

Responding to Observation: How Student Teachers' Use of their Counselor's Notes Support their Preparation

Respondiendo a la observación: Cómo apoya la preparación de los estudiantes-maestros el uso de las notas del profesor consejero

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Several practices for teacher preparation remain as essential today as they have been for decades. Among them, observation of lessons continues to be highly popular to support and evaluate student teachers' learning processes. The following pages deal with an experience in which observation was given an alternative perspective in the preparation of future teachers. Sixteen student teachers who constantly responded to their counselor's observation notes participated in the study. Exploring the participants' feelings about their counselor's notes and the nature of their responses to those records were the objectives of the study. At the end, a magnifying glass, a puzzle, a book and a map emerged as valuable metaphors to explain student teachers' use of this preparation tool.

Key words: Pre-service teacher preparation, teaching practice, practicum, supervision, observation, reflective practice, observation instruments, student teachers' learning

Algunas prácticas para la preparación de profesores continúan siendo tan esenciales hoy en día como lo han sido por décadas. Entre éstas, la observación de clases goza de gran popularidad para apoyar y evaluar el proceso de futuros profesores. Las siguientes páginas relatan una experiencia en la cual la observación adquirió un perfil alternativo en la preparación de los futuros docentes. Dieciséis practicantes, quienes constantemente respondieron a las notas de observación, participaron en el estudio tendiente a explorar sus opiniones respecto a las notas del tutor y la naturaleza de sus respuestas a estos registros. Al final, una lupa, un rompecabezas, un libro y un mapa surgieron como metáforas significativas para explicar el uso que los practicantes hicieron de esta herramienta en su preparación.

Palabras claves: Preparación de futuros docentes, práctica docente, supervisión, observación, práctica reflexiva, instrumentos de observación, aprendizaje de estudiantes practicantes

INTRODUCTION

Through the experience I describe along these pages, student teachers were encouraged to adopt a central role in their preparation; they were not only university students being observed and evaluated while they taught during their teaching practice, but also they were mainly “the teachers” who guided their own learning. These prospective teachers had complete access to their counselor’s observation notes and, according to their needs as well as interests, they used those records of their former lessons in directing their learning process. Thus, observation was planned as a liberating preparatory experience in which a counselor tried to set conditions to open its scope from a tradition of approving or disapproving supervision into a nourishing practice.

The next pages describe an alternative means that I, a counselor, have incorporated for using my observation notes in the preparation of student teachers at Universidad Nacional. Furthermore, I share the findings of a small-scale research project which explored how student teachers responded to my observation notes and how they felt about those records. To begin with, I provide information about the context of the study. Then, I review some basic principles from what different authors have studied to contribute to understanding the role of observation as an essential practice in pre-service teacher preparation.

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The teaching practice in which the study took place is a component of the Bachelor of Education Programme in Philology and Languages at Universidad Nacional. After two previous courses in ELT methodology, student teachers work in developing their teaching skills with the help of a counselor during their practice. By means of conferences, journals, observation and various tasks focused on the participants’ needs, including responding to their counselor’s observation notes, student teachers are exposed to a reflective approach.

Student teachers register for teaching practicum for a semester, generally teaching an average of two lessons a week. Most of them work in primary or secondary courses and they receive support, on the one hand, from their university counselor; on the other, from the school cooperating teacher. Cooperating teachers regularly provide student teachers with suggestions that they consider relevant for pre-service teachers’ improvement in the practice, whereas the counselor has organized a working scheme that integrates observation with other tools for student teachers’ preparation.

Twelve female and four male student teachers participated in this study during one of the semesters in the years 2003, 2004 or 2005. I use pseudonyms to protect their identity in keeping with a written consent form that they signed. Their ages ranged from 21 to 26 years. It was a heterogeneous group in terms of their personalities. A good number of them seemed out-going and self-confident whereas a couple appeared reserved and shy. A table containing specific information about participants can be found in Appendix 1.

In regards to their assignments, fourteen of them worked in primary while two taught in secondary school. All the institutions involved except one were public schools. Most of these young women and men had not had any previous experience in teaching. Four of them had taught for a short time, but a very different population from the target students in their teaching practice courses. Only one of them had wide experience in the area. Concerning their attitudes towards teaching, they harbored different feelings about their future profession and the teaching practice itself. Their life histories told me of different experiences they had faced as learners along their early school years.

I was the student teachers’ counselor and researcher. When this study was finished, I had worked supporting pre-service teachers in the teaching practicum at the University for four years. My job also included implementing ELT (English Language Teaching) methodology courses at about the same time, so I had previously shared

pedagogical experiences with the participants. Moreover, most of pre-service teachers' students also knew me from previous courses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Implementing and evaluating the impact of different components in pre-service teacher preparation programs has constantly been an issue of interest in the teacher education community. Thus, supervising student teachers, which refers to the guidance of these future educators during their teaching practice, has implied the integration of numerous alternatives for their and their counselors' practice.

Changing views in the conception of supervision calls for an integral observation process of student teachers' performances. There is a growing interest in preparing reflective practitioners, so after their initial experiences they can actively contribute to their own development. Henceforth, counselors' observations need to imply much more than observing the patient and prescribing medicine. Richards (1998: 142) depicted observation as a practice that needs to go beyond a mere diagnosis; the data we gather from looking at teaching practices in classrooms can increase our comprehension of the reasons which cause our decisions and actions. Gaies and Bowers (1990: 167) mention, when referring to clinical supervision, that analysis and evaluation need to go hand in hand throughout the observation process. Likewise, an investigation regarding the relation of student teachers' reflexivity with their practicum performance and clinical supervision carried out in Malaysia by Seng (2005) determined that "supervisors should be trained not only in the practice of clinical supervision but more importantly in a role that could ensure the enhancement function of the supervisor to promote reflection" (p. 10).

Pre-service teacher preparatory programs generally combine observation with other exercises to help participants in their initial encounters with their future profession. For instance, involving student teachers in research has turned into one of the

alternatives to improve their preparation. With no doubt, observation as a key element in teachers' investigation emerges as one of the most important practices to help future teachers learn. Studies conducted by Price (2001), as well as Quintero et al. (2003) have revealed that experiences which provide student teachers with tools to explore their teaching and context necessarily lead to a broader understanding of who they are as teachers. Furthermore, change as a synonym of improvement in student teachers' plans and actions can be a consequence of the various opportunities for learning that action research might give rise to.

Another study I would like to mention is Cárdenas and Faustino's (2003). Their teacher education program at Universidad del Valle (Colombia) included exercises to encourage student teachers' reflection as part of a general classroom research component. In regards to observation practices, they mentioned how data collected from perusing or examining lessons was used in discussions between teachers and student teachers. The authors highlighted the positive situation that through observation "students became aware of aspects of classroom life that they had not noticed before such as their own reactions towards activities, procedures and interactions" (p.36).

Gervais and Correa (2004) have also incorporated observation as a pillar in student teachers' reflective practice. They have planned a study to examine the effect that student teachers' explanations of their teaching has had in their practice. Pre-service teachers would be involved in the use of video recording to look at their own practice; then, they would share the recordings with cooperating teachers and teaching practice counselors. Participants' observation through video recording is expected to trigger not only enriching discussions about teaching, but also a community to learn from each other.

THE OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

Guiding student teachers to understand the purposes and procedures in using the observation

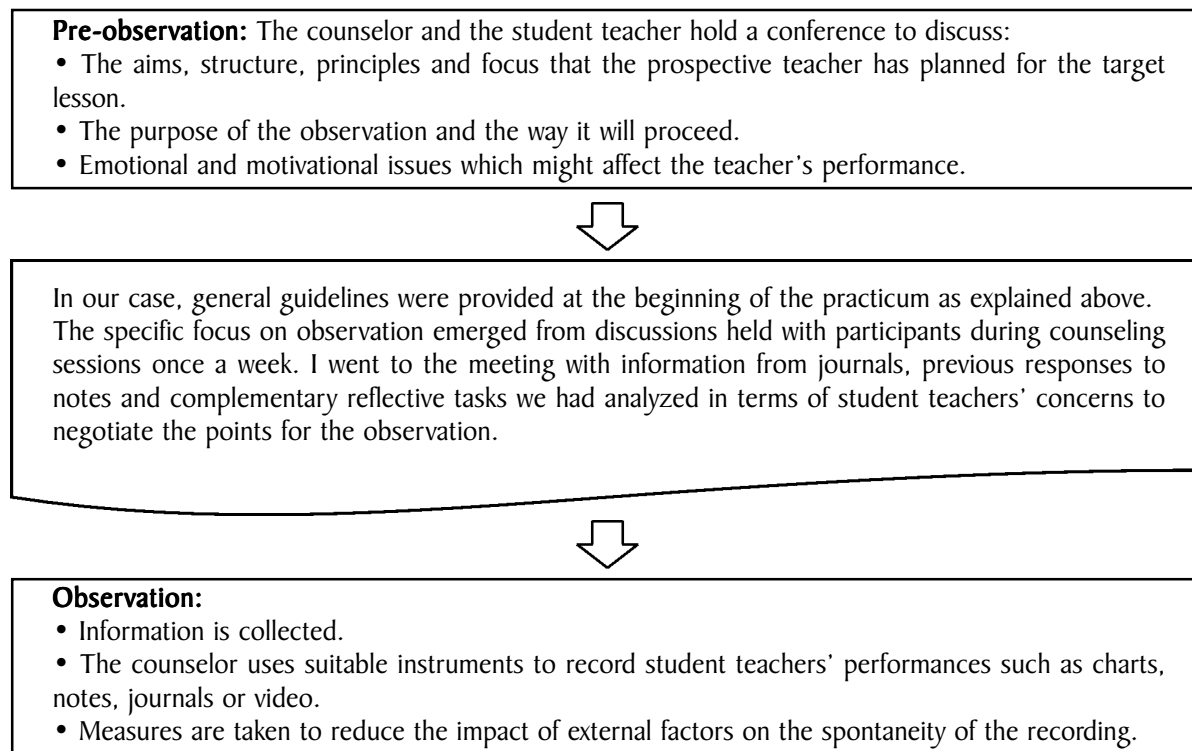
worksheet was a key issue when I introduced the teaching practice guidelines each term. This instrument had two sections (Appendix 2). The first one was available for the counselor's notes. I recorded my observation of student teachers' performances in classes by means of ethnographic field notes. Pentimalli (2005: 4) mentions that the purpose of this kind of notes is "to portray social scenes played by actors during the performance of their activity and record dialogues between practitioners". I did not only capture naturally occurring events, interaction, verbal and body language as much as possible but also details of relevant classroom scene elements. The description tried to be as objective as possible, avoiding judgments or value-laden comments.

The second section of the worksheet was available for student teachers' written reactions while they read my notes. From the beginning of their practice, prospective teachers were encouraged to respond to the notes; they wrote what they regarded as important in relation to the lesson they taught. Through my

experience, I saw how their responses corresponded to their personal styles. Some of them would write a lot responding to each single aspect pictured through my records; others would write in a more general fashion. Additionally, it was not rare to find single key words, symbols or pictures as part of participants' responses. Concerning frequency, some would answer the notes once a week from the start, whereas others would take a little longer to initiate a systematic work.

The observation instrument was a component of the reflective process that I prepared to support student teachers along their practice. There seems to be a consensus among different authors such as Gaies and Bowers (1990); Rondall and Thorton (2001); and Diaz-Maggioli (2003) that a framework for observation, incorporating analysis and evaluation in teachers' development, follows certain steps, namely: pre-observation, observation and post-observation. The following charts will relate general guidelines regarding the three stages previously mentioned (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003), with the target experience I am describing throughout this paper.

Diagram 1. General guidelines for the observation procedure (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003).



I recorded student teachers' performances using one column of the observation worksheet I designed (Appendix 2) and ethnographic field notes (A full description of this instrument was provided at the beginning of the section.)

I sat at the back of the room. I did not intervene in the development of the lesson unless the student teachers involved me in activities or I had to help them when emergencies took place.



Post-observation: The counselor and the student teacher hold a conference to evaluate, analyze, and provide feedback. Three possibilities for these meetings are:

- *Mirroring coaching:* Prospective teachers have the notes and analyze them on their own.
- *Expert coaching:* The counselor studies the information collected and provides advice.
- *Collaborative coaching:* Student teachers and counselors share analytical perspectives as a reflective exercise.



In our case, *mirror* and *collaborative* coaching were adopted for feedback sessions.

- I handed in the worksheets with my observation records to participants who wrote their reactions to them and brought them back for the counseling sessions once a week.
- The notes the participants wrote substantiated feedback sessions. Their responses contributed to guide our discussions about their teaching approach, the school context and curricular issues. Allowing their free expression, I tried to create a relaxing atmosphere. I fuelled the conversation through comments or questions that I found to be relevant in supporting their reflection.
- We completed the cycle by choosing or creating reflective exercises to address difficulties identified along the process; for instance, self-reflection tasks, planning or reading exercises.

RESEARCH METHOD

I followed the principles of a qualitative approach to develop this study. Following what Stake (1995: 49-50) explains about this perspective in research, the exploration of student teachers' feelings and responses to my observation notes was seen as an integrated phenomenon which took place under natural conditions in the context of the teaching practice. I concentrated on observing student teachers' feelings and responses to determine and explain their nature. Along the process, my interpretation of the phenomenon required interacting with participants' perspectives.

Among the various research designs in the qualitative approach, I adopted a descriptive case

study (Merriam, 1988). Since I explored five groups of student teachers, it was a multi-site study. Case study methodology was a suitable choice since it clearly defines the purposes of this project. My aim was to focus on units, groups of student teachers, to describe their feelings and responses to my observation notes. Throughout the process, I identified and understood the characteristic and constituent factors of the phenomenon, as well as the relations among them.

Finally, current research implied fieldwork in which the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection. I collected data from participants through a questionnaire (Appendix 3). The answers that participants provided contributed

toward determining how they perceived the observation instrument, the notes that the counselor wrote about their lessons and the processes they followed while they worked with the notes. With the purpose of clarifying or specifying their views in the questionnaires, participants answered questions in a non-structured interview when it was necessary. Student teachers' responses to my notes included in the observation worksheets (Appendix 2) provided the biggest amount of data that I analyzed. I gathered all the worksheets containing student teachers' responses that I had stored during five consecutive semesters.

THE FINDINGS

My analysis of the information gathered corresponded to Hubbard and Power's (1993: 65) view of this process as "a way of seeing and seeing again to bring order, structure and meaning to data."

I went through the data carefully examining the information to identify and understand how it related to the two questions in this study. I analyzed data from the five groups as belonging to one case. My intention was to produce a general explanation for the phenomena.

I used colors to codify the data and to help myself group what was common in the information. Using techniques from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) such as making comparisons and questioning what I initially found, I established patterns which I then labeled.

After this initial organization and identification of data, I engaged in grouping emerging concepts into categories according to their commonalities. As I carried out the grouping and regrouping of concepts, I took notes of my reflection about specific features I could see in the findings. The next step was naming the categories and in so doing, I used metaphors. Cortazzi and Jin (1999: 149) support the use of metaphors in teaching and learning since "a metaphor can easily be seen as a bridge, etymologically, carrying over, from one side to another. It links and comprises the known and the unknown, the tangible and the less tangible, the

familiar and the new". I thought of metaphors as a tool not only to substantiate my explanation of what each category meant, but also to capture the multiple possibilities of meaning pertinent to the concepts. Associating familiar elements from ordinary life with the concepts that categories defined, I sought to express the complexity of the phenomena under study through the richness of language.

Consolidating the analysis involved the definition of categories in terms of their characteristics and the exploration of the relations among concepts. A key issue for me was always to conduct a research process which would ensure reliability and validity in what I found. It was triangulation related to my use of various sources of data that I used to solidify my findings (Merriam, 1988). My categories emerged from the continuous comparison of student teachers' perceptions recorded in questionnaires and interviews with their responses to my observation notes. Additionally, I contrasted those categories with theory.

The analysis I developed guided me to establish that similar to travelers who adapt basic equipment throughout their journey, student teachers made a kit of the notes to support their preparation through the practicum. Let us see which elements they chose to take and how they use them.

A Magnifying Glass of their Classes

Student teachers started their journey through their teaching practice experience bringing a bagful of expectations, questions and fears. As travelers often do, they engaged in planning where to go and how to reach their destination. To a big extent, it was from the means incorporated in the teaching practice that they found initial support to begin their preparation. In the particular case of their counselor's observation notes, participants reacted in different ways when they saw the notes. "*My reaction is sometimes surprised or I see funny things that happen...*" (Lina), "*I say to myself, Mr...(the counselor), sí que es detallista!*" ("*He is perceptive*") (Edison). Student teachers' perceptions concerning my observation notes

seemed to change along the term. *"I would say the observation notes made me feel scared and worried. At the beginning, I had not clear they were just a detailed description of my lessons... Then, I understood how they worked and I found very useful data about my teaching practice."* (Ximena)

Apparently, for these future teachers the quality of the notes had an impact on how they assimilated their content and the way they used them. We decide to look in a mirror because we believe that the image it shows us is what we really are at a specific time. Participants characterized my notes as containing *objective, specific, systematic* and very *concrete information*. Most of them considered these features in the notes positive. Some also remarked that the notes *"were no judgments ...no pressure"* (Carmen). Richards and Lockhart's (1994: 12) views seemed to match the previous opinions of participants when they mentioned *"for observation to be viewed as a positive rather than a negative experience, the observer's function should be limited to that of gathering information"*.

In contrast to the previous feelings, Edison, a student teacher who initially would not respond to the notes nor write in his journal, was the only participant who expressed a negative perception about the notes. He was usually anxious to obtain teaching tips from the counselor to solve problems in his lesson. He expressed that *"They were tiring for me...sometimes I felt very bored because when I saw them (a lot of descriptions) I felt lazy to answer them."* Later, Edison would change his attitude towards the notes.

Data informed me how most of the students perceived that through the notes they constantly looked at themselves as if they were seeing through

a glass. *"It is like a mirror where student teachers can see how the classes are developed..."* (Edison). Participants regarded the previous characteristic of the notes as a benefit since, on their own, they could not be completely aware of everything happening around them. *"The observation sheets made me aware of several things which took place through my lessons that I had not noticed. It is totally true that we (Ts) focus our attention on a specific part of the classroom and plenty of things become dark"* (Ximena).

A Puzzle to Foster Reflection

Beyond the mere realization of other events occurring in their classes, the notes allowed student teachers to think deeply about their lessons. *"The notes helped me to see my class in a much more systematic way. Thus, I could analyze many situations"* (Carmen).

Student teachers read the notes and often determined on their own what they considered problematic situations. Bearing the previous in mind, it seems that frequently the counselor's notes narrated situations that participants interpreted as difficulties in their teaching; these events became puzzles. For instance, Julia responded in the following way to my notes.

Deliberation processes were essential when student teachers read the observation notes and found a puzzle to solve. The next answer included in Rebeca's questionnaire refers to this, *"They (the notes) made me reflect on my role as teacher because it showed me the importance of different issues we have to take into account when we are teachers"*.

Reflecting upon the difficulties that they identified through the notes involved the student teachers in the self-questioning and self-appraisal

Description of the lesson	Student's comments
<p><i>St is in front of the board writing the content of a quiz. She writes:</i></p> <p>Name: Last Name:</p>	<p><i>I've had some troubles when I'm checking quizzes. I haven't found names of students on them.</i></p>

of their attitudes and actions in the lessons. Turning back to participants' direct responses to my notes, the next is a concrete sample to see the kind of reflection they often evidenced. Jasbleidy established a close relation with her students. Her biggest concern during her assignment was to see that students' social and economic conditions did not stop them from developing an efficient learning process. Reading the description I made of her way of working with students about "telling time" generated her writing of a question directed to herself. Through her explanation, she revealed not only her interpretation, but also her analysis to place students' development of general knowledge, "telling time", as a priority over their learning of English.

for her teaching. The next response reveals how she evaluated her own practice.

Different authors in the area of teacher education such as Pollard and Tann (1993: 11) consider teachers' "continually monitoring, evaluation and revision of their own practice" essential since it is part of their reflection.

Among the issues mirrored by student teachers through their responses, it was common to find their self-monitoring of the methodology, development of their role, teaching context, and feelings.

A Book to Revise Referential Knowledge

Much of what student teachers wrote as responses to my notes corresponded to the pedagogical principles they followed and the

Description of the lesson	Student's comments
<i>St goes around checking individual Ss' work, explains using the clock. She explains through English and miming. Ss: express it is clear "marcar la hora" they say.</i>	<i>My concern at this point had to do with the lack of knowledge of the ways Ss can express time in their mother tongue. And I wonder -How can I teach something in English if they don't even know it in Spanish?</i>

Description of the lesson	Student's comments
<i>St: She is checking homework and she has assigned students to solve a puzzle.</i>	<i>This part of checking homework was great because it was much more organized and the puzzle gave me enough time to read all Ss' commitments.</i>

Asking questions, as in the previous case, was a common practice for some participants. This practice revealed their deliberation upon what happened along their lessons.

Furthermore, looking at themselves through the observation notes triggered student teachers' self-evaluations. Rebeca commented in her questionnaire, "We also noticed our weakness and strengths as teachers".

Luz Marina had never taught before. Her assignment in primary school was a tough experience at the beginning. However, along the term she seemed to become aware of key issues

knowledge they had about their context. Edison said in an interview about reading the notes, "I realized that there are many things I need to know about and I have to find more information about methodology by myself." In this sense, the notes became pages of a book which encouraged them to revise their knowledge. I have called referential the knowledge they recorded through their writing because it came from sources that student teachers relied on.

The source of the knowledge prospective teachers brought about varied. On the one hand, it came from theory that had been studied in previous courses. University professors, books or

academic spaces played a role here. It might also be that these principles either had been discussed during the practicum in counseling sessions or that student teachers had researched them, moved by their needs. In an interview to clarify information she had written in her questionnaire, Lina answered *"We (student teachers) read and compared situations in the notes with theory, so we analyzed and realized important things"*. Additionally, a good deal of this knowledge also embraced prospective teachers' own beliefs, and they reaffirmed them once again through their responses. They seemed to write their own book of knowledge and principles.

Referential knowledge contributed to participants' justification of what they tried to do; it supported their practice by giving meaning to it. Johnson (1999: 2) sees knowledge and beliefs at the core of teachers' reasoning to help them in their own understanding of teaching.

Carlos' teaching practice was a bittersweet experience. He was not sure about becoming a teacher and at the end of the term, he had decided to stop teaching for a while. Nevertheless, he always expressed interest in pedagogical topics and spent additional time discussing and exchanging views on education with me. In the next response to my notes, he seemed to reassure himself about his reasons to involve students in self-evaluation; he explains the pedagogical principles behind his selection of a particular means of assessment for his pupils.

The learning process that was revealed through this exercise showed that student teachers not only revised their knowledge, but also made connections between theory and practice; they monitored whether what happened demonstrated a coherent relation of principles with their reality in the lessons.

Very early in her teaching practice, Carmen decided to look for a methodology to handle large groups. This curious and hardworking pre-service teacher decided to shape her lesson within cooperative learning, and guided by her keen reflective style, she adapted Kagan's teaching and learning views for her lessons.

The possibility of looking back at what they are doing, thinking about it and revising knowledge might lead travelers to propose coherent alternatives in the planning of their route. Let us see in the coming paragraphs how answering their counselor's notes supported participants' projects to plan how to improve their practice.

A Map to Plan Possible Routes to Go

"This instrument make things clear, and helps me to plan strategies in order to work harder..." expressed Ximena in her questionnaire, meaning that my record of their lessons supported the planning process. On her side, Carmen expressed, *"You might be able to think about it, reflect and the most important thing: to find solution to the issues you face in the classroom"*. Therefore, the

Description of the lesson	Student's comments
<i>St: "Now, se van a calificar en estos aspectos. He writes criteria on the board: responsabilidad, respeto, aprendizaje, mejoramiento"</i>	<i>I kept in mind the self-evaluation because it has to do with the democratic classroom and at the same time, helps Ss to develop reflection, honesty and critical attitude toward themselves.</i>

Description of the lesson	Student's comments
<i>Ss: Calls monitors to the front and handed in postcards forms to monitors who deliver those to their groups. She draws on the board a hand up and an arrow with a question form. She walks around explaining kids that the sign means they have to put their hands up if they have any question.</i>	<i>This is a strategy from Kagan, cooperative learning. That is how I can avoid that kids come to me asking me the same things at the same time. Monitors are a great tool in terms of management.</i>

notes acted similarly to a map telling them where they stood and providing information on their whereabouts so they could design future courses of action. Evidence from participants' reaction to my notes, as Lina's response below, confirmed data from questionnaires.

Lina worked with a group of enthusiastic fourth graders. Promoting her students' commitment to do homework was one of her aims. Despite students' resistance and lack of institutional support, she never gave up. Next, she comments on her intention to improve her procedure to check homework.

The plans participants mentioned fell into different categories. A good number referred to

difficulties in their teaching. Thus, they posed problems and engaged in reflection to understand what happened in their practices. They deliberated mostly through their self-appraisal and the questioning of their teaching. In addition, participants' responses showed that the most common topics for their deliberation were the methodology, development of their role, teaching context, and feelings. Exploring student teachers' reflections in relation to these issues emerges as a possible question for further study.

The revision of previous knowledge was also a characteristic I identified in the analysis of data. The group of pre-service teachers referred to teaching principles from their own beliefs and other

Description of the lesson	Student's comments
<p><i>St: Asked Ss to go to their lines so she can check homework. She starts going to the first line.</i> <i>Ss: The ones in the first line get ready and in the other lines some talk, others move around or visit their peers.</i></p>	<p><i>I can sit down in my desk and ask Ss to come one by one to show me the homework so I can see the rest of them.</i></p>

future teaching actions as alternatives to correct or continue what they did. Other times, they made statements about the development of actions in relation to their own preparation which included being more analytic, observing more in detail what happened and improving their attitude.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To close this article, I will specially state the answers for the questions I posed to guide the research. Furthermore, I discuss how what was found can support our job in preparing student teachers through the observation we make of their lessons.

Most prospective teachers' perceptions of my observation notes referred to the help they found to become informed about their performance and classes. Likewise, their responses to those records revealed that they gained awareness of their own performance through the experience.

The description participants obtained of their lessons made them aware of what they regarded as

sources. Their constant reaffirmation of that knowledge seemed to support participants' conceptualization of their practice.

By means of the awareness, reflection and conceptualization that their counselor's observation notes triggered, student teachers came to understand more their teaching and to propose solutions to their problems.

Responding to observation notes is an exercise students can develop on their own, based on their style, priorities and interests. This kind of approach to feedback about observation contributes to easing student teachers' stress and to increase their confidence to approach their preparation process honestly. Likewise, characteristics of the notes highlighted by participants such as objective, non-judgmental and no pressuring reveal the importance of using friendly observation instruments.

In that kind of environment, reflective processes such as self-evaluation and self-inquiry seemed to take place. Therefore, providing student teachers with enough autonomy and non-threatening

contexts to work regarding observation of their practices can be a key for their growing. There is the potential to foster autonomy in that responding to observation can turn out to be a liberating exercise for student teachers.

When students become the center of the feedback process responding to their counselor's observation notes, they might come better prepared to counseling sessions. What they might have achieved on their own could move them faster from initial thinking and reflective processes to deeper deliberation. Moreover, advisors gain a better understanding of student teachers' actions and attitudes when they share the responses to the observation. Finally, the planning of conferences and tasks can be based on real needs.

The features I identified in participants' responses to my notes seem to have a connection with the Teaching Practice cycle that Rondall and Thornton (2001: 47) outlined to point out essential factors in the experiential learning of teachers and with Pablo Freire's (1970) problem-posing method. Rondall and Thornton include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation as part of the cycle. Freire's method includes the following three general phases: identifying and naming the problem, analyzing the causes of the problem and finding solutions. How the previous approaches to learning relate to the finding in this study can be the objective of future exploration.

Finally, the findings in the study have led me to design a new observation format that resembles the four features identified in participants' responses and opinions, (See Appendix 4). I am looking forward to using this new instrument in future experiences.

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APPENDIX I: INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

NAME	YEAR/ SEMESTER	AGE	GRADE	SCHOOL
Rebeca	2003 I	22	5 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Araminta	2003 I	26	5 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Carmen	2003 I	21	4 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Amanda	2002 I	22	4 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Lina	2003 II	22	4 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Edinson	2003 II	26	5 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Ximena	2003 II	22	4 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Jenny	2003 II	22	6 th	IED Palermo
Carlos	2004 I	22	4 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Julia	2004 I	23	5 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Luz Marina	2004 I	23	3 rd	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Sergio	2004 II	23	6 th	IED Palermo
Andrea	2004 II	24	4 th	IED Palermo
Polina	2004 II	25	4 th	Instituto Pedagógico Ramírez Montufar (IPARM)
Jazbleidy	2005 I	26	5 th	IED República del Ecuador
Ernesto	2005 I	26	5 th	IED Palermo

APPENDIX 2: OBSERVATION WORKSHEET FOR THE STUDY

CLASS OBSERVATION

Number

Student Teacher: _____

Date: _____

Grade: _____

Time: _____

DESCRIPTION OF LESSON (COUNSELOR'S NOTES)	COMMENTS/QUESTIONS (ST' RESPONSES)

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE TO EXPLORE PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEIR COUNSELOR'S OBSERVATION NOTES

Dear Student Teacher,

The purpose of the following questionnaire is to collect information to help me see the effectiveness of some of the instruments I use to guide you during the teaching practice work. In that sense, I think you can help me with relevant information to analyze how they function. Your cooperation would contribute to improve what I can do for other student teachers in the future. Thanks.

1. What do you think about the observation notes I wrote about your classes?

The form: _____

The content: _____

2. What kind of description do the notes make about your practice and teaching situation?

3. How did you usually react when you read my observation notes about your class? What did you do? Why?

4. How did you feel about these notes? Why?

5. Did the observation notes play a role in your practice? Which?

6. What can you say about this instrument as a working tool?

7. Would you change anything about the notes? What?



APPENDIX 4: PROPOSAL FOR A REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION FORMAT

Number

Student Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Grade: _____ Time: _____

While you read your counselor's observation notes, use the form below to reflect on your lesson.

WRITE AN ISSUE OF YOUR INTEREST FROM THE NOTES:	INTERPRET AND EXPLAIN 	SELF-EVALUATE 
What did your counselor write about it?	How do you explain what happened?	What does it tell you about your teaching?
What do you know about this issue? (Principles/ ideas: from talks with people, readings...)		
How do you relate what you know to what happened?		
What future actions can you take?		