

**10<sup>th</sup> ICEEPSY 2019**  
**International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology**  
**A TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE**  
**FOCUSING ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE**

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***Abstract***

Teaching always involves challenges; and reflective practice can be an indispensable tool for adapting one's teaching to meet these challenges. The professional development and recertification online course for K-12 classroom (thus in-service) teachers described herein sought to identify the importance and benefits of reflective practice and to become familiar with various reflective strategies in teaching. The professor of education developing and conducting this course employed an online learning community approach. While writing, reading, and learning cooperatively, participants reflected on their own teaching practices. The approach used in the course is likely essential for any use of student-centered instruction with diverse learners. This case study highlights several kinds of information that in-service teachers can readily use to improve their teaching. Of four tasks in teaching (preparation of material; instructional delivery in the classroom; grading student work; and evaluating one's teaching effectiveness), the fourth most directly enables continuous improvement. And even more important, for most in-service teachers, is that evaluating one's performance is essential for maintaining professional vitality and continuous improvement in teaching.

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**Keywords:** In-service teacher, professional development, learner-centered instruction, reflective teaching practice, learning community, online course.



## 1. Introduction

The shift from teacher-centered (also known as lecture-focused) methods to learner-centered (also known as resource-based) methods is a tremendous change in higher education today, shifting from an emphasis on *teaching* to *learning*. The important educational challenges of the information age include restructuring the teaching and learning process to reflect the use of information in the real world.

Bandjur and Maksimovic (2013) state as follows: “the teacher—reflective practitioner is an alternative to the traditional practitioner since he exhibits a changed conceptual and methodological approach to the practice.... The teacher—reflective practitioner is one of the possible paradigms of that person’s lifelong learning and advancement” (p. 100). In other words, reflective practice is the key to the professional development of teachers, mainly because “teachers face an ever-changing population of students that represent a wide range of socio-economic, academic, and linguistic diversity” (Sparks, 2003, p. 5). Reflective practice has “become a focus of interest and a powerful movement in teacher education. The complexity of teaching requires teachers to question their practices for their own professional development in order to improve and to increase learner performance” (Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017, p. 126).

“Reflective teaching practice” is a commonly used term among educators: for some it refers to a teacher’s awareness of teaching practice; and for others it is an approach to dialogic teaching (Zimmerman, 2015). Reflective teaching practice “has the effects of making teachers more initiative and responsible in pursuing the practical rationality through exploring teaching and learning activities, taking more informed actions and establishing a deeper understanding of teaching, while ultimately contributes to their professional knowledge and competence” (Ma & Ren, 2011, p. 154). “Central to the approach to teaching reflective is the concept of ‘personal context,’ which we define as the interwoven fabric of one’s unique and diverse life experiences and from which stems one’s perspective and affective reactions” (Saperstein, Lilje, & Seibert, 2015, p. 143). Teachers who use critical reflections to improve instruction are called “reflective practitioners.” Reflection is an ability for continual self-improvement and is a “combination of critical inquiry, consideration of the ethical implications and consequences of teaching practices and deep examination of personal beliefs and assumptions about human potential and learning” (Larrivee, as cited in Impeovo & Malik, 2016, p. 100). Accordingly, in Çimer, Çimer, and Vekli’s (2013) words:

It has been seen that reflection is an essential part of teachers’ professional development because it calls teachers for ongoing exercise of their intellect, responsibility and professionalism. It promotes deliberative action in planning and implementing instruction and ongoing engagement with theory and supports growth in professional knowledge and learning as reflective teachers become more aware of their own actions, more skilled in the use of evidence, more knowledgeable both in teaching and about teaching, and more able to identify and analyze the consequences of their actions (p. 142–143).

“The merits of reflective exercises in teacher training are well known. Reflection through journals, surveys/questionnaires, action research, or supervised teaching and classroom discussion creates opportunities for teachers in training to think critically of what they do in their classes, why they do it, and

how they could improve” (Ene & Riddlebarger, 2015, p. 157). “Reflection diaries may be effective in their usage of reflective thinking skills... can use their reflective skills in presenting effective learning environments for their own students” (Töman & Bayburt, 2017, p. 238). “Since the end of the 1990s reflective diaries have been used and studied in teacher education courses” (Bergmann & Da Silva, 2013, p. 999).

Teaching is a better way to learn; and the process of teacher professional development is therefore a process of learning for teachers: “Teacher professional development becomes possible only when teachers critically reflect upon teaching, for reflective teaching is the process of self-study or self-learning. Teachers are learning while teaching” (Ma & Ren, 2011, p. 153).

## 2. Problem Statement

Students in U.S. colleges and universities are getting more and more diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, linguistic, age, socioeconomic status, and expectation. The site of the current study, an American Pacific island university, has a diverse student population. The school of education at the university has a mission to advance both pre-service and in-service teacher education. To grow professionally continuously, classroom teachers must be active participants in their own growth and learning (Arizona K-12 Center, 2012): the InTASC model core teaching standards capture the complexities of teaching (a tree) in the three components of essential knowledge (*seeds*: when teachers can articulate this essential knowledge, seeds are planted. If unfertilized, seeds cannot grow), critical dispositions (*roots*: when teachers can articulate their values, beliefs, and commitments to students, they establish roots that ground them in service to the teaching profession), and performance (*leaves*: when paired with regular reflective and analytical practice, teacher performance evolves and becomes highly sophisticated; reflective thinking becomes evident, observable, and measurable in their teaching practice). K-12 teachers must continuously improve their professional abilities by attending workshops/seminars for teachers and taking continuing education courses.

## 3. Research Questions

In the InTASC (Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium) standards, the reflective prompts are defined as questions designed to guide reflective thinking around standards that define a teacher’s practice. Such questions are: performance (what do I need to create an environment that support learning?); essential knowledge (how do I group learners to engage them in content?); and critical dispositions (how do I promote learner-to-learner discourse?). In the preparation of this teacher professional development/recertification course—a continuing education course for K-12 classroom teachers—focusing on reflective practice, the above InTASC’s questions were applied to research questions for this study:

Q1: As a university teacher, how do I create an environment that supports in-service teachers’ lifelong learning?

Q2: As a university teacher, how can I best in-service teachers to engage them in the content of professional development course?

Q3: As a university teacher, how can I best promote learner-to-learner discourse in a professional development courses for in-service teachers?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The course reported herein was designed to guide (practice-based) reflective thinking among its enrollees: in-service teachers. The discussion forum emphasized taking time before posting their ideas; and reflecting on their experiences and observations as much as they could. The author of this paper is a professor of education, who developed and conducted this course using discussion forums in an online learning community approach. There are two types of discussion forums. In instructor-guided discussions, the instructor participates as a facilitator. In peer-led discussions, students are the primary sources of information, feedback and inspiration. Teaching always involves challenges; and reflective practice can be indispensable when adapting to meet these challenges. The professional development/recertification course described herein sought to identify the benefits of reflective practice, and of various reflective strategies.

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Two-Step Study Approach

#### 5.1.1. Step 1: Developing a Teacher Development Course

This online course (titled “Reflective Practice: Teachers as Reflective Practitioners”) was developed as a five-week-long (see Table 01), one credit-hour course navigated by the Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) in a weekly basis. Allowing an immersion (deep mental involvement) and personalized learning experience, the delivery mode provided participants (K-12 in-service teachers) with ample opportunities to engage in discussion forums through the learning community.

**Table 01.** Course Schedule: Topics, Resources, Activities, and Assignments

	Topic/Resource	Activity/Assignment
w1	Warming Up & Team Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read the syllabus and posted materials</li> <li>○ Submit a self-introduction, answering all questions</li> </ul>
w2	To study about teachers as reflective practitioners Resources: video/website/PPT/journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read posted materials and conduct online search</li> <li>○ Submit an original response and reply to others,</li> <li>○ participating actively in the discussion</li> </ul>
w3	Instructor Guided Discussion: To identify the benefits of reflective practice Resources: video/website/PPT/journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read posted materials and conduct online search</li> <li>○ Submit an original response and reply to others,</li> <li>○ participating actively in the discussion</li> </ul>
w4	Peer Led Discussion: To become familiar with reflective teaching strategies Resources: video/website/PPT/journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read posted materials and conduct online search</li> <li>○ Submit an original response and reply to others,</li> <li>participating actively in the discussion</li> </ul>
w5	Summing Up & Self-Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflect on the learning experience</li> <li>○ Submit a final reflection, answering all questions</li> </ul>

In addition to regular items (such as course description, course objectives, assessment plan, schedule of activities, and reading list), the following course policies are included in the course syllabus:

**GRADING & ASSESSMENT:** This course will be assessed on a Pass/No Pass basis. To pass the course, you must attend the online class each week. You will be counted as “present” for a class week if you participate in that week’s online discussion forums and any other required activities

within the required timeframe. If you do not post to the discussion forums during the class week or do not participate in a required activity, you will not be counted as attending class that week. Discussion submissions were assessed using the simple rubric (see Table 02).

**NETIQUETTE & DISCUSSION EXPECTATION:** To maintain productive discussions in this course, please participate actively throughout the session. When responding to others' comments, show respect for differing points of view. Respectful consideration of alternatives is the main purpose of a learning community.

**Table 02.** Online Discussion Rubric

Criterion	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target
Relevance of the original response	Submission is not related to the week's topic	Submission is relatively related to the week's topic	Submission is very much related to the week's topic
Contribution to the learning community	No response to other Participants	Comment does not make much effort to participate in learning community	Comment is thoughtful, and responds respectfully to others' posts
Length of words	Word totals are much too short or much too long	Word totals are within the optimum range	Uses words effectively, and word totals are within the optimum range

### 5.1.2. Step 2: Conducting a Teacher Development Course

The course was offered in the 2018 Spring semester. Eleven students (in-service teachers) enrolled in the course. The demographic data were: gender (three male; eight female); years of teaching (range 3 to 37 years; average: 17.8 years); and levels of teaching (five elementary; four middle school; two high school). Learning outcomes (and representative responses to discussion questions) are described below.

#### WEEK ONE—*Self-Introduction*

Instruction: "Using 100 words effectively, introduce yourself, answering the following question: Some say that teachers need a special human quality. In your opinion, what might that special human quality be?"  
 Some of the responses from participants were:

- "Maintaining a passion for teaching is important: if teachers are excited about what they teach and uphold true to their ideals, the passion will spread to their students."
- "A teacher who has a strong desire to effect changes in students tends to have the intrinsic motivation to search for better teaching methods continuously."
- "Successes do not come so easily and are not instantaneous: teachers must be able to wait and to see the fruits of their labor. With great patience comes great rewards."
- "Establishing a comfortable working relationship with a student is key to succeed. If a teacher can demonstrate tolerance, empathy, or genuine concern, the student will want to work harder."

#### WEEK TWO—*Teachers as Reflective Practitioners*

Discussion Question: What is reflective teaching?

Instruction: "A learning community is a group of individuals who share common interests and who are actively engaged in learning together, sharing thoughts and resources about a particular topic. Develop your original response (100 words) to the question by reading and referring to online resources and based on your experiences and observations. Include a reference, link, or citation when appropriate. After posting

your original response, check out what others have written; and thoughtfully and substantively reply to, at least, two other participants. Whether you agree or disagree, explain why: using supporting evidence and concepts from the readings or your own experiences. Also provide any encouragement, ideas, or resources that the person may find useful.” Some of the responses from participants were:

- “Teachers have remarkable opportunities to launch students into a new realm of critical thinking: in part, by creatively translating lessons into real-world situations.”
- “Reflective practice helps a good teacher become a great teacher. When we ‘aspire to inspire’ achievement in all students, reflection is an invaluable tool.”
- “We must make sure to look back at how we taught, how successfully the lesson went, and what adjustments could make the lesson more interesting and meaningful.”
- “To reflect well, continuous communication with colleagues, students, parents, and other stakeholders is a must. Particularly reflective practice involves paying close attention to the values and practical concepts that inform everyday actions.”

WEEK THREE—*Benefits of Reflective Teaching Practice*

Instruction: “Using the website evaluation checklist provided, evaluate one website. Share with the class the completed the checklist. To do that, search for an appropriate website related to the benefits of reflective teaching; and, after posting your website evaluation, check out what others have written and thoughtfully and substantively reply to, at least, two other participants.” Below is the response from Student Y. Note: The URL for the website appears in Student Y’s comment but not stated below (see table 3).

**Table 03.** Website Evaluation Checklist (Student Y)

Question	Yes	No
<i>Authority</i>		
Is it clear who is responsible for the contents of the page?	X	
Is there a link to a page describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization or group?	X	
Is there a link to information about the author or the sponsor?	X	
<i>Accuracy</i>		
Are the sources for any factual information clearly listed so they can be verified in another source?	X	
Is the information free of grammatical, spelling, and other typographical errors?		X
If there are charts and/or graphs containing statistical data, are the charts and/or graphs clearly labeled and easy to read?		X
Are the facts similar to those reported in related print or other online sources?	X	
<i>Objectivity</i>		
Does the page make the purpose of the website clear, including any bias or viewpoint?	X	
Is the information free of advertising?		X
Is it somebody's personal page?		X
Does the page disclose who is sponsoring or paying for the site?	X	
<i>Currency</i>		
Are there dates on the page to indicate?	X	
When the page was written?		X
When the page was first placed on the Web?	X	
When the page was last revised?		X
Are there any indications that the material is kept current?		X
<i>Relevancy</i>		
Is the information provided on the page useful for your research topic?	X	
Is the content of the page written at a level that you can understand?	X	

Is the site organization logical and easy to maneuver?	X	
Does this site include other links to additional information on your topic?	X	

Source: <http://library.acphs.edu/PDFs/Website%20Evaluation%20Checklist.pdf>

#### WEEK FOUR—*Reflective Teaching Strategies*

Discussion Question: What are specific reflective teaching strategies for classroom teachers?

Instruction: “Develop your original response (100 words) to the discussion question by reading and referring to online resources and based on your own experience and observation. Include a reference, link, or citation when appropriate. After posting your original response, check out what others have written; and thoughtfully and substantively reply to, at least, two other participants. Whether you agree or disagree, explain why: using supporting evidence and concepts from the readings, or your relevant experiences. Also provide any encouragement, ideas, or resources that the person may find useful.” And some of the responses from participants were:

- “Simple strategies include: self-reflection through video recordings, journals, and blogs. Advanced strategies include: student survey and peer observation, allowing teachers to improve based on suggestions and constructive criticism.”
- “Using self-assessment rubrics is beneficial: similar in nature to the ones teachers use to assess student performance, the only difference is that these rubrics help teachers reflect on their own teaching by critically analyzing based on a list of carefully created criteria.”
- “Common strategies are peer observations, teacher portfolios, and teacher inventories.”
- “Jotting down daily notes in a teacher’s diary, videotaping lessons, and student surveys represent three insightful strategies teachers may employ.”
- “Participating in professional training activities and professional learning communities, as well as taking professional development courses and reflective teaching research programs.”

#### WEEK FIVE—*Final Self-Reflection*

Instruction: “Post your final self-reflection (100 words), answering the following question: What are the most valuable insights that you have gained through this course? Note that take some time to reflect on your answer to the question before you write and submit it.” Some of the responses from participants were:

- “Reflection is important in every aspect in life. A person must determine what was done right, and what he or she can improve to contribute to success for everyone involved: including oneself. This course has provided me with tools that will help me reflect on my teaching.”
- “I realize now that student and parent perception surveys are useful. In the past, I felt that they might be a waste of time. I was also afraid to learn how parents might perceive my work. Now I realize that these surveys can help me to improve my teaching.”
- “The most important insight I gained from the course concerns the whole purpose of reflective practice. I had the mistaken notion that the sole purpose of reflecting on my teaching was to identify all the deficiencies and inadequacies in what I was doing.”

## 6. Findings

Teaching is an ongoing endeavour; and *reflective practice* is an indispensable tool for improving teaching performance. In incorporating reflective practice (a tree) into teaching, three guiding elements of

the learning community approach used in this study are: essential knowledge (seeds); critical dispositions (roots); and performance (leaves). The three elements can be summarized as follows:

Essential knowledge (“When teachers can articulate this essential knowledge, seeds are planted. If unfertilized, seeds cannot grow,” Arizona K-12 Center, 2012, p. 10). Results from this study confirmed the necessity of providing appropriate questions to stimulate class discussions. In response, all participants (in-service teachers) in this course posted their submissions relatively in a timely manner. It should be emphasized that the participants gained substantial knowledge of reflective teaching practices, and a renewed appreciation of their importance in effective teaching.

Critical dispositions (“It is through meaningful professional interactions and classroom experience that seeds of knowledge are fertilized and take root in the hearts and minds of growing educators,” Arizona K-12 Center, 2012, p. 10). All participants in this course, overall, contributed to the online learning community by being creative in approaches to topics, being relevant in the presented viewpoints, and attempting to motivate the critical discussion. One significant concern in online classes is described by Harrison and West (2014) in the following way: “a lack of in-person experience could diminish the students’ overall sense of community and social presence in class” (p. 290). In this asynchronous learning environment, the Moodle course shell has provided an “open door” to the virtual classroom, building a sense of community among participants, and mostly promoting critical disposition of the participants.

Performance (“High effective classroom performance is dependent upon a strong foundational knowledge of content and pedagogy,” Arizona K-12 Center, 2012, p. 12). In professional education, reflection leads to good practices in the teaching and learning process (Leitch & Day, as cited in Yanuarti & Treagust, 2015). This course was designed to guide (practice-based) reflective thinking; and assignments during the second, third, and fourth weeks addressed the three core discussion topics. The discussion forum emphasized taking time before posting their original responses and providing feedback to others; reading substantial materials; and reflecting on their experiences as much as they can, on a weekly basis.

Of four tasks in teaching (making a lesson plan; teaching in class; grading student work; and evaluating one’s teaching effectiveness), the fourth most directly enables continuous improvement. Evaluating one’s performance is also essential for maintaining professional vitality and continuous improvement in teaching. This course concentrated on in-service teachers’ evaluations of their own teaching effectiveness through reflection. As the author teaches for the School of Education, this course was also aligned with the School’s conceptual framework, which emphasizes the foundation of excellence in preparing teachers to become a knowledgeable scholar, an effective communicator, and a reflective decision maker.

## **7. Conclusion**

In recognition of students’ competence and experience, teachers should encourage their active participation. This approach is likely essential for any use of student-centered instruction with diverse learners. Through conducting this course, possible answers to the three research questions are as follows:

Q1: As a university teacher, how do I create an environment that supports in-service teachers’ lifelong learning?



A1: In today's learning environment, encouraging students to learn through reflection—capturing their own thoughts systematically—is even more important than before. As Kennison and Misselwitz put it, “Reflection is the purposeful and recursive contemplation of thoughts, feelings, and happenings that pertain to significant practice experiences” (cited in Kennison, 2012, p. 306).

Q2: As a university teacher, how can I best in-service teachers to engage them in the content of professional development course?

A2: In striving to be a facilitator as well as a teacher, the instructor should provide questions that stimulate the discussion, and eventually allow the students to achieve competency in the content area. As the following suggests, having students submit their answers in writing might be effective: “Writing is considered more effective than speech. Reflective writing is a unique mode of learning that requires a higher level of abstraction and more intellectualization than speech” (Vygotsky, cited in Kennison, 2012, p. 306).

Q3: As a university teacher, how can I best promote learner-to-learner discourse in a professional development courses for in-service teachers?

A3: Online learning communities provide a solution. In an online course, cohort members greatly depend on each other to achieve the learning outcomes. This approach helps students to engage problems in general, and to develop the habit of making decisions using critical thinking skills in particular. Online learning communities therefore offer opportunities for learning from discourse with other students, that more traditional classroom instruction cannot. By the same token, the instructor must ensure that each student participates actively in the community. Without such participation, these advantages of an online course vanish.

Hallman and Adam (2013) observed as follows: “As reflective practice is often framed by ‘how to’ and technical visions of reflection, meta-knowledge of genre in writing enlivens the discussion of reflective practice by reconnecting reflection to action. Teacher reflection is always connected to action, and the rhetorical choices one makes in the act of reflecting manner” (p.13).

Therefore, the following two professional development/recertification courses should be offered in the same manner. One is a course (titled “Reflective Practice: Teachers as Critical Creative Thinkers”). It is commonly understood that “critical” thinking is correlated with “creative” thinking. Both are valuable skills for teachers who wish to reflect on and improve their instruction by creating a productive learning environment. The other is a course (titled “Reflective Practice: Teachers as Action Researchers”). Classroom action research—a method of finding out what works best in the classroom—is an attractive option for teachers who wish to reflect on and improve their classroom performance.

In conclusion, this series of professional development courses ultimately presents techniques for gaining and applying deep and helpful insights into one's own teaching practice. In due course, participants (mostly K-12 teachers) will learn to become reflective practitioners, critical and creative thinkers, and action researchers.

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