instructor. This led to a more teacher-centered approach than originally intended. This also may have contributed to less participation on the part of the students, even though the blogs were worth fifteen percent (15%) of their overall grade. While certainly there are multi-dimensional aspects to pre-service world language teacher preparation programs, it would be interesting to investigate which aspect(s) of such programs has the most impact on identity, critical thinking and reflection, community, or other.

Based on the results of this study, it appears that blogs can serve a role in the professional development of future teachers, particularly in the development of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking and use of technology. As such, these skills should also include collaboration and cooperation. A modification of the task at hand could elicit more student-centered learning and participation within a community of practice. In addition, it is important to foster dialogue between peers in order for the blog forum to contribute to a community of practice.

Blogs provide a viable means for future teachers to develop in their identity as well as critical thinking and reflection. The sharing of their thoughts leads to mutual acceptance and problem-solving while decreasing feelings of isolation or discouragement within a community of practice. Support for others is critical to successful teaching and learning and contributes to innovation in the field. The weekly blog postings are one of the many ways that novice teachers can articulate and reflect upon their beliefs as they become professionals in the field.

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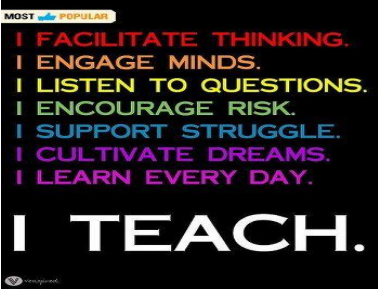


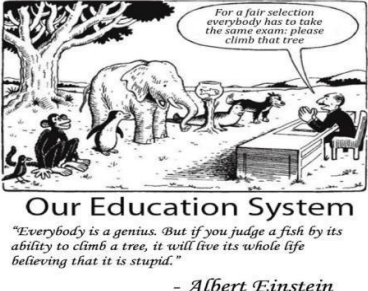
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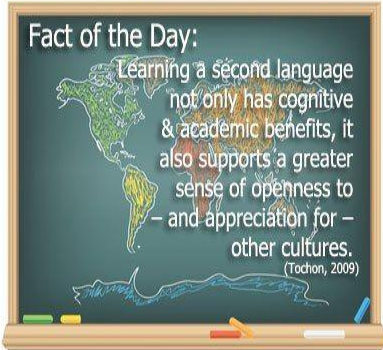
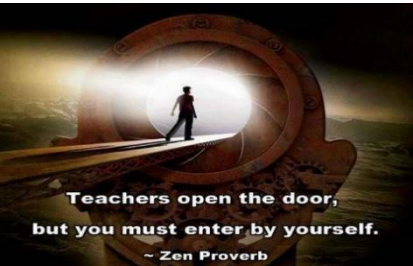
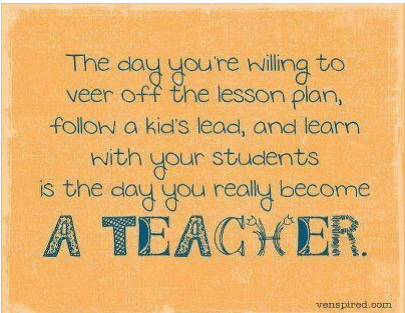
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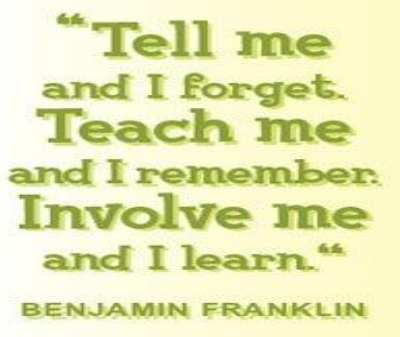
Appendix A

Weekly blog topics

	<p>Blog 1</p>	<p>I would first like for you to self-assess where you are as a teacher and what you hope to gain this semester. Identify 3-5 goals and objectives.</p>
	<p>Blog 2</p>	<p>What is your target population in your edTPA? What are you looking at? How will you assess? How will you instruct? What are your challenges?</p>
	<p>Blog 3</p>	<p>What kind of guidance do you plan to provide for students? What words will be most useful to you? How do you best scaffold? Facilitate? Encourage? Any real-life situations so far?</p>
	<p>Blog 4</p>	<p>How do you develop you lesson plans? How do you link to prior knowledge? How do you engage students? How do you know when you are having an impact on their learning day to day?</p>

 <p>off the mark.com by Mark Parisi</p> <p>LOOKS LIKE IT'LL BE ANOTHER F IN CLASS PARTICIPATION, REX!</p> <p>THIS IS SO UNFAIR</p>	<p>Blog 5</p>	<p>What have you learned from looking at the others' templates so far? What have you learned from discussion with your peers/in class? Has it helped you view your project differently?</p>
 <p>MOST POPULAR</p> <p>Fact of the Day:</p> <p>Learning a second language not only has cognitive & academic benefits, it also supports a greater sense of openness to - and appreciation for - other cultures. (Tochon, 2009)</p> <p>edutopia.org</p>	<p>Blog 6</p>	<p>What is your central focus for your unit/lesson plan that you are doing for your edTPA? How do you plan to assess students both formally and informally?</p>
 <p>Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself. ~ Zen Proverb</p>	<p>Blog 7</p>	<p>How do you approach "deep reflection?" Do you reflect on your lesson plans? How your teaching went that day? For the blogs? For the edTPA? What does deep reflection mean to you?</p>
 <p>The day you're willing to veer off the lesson plan, follow a kid's lead, and learn with your students is the day you really become A TEACHER.</p> <p>venspired.com</p>	<p>Blog 8</p>	<p>How are you incorporating differentiated instruction into your lesson plans? What areas of differentiated instruction interest you? What are your overall thoughts?</p>

	<p>Blog 9</p>	<p>How are you incorporating technology into your class? How are you preparing your students for 21st century skills? Are you using technology to differentiate instruction?</p>
	<p>Blog 10</p>	<p>Let's recap our conversation tonight. What was the experience of the edTPA for you? What were the pluses? Minuses? Any additional thoughts?</p>
<p>“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” BENJAMIN FRANKLIN</p>	<p>Blog 11</p>	<p>Many of you defined your professional goals in ways such as “to graduate in May”, etc. Let's take this further and deeper. Where do you need to grow as a teacher? What are the concrete steps to take to achieve this? Other thoughts about professional/practical issues?</p>
<p>The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.</p>	<p>Blog 12</p>	<p>What do you know about value-added instruction? Differentiated instruction? Assessment? What have you learned about these from the edTPA? From student teaching? Other? Consider this a pre-reflection before the topic next week.</p>

	<p>Blog 13</p>	<p>Have you witnessed the impact of your instruction directly? Have you witnessed the impact of your differentiation on instruction? What tells you that you are responsible for the learning? Write a reflection of this experience.</p>
	<p>Blog 14</p>	<p>What are 21st century skills? How do they apply to languages? Why are they important? How will you develop them in your students? Other thoughts?</p>
	<p>Blog 15</p>	<p>What are some other ways that blogs can be used to develop skills for the TPA? Other ideas on how to develop/prepare/progress through the edTPA?</p>

Appendix B

Student D's graphic

