



An Associate Professor and A Doctoral Student Learn From Each Other: Critical Friendship

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Abstract

Teaching evaluation mechanisms are often a process of isolated reflection on teaching. In some cases, university lecturers also do not have support systems for their teaching development. Feelings of isolation and the absence of support systems, when taken together, hinder positive teaching-related changes in university instructors' future classrooms. In this paper, the authors promote the idea of forming a critical friendship (CF) through the successful building of trust. This qualitative case study reports on a CF between an associate professor (as an observed lecturer) and a doctoral student (as a critical friend) at a state university in the USA. More specifically, the paper explores teaching lessons that both participants can gain from the CF. Data were garnered from video recordings of teaching practices from a course on methods for teaching English language learners, observation notes, and semi-structured interviews. This study reports on the CF's success based on explicit principles around trust, reflection, peer observation, and interaction between the observed lecturer and the critical friend. Limitations of the current study and directions for further research are discussed.

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1 Introduction

Before coming to the USA to pursue his doctoral studies, author 1 (hereafter called C) was a lecturer in an English language education program at a private university in Indonesia. At the end of every semester, he always received student evaluations about his overall teaching performance. However, the evaluations mostly contained short responses from the students. For instance, in a

writing class (May 2017), some students wrote: don't be too serious, just relaxed, C. Other comments were less personal but equally unhelpful: the teacher provided feedback for every assignment so that I know what my mistakes are, and the teacher always gives detailed explanations in the class.

Although the feedback indicated students' overall satisfaction with C's teaching, he felt that this written feedback did not guide him on what he should do exactly to enhance his teaching practices. For example, despite the comment to just relaxed, C could not recall when he had become a "serious" lecturer or even what was meant by that comment. Perhaps, the student was thinking about other classes, or maybe the student was just wrong about C! These are glimpses into the thought processes of university faculty when reading student evaluations. When lecturers reflect on their in-class teaching practices, we agree with Farrell (2004) that "so much takes place so quickly that a teacher cannot hope to see and monitor everything that goes on" (p. 64). Moreover, we second Tuĝa's (2013) concern that written feedback might risk ambiguity and might not be able to evaluate a lecturer's teaching performances in detail. Also, students' evaluations are often only used for administrative purposes (e.g., completing an annual review portfolio of the lecturers). In this paper, we ask how university lecturers can learn from teaching-related problems they have in classes in order to make positive teaching-related changes in their future classrooms.

Research literature in this area provides mechanisms beyond student evaluations for university faculty to improve their teaching. These include evaluating teaching materials (Stark & Freishtat, 2014), doing self-evaluation through teaching statements, descriptions of teaching objectives, strategies, and methodologies (Miller & Seldin, 2014). Other ways include brief reflections on course materials (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2019), as well as a reflective teaching portfolio as "a faculty member's opportunity to contextualize the experience from his or her point of view" (Lyde et al., 2016, p. 86). Although each mechanism has its strengths, we are concerned that some procedures might take the teaching-reflection process in isolation without support systems for teaching development (Nguyen & Ngo, 2018). In that situation, lecturers reflect on their work by themselves without recognizing the value of collegial interaction with others that might challenge their current practices and provide various perspectives for their teaching (Campbell et al., 2004). Gemmel (2003) warned that "lecturers who work in isolation often resort to familiar methods rather than approaching concerns from a problem-solving perspective in attempting to meet the diverse instructional needs of today's students" (p. 10).

In response, we adopted Baskerville and Goldblatt's (2009) notion of a critical friend. This type of friend is a close colleague and one who is also "a reflective practitioner (with integrity and passion for teaching and learning) who establishes safe ways of working and negotiates shared understandings to support someone's teaching practices" (p. 206). Furthermore, the critical friend provides questions for a peer to understand his/her teaching, highlights the specificity of the teaching practices, gives constructive (not judgmental) feedback, and advocates for success in teaching (Costa & Kallick, 1993). Successfully building trust, a lecturer and a critical friend could then form a CF to talk about the practices in a collaborative undertaking (Farrell, 2001), promote collegiality, and minimize a sense of isolation that they might feel (Farrell, 2007). The CF can be done in a one-to-one manner or as a group of people (Storey & Wang, 2016). In the next section, we will define the CF in more detail, explain four main principles of the CF, and pedagogical lessons that can be obtained in the CF. We then present empirical gaps in the literature and the theoretical framework of the current study.

2 Literature review

2.1 Definitions of critical friendship

What is CF? Built on the foundations of trust (Farrell, 1998) and openness (Farrell, 2004), CF is a collaboration that encourages discussion and reflection to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (Farrell, 2001). The collaboration helps teachers improve their instruction through ongoing

practice-centered collegial conversations about teaching and learning (Smith, 2019). As a social process (Golby & Appleby, 1995), individuals involved in the collaboration inquire about teaching practices, provide classroom data to be analyzed, and offer feedback for the teaching as a friend (Thorgersen, 2014). However, in a CF, the term critical should not be translated negatively as it is basically about “separating teaching into its parts, discerning how those parts work together, and how teaching is connected to other parts of life” (Farrell, 2001, p. 369).

2.2 Principles of critical friendship

In our reading of the literature, we identified four fundamental principles of CF. The first one is *trust*. Although it might depend on personal relationships (Nilsson et al., 2018) and take time to build (Farrell, 2001), trust needs to be established to ensure the success of CF (Farrell, 1998; Swaffield, 2004). To create trust, a lecturer needs to feel that his/her critical friend will “be clear about the nature of the relationship, and not use it for evaluation or judgment, listen well, clarify ideas, encourage specificity, take time to understand what is being presented fully, and be an advocate for the success of the work” (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50). When trust is established, the lecturer and the critical friend can have an “unguarded conversation” (Baskerville & Goldbatt, 2009, p. 216) where they feel safe to openly talk about strengths and things to improve in their teaching practices.

The second principle is *reflection*. It refers to conscious thinking about what teachers are doing and why they are doing it; teachers reflect on what they do as teachers, what is going on in a classroom, observable actions, and students’ reactions during lessons (Farrell, 2015a). Moreover, reflection happens when teachers systematically gather data about their teaching, and they use the data to make informed decisions for their pedagogical practices (Farrell, 2014) or draw implications for their teaching (Carolan & Wang, 2012; Farrell, 2001, 2015b; Gray, 2012; Gün, 2011; Vo & Nguyen, 2010). The reflection process can be successfully implemented among program faculty, or as illustrated in the case of Probst et al. (2016), conducted with a cohort of students.

The third principle is *peer observation*. Donnelly (2007) argued that doing a peer observation has benefits for both the observer and the observed. When we observe others to gain knowledge of self, we get opportunities to construct and reconstruct knowledge that we already have (Gebhard, 2005). These propositions appear to be true in the previous studies that observed classes and/or discussed the observation in a meeting attended by teachers (Carolan & Wang, 2012; Gün, 2011; Moradkhani, 2019; Vo & Nguyen, 2010) or by students (Nguyen & Ngo, 2018; Smith, 2019; Storey & Wang, 2016). For instance, a teaching practicum student in Vietnam remarked, “How could we see ourselves when we were teaching in class? My peers could help me with that” (Nguyen & Ngo, 2018, p. 193). Then, in a Critical Friends Groups (CFG) among four beginner teachers in Vietnam (Vo & Nguyen, 2010), all teachers in the study regarded the CFG as “opportunities to learn from colleagues and exchange professional ideas” (p. 210).

The last principle is *interaction*. Interactions happen between a lecturer and a critical friend or in a CF with a group of people (Storey & Wang, 2016) who provide “honest” (Samaras & Sell, 2013, p. 101), constructive and non-judgmental feedback (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Thorgersen, 2014) for the lecturer’s teaching practices. Based on his professional experiences working with twelve experienced American, Canadian and Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, Gebhard (2005) stated that providing rules of “non-judgmental and non-prescriptive discussion” (p. 12) and focusing the interactions on specific teaching aspects might promote a productive interaction. The communication can then generate various teaching techniques to apply in a classroom. For instance, a teacher taking a practicum course to obtain an MA in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Iran said: “At the end of all observations, I started a friendly communication with the observed teachers talking about the teaching sessions. The outcome was wonderful as either I learned something new, or I was able to suggest some better teaching alternatives to my colleagues” (Moradkhani, 2019, p. 67).

2.3 *Pedagogical lessons gained in a critical friendship*

We use the term pedagogical lessons similarly to Richards and Schmidt (2010), who defined the term as what instructors learn about teaching techniques used by a teacher in a classroom, what happened in the class, and “ways in which teaching and learning activities were delivered” (p. 425). One example of a pedagogical lesson comes from Farrell (2001). He reported how his presence helped the observed teacher to become more aware of her teaching in the context of an academic writing skills class in Singapore. The teacher said, “I was so glad that students were beginning to speak up more in class. Maybe I didn’t give them much opportunity in my earlier classes” (Farrell, 2001, p. 371). More recently, Nguyen and Ngo (2018) reported how a pre-service EFL teacher in Vietnam could learn to pay more attention to students’ behavior in a class: “However, after observing my lesson, Van reminded me about a group at the back who were always playing cards, and I paid more attention to them in the next lesson” (p. 191).

2.4 *Empirical gaps in the literature*

Four empirical gaps emerge in our review of the CF-related literature. These relate to building trust, teacher observation protocols, the teaching/research setting, and relationship patterns. The first one relates to building trust and negotiating ground rules for teacher observation and joint reflection. The potential for tensions to arise can be high; thus, Farrell (2001) claims that “sufficient trust needs to be established for healthy confrontation to be tolerated, and some rules need to be negotiated” (p. 374). To the best of our knowledge, Nilsson et al. (2018) were among a few researchers who directly address Farrell’s concern about building trust and minimizing doubts and tensions in a CF. They proposed ways to communicate where an observer and a teacher should discuss what happened in the class, trust each other, share a mutual interest in any class activities, and not guard their positions and views.

The second gap in the CF literature relates to teacher observation protocols. For example, Farrell (2001) acknowledged that “the teacher did not ask him how or what to observe in any of the classes” (p. 370). A similar situation happened in Golby and Appleby’s (1995) study where “no detailed specification of the role was made explicit” (p. 151). In Vo and Nguyen (2010), the researchers did not explicitly state rules and specific teaching aspects to discuss in their CFG. As a result, CF pedagogical lessons were reduced to comments such as, “I learned about my colleague[s]’ strengths and weaknesses and that gave me a chance to develop my teaching abilities” (p. 209), without mention of specific teaching aspects or their strengths/weaknesses. Without the lens of an observation protocol to focus the teacher observation, these were allowed to wander, even to student-teacher interactions outside of the classroom itself (see Farrell, 2015b) and instructors’ assumptions about course integrity in a distance model (see Hunter et al., 2014). Where observation protocols do exist, they are limited in scope, such as the study by Tuğa (2013), which focused on “classroom procedures and lesson planning, self-presentation and classroom persona, and classroom management” (p. 178). An observation protocol with a wider scope on the one hand or a more fine-tuned lens on the other can be co-constructed in the CF to provide more detailed observations of how teachers show respect to and interact with their students (rapport), maximize students’ talking time (interaction), and use relevant technology in a class (teaching techniques) as addressed in the recently published study (e.g., see Moradkhani, 2019).

Previous studies on CF typically explore teacher-teacher, teacher-student, or student-student collaborations in US settings (see Bambino, 2002; Costa & Kalick, 1993; Storey & Wang, 2016). The previous studies also include reflective practices with undergraduate students (Behizadeh et al., 2019), among school teachers (Andrei, 2017), and among university professors (Lewis, 2018). Probst et al. (2016) explored a CF between a university professor and doctoral students, reflecting on a qualitative method class. In such collaboration involving a university professor and a doctoral student, it remains a mystery on how the collaboration could address Farrell’s (2001) concern about

building trust and tolerating healthy confrontation in a CF project, for instance, by implementing the communication techniques as proposed by Nilsson et al. (2018). Moreover, we have not seen much evidence to suggest that (video) recording and reflecting on more various teaching aspects, such as beyond what Tuĝa (2013) had addressed, of an experienced university lecturer's classes might benefit the lecturer and the critical friend and achieve the goals of CF: directing positive actions to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the future.

Lastly, the literature indicated a less explored CF done by a native English speaker lecturer (e.g., from the USA) and a non-native English speaker critical friend (e.g., from Indonesia). We agree with Carolan and Wang (2011) that doing a peer review across cultures can be a useful and informative activity as it provides teachers with opportunities "to exchange teaching experiences and reflect on cross-cultural teaching practices" (p. 77).

2.5 Theoretical framework

Our study is framed under CF principles drawn from the literature. These include trust, reflection, peer observation, and interaction. As the study involves the interactions (e.g., between a lecturer and a critical friend), social constructivist theory (see Tracey & Morrow, 2017) also informs the theoretical framework of this research. We worked from a belief that the (pedagogical) knowledge growth of participants in the CF is, in large part, a result of their interactions with one another. During the interactions, we are aware that the race, social class, ethnicity, language, values, beliefs, and teaching experiences (Skepple, 2015) that the lecturer and critical friend bring to the relationship can impact their knowledge constructions. Framed under the CF and informed by the gaps in the literature, this study aims to answer these research questions:

- (1) What are pedagogical lessons that the observed lecturer gains from the CF?
- (2) What are pedagogical lessons that the critical friend gains from the CF?

By answering these questions, we hope to provide some evidence for the value of a reflective practice that might promote dialogue, engagement, and evidence-based reflection, which, according to Walsh and Mann (2015), still becomes a challenge for teacher educators and practitioners. We also hope to inform teachers about possible ways that the systematic reflection process in a trusting and supporting environment might be carried out.

3 Method

3.1 Research participants

The CF in this study involved two participants. First, C (author 1) participated in this study as the critical friend. The other participant was author 2 (hereafter called T), who was the observed lecturer. T was an associate professor at a university in the USA with more than 20 years of experience teaching students at undergraduate, master, and doctorate levels. The initials (C or T) and pronouns (we or our) were used interchangeably in this paper to refer to the authors who also become the research participants. Table 1 briefly summarizes each of our responsibilities in the CF of this study.

Table 1. The responsibilities of each participant in the CF

The principles of the CF	Responsibilities of each participant: C (the critical friend/author 1) T (the observed lecturer/author 2)
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Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C and T had established a good rapport (e.g., as a lecturer-student and a doctoral research advisor-research advisee) for more than a year before the CF project began. • C initiated the CF project, informed T about the rules and processes of the project, and invited him to participate in the CF.
Peer Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C observed and video-recorded classroom activities in T's four class sessions. The observation was guided by the teaching observation framework of Moradkhani (2019). The framework was selected because it was formulated by "consulting multiple ELT resources, two domain experts, and observation sheets Moradkhani had collected during his years of teaching EFL and supervising teachers in language schools" (Moradkhani, 2019, p. 64).
Interactions and Reflection	<p>C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Described teaching activities performed by T; • Summarized the descriptions on PowerPoint slides (e.g., see Figure 2); • Put the teaching videos on the slides to illustrate and recall some teaching activities; • Showed specific teaching aspects (e.g., by playing the teaching videos) that might need future improvement; • Led the discussions on the slides with T in the interview sessions; • Asked T to clarify what he did in the classroom; • Shared lessons learned from the classroom practices and discussions; • Informed T's teaching strengths observed in the video; • Provided feedback to T's teaching performance as a friend; • Suggested constructive ideas for teaching improvement; • Shared his experiences as a student and lecturer in Indonesia in response to the teaching practices that happened in T's class. <p>T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided comments to the descriptions, reflections, feedback, and suggestions that C addressed in the interview sessions; • Shared lessons learned from the classroom practices and discussions.

Note. These participant responsibilities address empirical gaps in the CF literature regarding details on participants' roles (Golby & Appleby, 1995) and specifics of the observation protocol focusing on particular teaching aspects (Farrell, 2001).

Our study, which includes the observed teacher as a research participant and paper author, is not the first study to adopt this arrangement (for example, see Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009; Farrell, 2001; Golby & Appleby, 1995). Additionally, in regards to the small number of participants in this qualitative case study, we adopt Fossey et al. (2002), who argue that there is not an exact minimum number of participants needed to perform sound qualitative research. Following Fossey et al., we provide detailed information in the methods section to fully describe the phenomenon under investigation.

We purposively involved ourselves in this research for the following reasons. T has been C's doctoral research advisor for two years. At the time of this writing, we have worked together to complete two previous research projects on technology and motivation. C was also a doctoral student in one of T's courses. Through the process of research advising and classroom interactions, our relationship has developed over time. We respect each other's research interests and cultural backgrounds, and we have established a good rapport. These conditions are essential in building the foundations of trust (Farrell, 1998) as a key to ensure the success of the CF. T acknowledged the trust that we successfully built when he introduced C's research topic in the class: "[...] C's research is on teacher's reflection; [...] watching yourself teach with somebody you trust. I trust C, and C trusts me" (8/21/19/ observation note/ 2, 3). With these foundations, we entered this CF research with positive attitudes toward lifelong learning and a belief in the value of the project for professional development.

3.2 *Researchers positionality*

In this section, we describe our positionality to inform readers about the background experiences (e.g., beliefs, assumptions, and social backgrounds) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) brought to this research as well as any conflicts of interest that emerged in this study (Saldaña, & Omasta, 2018). C was a lecturer at a private university in Indonesia before coming to the USA to pursue his doctoral studies. He taught EFL, where students learn English in a formal classroom with limited opportunities to use the language outside the class. C's four-year teaching experiences in the Indonesian EFL setting influenced how he perceived his critical friend's (T's) teaching practices. When the study was conducted, C was also a doctoral student and knew T very well through the process of research advising and classroom interactions. Therefore, we acknowledged in advance the presence of bias in the data interpretation stages. Also, we were aware of our power differences (e.g., between a doctoral student and his advisor) that undoubtedly impacted conversation at some points. Nevertheless, by providing detailed descriptions of individual roles and acknowledging potential biases, we follow Creswell and Miller (2000) in promoting greater transparency on how these influenced our research. In doing so, we hope to ensure the transferability of the study, "the degree to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts or other individuals" (Ary et al., 2019, p. 445).

The relationship between power and trust is important to highlight in the context of this study. As already mentioned, both C and T were aware of the power differences in this critical friendship. Thus, it was incumbent on T to name that power dynamic and work actively to build trust with C. In other words, even though we could not change the power dynamic, we could still work in a way that promoted trust. One way to do that was for T to show (not just say) that there would be no negative consequences for presenting classroom observations, even if they illustrated weaknesses or areas for improvement in T's classroom management or presentation of new content. T recognized that the onus for building trust fell primarily onto him and that he would have to build that trust over time. We attempt to illustrate building trust in our data analysis. For example, we highlight T's affirmative responses to C's comments about classroom observations. In addition, we show how T builds on C's comments, thus providing further reason for C to continue his detailed observations and comments. Thus, T's positionality was as mentor (advisor) and participant. These interacting, dynamic roles in the research are illustrated in our data analysis.

3.3 *Introductory dialogues*

Smith (2019) suggested an introductory dialogue to begin the CF so that we are "on the same page" (p. 14). Moreover, participants in a CF need to negotiate rules to ensure productive interaction (Gebhard, 2005). Therefore, the CF in this study began with a discussion meeting in the second week of August 2019. C met T in his office to inform T that this study was a pilot CF that C would develop further into his dissertation. C then asked T to participate in the study, discuss and negotiate roles (see Table 1) and data collection procedures (e.g., the class observations and interview sessions) that C had prepared, and eventually ask his permission to observe his class. Considering the good relationship that we had developed through the process of research advising and classroom interactions, T agreed to participate in this pilot study with all the roles and procedures that C had prepared. Farrell (2001) warned that reflective communication has the potential to cause doubt and raise tension. To minimize that possibility and create a trusting environment, specifically during the interview sessions, C (following Nilsson et al., 2018) further explained to T that he would not ask demanding questions, seek any explanations as an academic, legitimize himself as a knowledgeable facilitator, or refer the discussions to any theoretical literature. Nilsson et al. (2018) recommend CF partners avoid questions such as the following:

What are the students supposed to learn? Which learning concepts are central? In your oral instructions, the performance, not the learning, is in focus [...] (p. 16). I'm thinking about students' participation during

the lesson related to learning, according to Liberg's theory. Where are the students situated in this model, and how could their participation be expanded? (p. 18)

3.4 *Research setting and data collection procedures*

C collected the study data from video recordings of classrooms, observation notes, and semi-structured interview sessions. The recorded class was *Teaching English Language Learners for Secondary Teachers*. It was a three-credit course held in the Fall semester of 2019 and attended by students in the Secondary Education Program (who typically enter in the third year of their undergraduate degree program). In the class syllabus, some purposes of the course are:

(a) to develop an understanding of basic concepts of second language processing in a variety of language learning contexts; (b) to develop skills that will enable them to teach students when they do not speak their students' language(s) yet are responsible for making sure those students learn and meet the state standards for their grade.

The classroom topic of the first two meetings (on August 21 & 23, 2019) related to values and beliefs in teaching, while the other sessions (on August 28 & 30, 2019) were about language learners in 21st-century classrooms. From a total of thirty students in the class, two students were non-native speakers of English. During the class sessions, the students mostly worked in groups of four to five students. The moveable tables and chairs were arranged to accommodate eight to nine groups.

C video-recorded T's teaching practices in four class sessions. C came to each meeting, which lasted for 50-60 minutes. He put a video camera at the back-left corner of the class to record the teaching and learning activities. Like Farrell (2001), he did not interfere with any learning activities, talk to students or T in classroom sessions, or show any gestures that attracted attention. These were to ensure that all classroom teaching and learning practices ran as naturally as possible and to minimize the observer effect (Bodgan & Biklen, 2016), where his presence in the class with the video recording might influence students' and teachers' behaviors.

Furthermore, C decided to record the class because (like Orlova, 2009) he could repeatedly view what was going on in the class. In Saldaña and Omasta's (2018) words, the video could provide him with "fresh memories" (p. 83) on the observations. With the video, C could also make the reflection process more concretely tied to T and enable T to see himself teaching (Baecher et al., 2014). C watched the recordings of four class sessions, each of which lasted from 50-60 minutes, to spot teaching moments related to seven aspects of teaching, such as organization, rapport, teaching techniques, presentation, management, questioning, and interaction (for more detail descriptions of each aspect, see Moradkhani, 2019, p. 71).

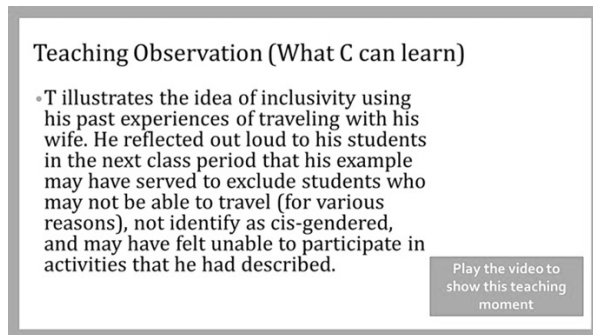
While watching the recordings, C typed his observation notes. In his notes, C described what T did (e.g., his gesture and where he walked and sat), with whom he interacted, and his teaching instructions. The notes also contained some behaviors that the students did in the class (e.g., playing with the phone, being passive, and dominating group and class discussions) to see how T addressed those attitudes. Further, C put time stamps to detail "duration of specific moments or chunk of action" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p.85) to provide more data for answering the research questions.

Next, C uploaded the observation notes to *ATLAS.ti*, qualitative data analysis software. Then, with the software, he open-coded the observation notes. Ary et al. (2019) define open-coding as an activity to label and categorize phenomena that emerge in the data. C took some labels in his coding process from Moradkhani's (2019) teaching observation framework that closely described what was going on in the classroom. He also came up with other codes (e.g., inclusivity, fairness, and domination). Overall, this process resulted in some "descriptive codes in the form of a word or short phrase" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 287). Then, following Saldaña and Omasta, he assembled the coded data and analyzed phrases and sentences under each code. In the end, C cut the video recordings using a software (*Open Shot Video Editor*) and put them on PowerPoint slides

(as a sample, see Figure 1) to show T's teaching practices and (following Farrell, 2011) to separate teaching and learning into their components.

Figure 1

A sample slide that C prepared for the interview session



C conducted two semi-structured interview sessions (on September 11 & 18, 2019) with T to discuss the PowerPoint slides, watch the cut video recordings, describe what happened, clarify the teaching moments, and discuss pedagogical lessons we could learn. In this semi-structured interview (following Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), C provided a detailed list of questions that covered all topics he wished to discuss with T about T's teaching practices; C then asked follow-up questions based on responses given in the interview. This was illustrated in the following interactions (9/18/19/interview/31-36) when we discussed the concepts of inclusivity in teaching and learning:

C: [show Figure 1 and play the video] This is what I am interested in. T, how do you feel about this?

T: I spend a long time thinking about: do I want to go there with the students? And, it's hard for me to say it because I was being vulnerable. But, you know, I have been, often time, thinking about how we, our strategic, and what we say like why we say things for reasons. If I am introducing you as a student from Indonesia, then, I have to say I went to Borobudur. So, why I am saying; why am I turning the focus back on me? Why didn't I focus on you? Or what was my purpose in saying this in the first place. Students might say, "Oh cool, this guy travelled." Am I trying to get them to respect me because I have been in different places, that I am married, I did these cool things, or so that might have been my thinking at the time. Then, when, as I reflected on it, how about those students that may never wanna travel, who don't identify as a straight white man. There can be a lot of people there that don't identify that way. Why do they care that I've got kids and traveled in these places, you know?

C: Honestly, I also experience the same thing like here in the U.S. when it was like in the first meeting of the class after the break. Sometimes, it is quite difficult for me to engage in the discussion when they ask: where did you go?

T: Yes...[laughing] I didn't go anywhere.

C: I just stay in my apartment. I bring this up and want to discuss it with you because it is so true. Sometimes, I just feel I don't go anywhere. [laughing]

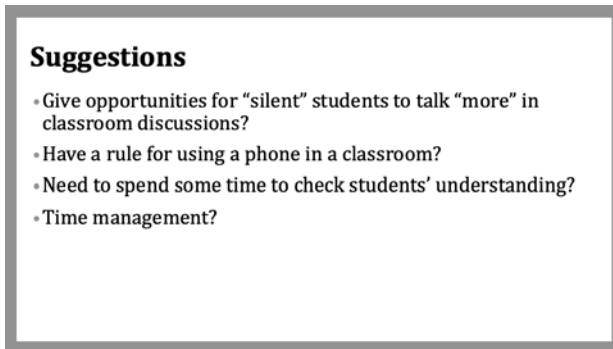
T: That's right. Then, you feel bad. What's wrong with me? Is it because I didn't have enough money to travel, or I just didn't want to travel? I don't want to go to these special places, I just stayed at home. So, rather than including people, making them feel comfortable about who they are, and their place in the class, comments like that can be exclusive; can make people feel there is something wrong with them; like they are othered. And, this happens a lot.

Like Moradkhani (2019), C also asked about the logic behind some practices or teaching techniques. At the end of the interview sessions, C showed PowerPoint slides that described T's overall teaching strengths observed in the video and suggested some ideas for T's teaching future improvement. This was illustrated in the following interactions (9/18/19/interview/78-79):

C: So, these are the things I can suggest based on our discussions [showing the suggestions for improvement in the slides; see Figure 2 below].

Figure 2

A sample slide that C prepared to show the suggestions



T: Yep, I totally agree. You know because it is interesting like; because I don't like calling on students, I need to do that more. That's actually a great point. We use our phone for some activities, but when we are not using the phone; you are right, I'll say: let's keep our phones closed. And then, this is really important because I say objectives at the beginning of the class, but am I really checking to see if they meet our objectives? And that's part of the assessment, so this is really a big deal.

Through these interactions that we had in the interview sessions, as illustrated above, we could learn from one another and generate ideas to answer the research questions. For example, T says he does not like calling on students and that he needs to do that more. A change in his teaching is to do more to check on student engagement using non-verbal thumbs up/down/side, verbal prompts to which students can respond in writing, verbal questions to individual students, and more electronic ways to gauge engagement. For example, he has adopted anonymous ways for students to express themselves with Padlets, which are electronic graffiti boards. He does similar activities with physical paper-and-pencil graffiti boards using Post-it Notes and butcher paper. Because his students are future teachers themselves, he asks the class for feedback on how activities land personally with students, how they could be improved, and how they should be modified depending on the subject and age group being taught. All of these function as formative assessments, providing a feedback loop to T to monitor student learning and engagement with the course material.

3.5 Data analysis procedures

All of the interview sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. C was aware that errors, such as missing, misinterpreted, mistyped words, and incorrect punctuation that could change meanings from what was initially said (Easton et al., 2000), might occur during the transcription process. Therefore, he first emailed the data transcription to T to let him read and confirm the accuracy of the data. Like what C did in analyzing the observation notes, he coded the interview transcripts descriptively and sorted them based on the categories of the teaching aspects. Emergent themes were further defined within the research questions. Soon after the data analysis was completed, C met T in his office and let him review the analysis. T also checked all emergent themes

and excerpts of the transcript to ensure that all of the interpretations were reasonable and accurate. This member-checking procedure can help ensure the trustworthiness of research (Ary et al., 2019) and has been successfully implemented by previous researchers (see, for example, Baecher et al., 2014; Li, 2007; Ruggiero & Mong, 2015).

4 Findings

In this section, we present the results in order of the research questions. To recall the initials used in this study, we use C to refer to the critical friend and the first author and T to refer to the observed lecturer and the second author. Moreover, we define the term *pedagogical lessons* as what we could learn about teaching techniques used by a teacher in a classroom, what happened in the class, and “ways in which teaching and learning activities were delivered” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 425).

4.1 *Pedagogical lessons that the observed lecturer gains from the CF*

The lecturer needs to pay more attention to small class phenomena (e.g., using a phone in a classroom). He said, “sometimes I miss those little things like students checking their phone. I should be better about that. Thank you. It’s really helpful” (9/11/19/interview/22).

The lecturer needs to set a class rule dealing with the use of a phone. He mentioned, “We use our phone for some activities, but when we are not using the phone, you are right, I’ll say: let’s keep our phone closed” (9/18/19/interview/79). These first two plans were based on what we saw in the video where a female student was distracted with her smartphone while her group members were completing a classroom task (8/20/19/observation note/23).

The lecturer needs to call on students’ names to engage them more. There were only a few and the same students who always actively gave feedback to a group presentation (8/23/19/observation note/59,67) and participated in class discussions (8/30/19/observation note/ 111,114,125). Dealing with this plan, T said:

“I could start calling on some people, just say: what do you think? Sometimes, I just really have no idea, you know [laugh], that’s okay, but I should be able to do that more frequently. I will” (9/18/19/interview/44). “Yep, I totally agree. You know because it is interesting like; because I don’t like calling on students, I need to do that more. That’s actually a great point.” (9/18/19/interview/79)

The lecturer will check on students’ progress. T liked the use of group discussions as it provided opportunities for students to interact with one another. Yet, C asked T how he made sure of each student’s understanding of the class discussion. Although there would be no quizzes in class, and assessments of student learning in class are purely formative, T supported an alternative that: “[...] I could do more like, ‘what did you learn today?’ I could help people kind of share out what they have learned; did we meet our objectives; let’s go back to our objectives, did we meet these? That would be really good.” (9/18/19/interview/ 81)

The lecturer learns to be more careful with his time management. C shared with T that, at the beginning of the fourth observed class, he spent almost half of the class time reviewing discussion on the previous meeting’s topic (9/18/19/interview/70). He knew about that issue, felt bothered, and bummed about that (9/18/19/interview/70). In regards to time management, T responded, “and then, time management, I agree. I try to balance; try to create rapport, with getting stuff done, right? [laughing] So, that’s good” (9/18/19/interview/ 81).

4.2 *Pedagogical lessons that the critical friend gains from the CF*

The CF works both ways, which enrich the experience for the observer and observed. While the observed teacher, T, learned from his critical friend’s analysis and observations of his class, the critical friend, C, also learned a lot about pedagogy and relationship building with students that T

modeled for him. In the following section, C reports on what he learned from his observations of T. These are, of course, subjective and based on Moradkhani's (2019) teaching observation framework.

The critical friend learns how to be respectful to students in a classroom in the U.S. context. For instance, given the observations that occurred in the first weeks of the new semester, T made a point of learning and using students' names (8/20/19/observation note/26) as he clarified in the interview:

Since this is the first week of class, I am focusing on learning students' names. That was a big part of it. As I am walking around, I am just reciting their names in my head and remembering, kind of creating contexts like who is working with whom [...] (9/11/19/interview/8)

The critical friend learns the concept of inclusivity or the inclusion of multiple perspectives of students with various cultures, nationalities, and economic backgrounds, none of which is more correct than the other. In the class, T explained ideas of inclusivity, which C had never heard before in his teaching experiences in Indonesia. T thought about his positionality to engage all students in his classrooms as he said:

When I introduced C, and I said it is a very beautiful place, my wife and I went to Yogyakarta. I was reflecting on that. Did I need to say that? Can I just say I was there? Thinking of why we say what we say in front of our students [...] If I want to be inclusive, stick to the subject matters, not the agenda. When I said that I went to Yogyakarta, it is a beautiful place, Mount Merapi, Borobudur, because it might be another agenda; I want to show you all that I had traveled somewhere. You might think that that kind of excluded me. "I will not be able to do that because of my immigration status, nationality, and other things." (8/23/19/observation note/38)

The critical friend learns the concept of fairness. T was willing to do precisely the same as what his students were asked to do in the class. For instance, he shared stories about his parents in the class soon after the students finished sharing their cultural stories in the group. It was as described in the following interactions (9/18/19/interview/67-69):

T: Well, because I was asking them to talk about their personal lives, so I thought like it was only fair if I am asking them to open up about their personal lives, so I should also be able to open up about mine within reason and in a safe space. I am just sort of showing that if they can be vulnerable, I can be vulnerable too.

C: So, I can sense that it is like fairness. If you have to do that, I'll do that too. It reminds me of a writing class. The professor should have some experiences, such as in writing and publications when they ask their students to write and publish [laughing].

T: That is exactly it. If I am asking you to do it, I should do it too.

The critical friend learns how to promote authentic learning discussions in the classroom. Authenticity refers to any topics, processes, and contents that learners can connect to a real-world situation beyond classroom walls (Egbert & Shahrokni, 2018). The video showed that T used many real-life examples to explain authentic concepts. For instance, he talked about his vacation to Borobudur and Mount Merapi to clarify concepts of inclusivity (8/23/19/observation note/38). As the data indicated, more students actively responded to those kinds of authentic concepts than those who responded to an open question, such as commenting on a group presentation (8/23/19/observation note/58).

The critical friend learns how to encourage students' active participation. For instance, T did not just stand in front of the class and explain the learning materials (9/11/19/interview/6). Instead, he used group work and asked his students to collaborate with their group members and draw (8/20/19/observation note/11, 22). T also asked his students to interact with their group members about authentic topics, such as funds of knowledge, technology (8/20/19/observation note/6), food, religion, personal relationships (8/28/19/observation note 72, 73), and about a movie, book, and song they like or dislike (8/30/19/observation note/137). The data also showed that T provided time for his students to share how they felt about sharing their personal experiences with friends in the group (8/28/19/observation note/100).

5 Findings

Our hope is that the results of this study go beyond observation and discussion to actionable classroom changes. For instance, T learned several pedagogical lessons (e.g., being more careful with his time management), following from the reflection process, where he was given the opportunity to use data about his teaching inside a class (e.g., from the video recordings and conversations with C) to make informed changes to his pedagogical practices (see Farrell, 2014) or draw implications for his future teaching (see Gün, 2011). C also learned pedagogical lessons from T, which complement his teaching practices. As a result, C will pay more attention to small class phenomena, call students' names to engage them more, check on his students' progress, manage time for doing classroom activities, and set a class rule about using a phone. On a deeper level, C is now more aware of the reasons for addressing students' names correctly as a way to show respect (Glenz, 2014), make personal connections (Chambliss, 2014), and engage his students in learning activities (Cooper et al., 2017). Working and interacting with his doctoral advisor provided C with "an added value" (Golby & Appleby, 1995, p. 155) to his own teaching, such as about fairness and inclusivity regarding the topics of in-class discussion (Miller, 2012).

As a result of this experience, C is now more aware of the stories that he and his students bring to his class. Ideally, these serve as vehicles for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, none of which is more correct than the other. Through CF, C was also able to observe how T encourages students' active participation in his class. C saw a demonstration of a student-centered class (like Palmer, 2015) where T did not passively transfer knowledge. The students could work together, communicate with, learn from, and value each other's ideas (Jones, 2007) related to the authentic classroom discussions (e.g., about their food, religion, personal relationships, and tradition). In the discussions, T encouraged his students to bring their own experiences, not just sharing everyday things they had in the USA. With all these lessons learned from the CF, this present study should contribute beyond general issues of teaching, as addressed by Tuğa (2013), such as "classroom procedures and lesson planning, self-presentation and classroom persona, and classroom management" (p. 178). Moreover, the lessons confirmed the positive voices addressed by the previous studies that teachers can learn something new (see Moradkhani, 2019) and various teaching techniques (see Vo & Nguyen, 2010) through observing classrooms and discussing the observations with peers. With this in mind, we hold the strength of "collaborative, oral reflection approaches over an individual, written ones" (Moradkhani, 2019, p. 68), such as teaching journals (Lee, 2007) or diaries (Farrell, 2004), which are often done only to fulfill an institutional requirement, follow box-ticking exercises, and, therefore, result in an inauthentic reflection that fails to culminate teachers' professional growth (as concerned by Walsh & Mann, 2015).

The setting for this CF was a teacher preparation course on how to teach English learners, and there were clear models for the students in the course on teaching and learning the language skills of speaking/listening (see Farrell, 1998), writing (see Farrell, 2001, 2006), and reading (see Carolan & Wang, 2012). One of the goals of the course was to prepare future secondary content teachers (across disciplines), who were themselves primarily monolingual English speakers, to successfully teach in a class where their future students come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, students were asked, to the degree that they were able, to put themselves in the place of their future students who are English learners. From this vantage, students in the course learned how to teach language skills that provide appropriate scaffolds for English learners at differing levels of English language proficiency to be able to participate fairly in their future classes. Overall, in addition to those targeted areas on our observation protocol, we believe that, from this CF, we also gained pedagogical lessons related to promoting language skills, which directly apply to (EFL) language classrooms.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

Results from this study showed that, first and foremost, the CF provided various pedagogical lessons for the observed lecturer (T) and the critical friend (C). Second, the CF protocols seemed to work well; we learned from one another through the use of video recording, observation notes, and interview sessions. The processes by which we engaged in our CF addressed Farrell's (2001) concern on building trust, doing healthy confrontation, and readiness to participate in a CF. Furthermore, the CF involving a non-native English speaker critical friend (a doctoral student) and a native English speaker teacher (his doctoral advisor) contributes to the literature that overwhelmingly includes collaborations among students-students and teachers-teachers from the same nationality and cultural backgrounds. The fact that this CF includes an international student from a non-English speaking country is yet another novel contribution to the literature in this area. Overall, the results of this CF support Moradkhani's (2019) belief in the strengths of collaborative and oral reflection approaches to better support fellow educational teachers in their professional development.

Despite the success of the CF in the current study, we recognize some limitations. For instance, there was an unequal institutional status between T and C in the CF. Not only was C one of T's graduate students, but C was not actually teaching at the time of this study; thus, he could not invite T to observe his teaching practices.

Another limitation relates to how the technology was implemented. C put his video camera at the back corner of the class, and as a result, he could neither hear clearly what the students discussed at their table nor what T said when he interacted with some students during the group discussion.

A third limitation relates to the large scope of the observation protocols in this CF (e.g., building a relation and trust, observing and recording classrooms, watching teaching videos together, and attending interview sessions to discuss the teaching practices). We acknowledge that the scope of these observation protocols is likely more time-consuming and requires a greater commitment than many individuals have. Teachers with busy schedules and heavy workloads would likely be reluctant to participate in a CF of this scope. Our response is to encourage interested teachers to reduce the scope of the observation protocols and focus on one or two mutually agreed upon dimensions.

A fourth limitation exists in teaching contexts where people are not used to speaking openly about what they think and accepting feedback or different views (Wachob, 2011). The CF project described in this study required an openness to collaboration, strong communication skills, deep trust, and willingness to be open with others. Vo and Nguyen (2010) provide guidance to teachers who work in settings where the habit of collaboration is less common or expected. A fifth limitation, like Farrell (1998), is that C did not have a chance to make further class observations to check whether T's planned changes were carried in practice. C was not able to continue his observations, and, due to competing responsibilities on both C's and T's time, interview sessions typically did not last longer more than one hour. Given more time and more continuity, T and C could have deepened their CF, analyzing the various dynamics and pedagogical lessons available from this course.

To address some of these limitations, first, we suggest those (e.g., teachers, practitioners, and students) who are interested in doing a similar CF to work with a small number of individuals (see Carolan & Wang, 2012; Farrell, 2001) and have freedom for selecting partners with whom to collaborate (Gün, 2011).

Second, more evidence is needed to conclude whether the protocols in this study and the teaching observation framework by Moradkhani (2019) are a successful guide, particularly given the CF profiles in this study.

Future researchers might also replicate this study by implementing similar research protocols in language classes (e.g., writing, speaking, listening, or reading) in Southeast Asian countries. The researchers could then conduct a post-observation after the meetings to observe if there are any expected changes in an observed teacher's classroom.

Future researchers can also try to do the CF with someone they did not know very well for a long time (e.g., less than a year) and find out if they had similar results to what has been discussed in this paper.

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