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UNIVERSITY PRACTITIONERS' CRITICAL REFLECTIONS FROM THE COLLABORATIVE MODEL.

REFLEXIONES CRÍTICAS DE LOS PROFESIONALES UNIVERSITARIOS DESDE EL MODELO COLABORATIVO

Luis Eduardo Heredia¹

Monica Torres²

Danilo Yépez y Adriana Lara³

Adriana Lara-Velarde⁴

Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo.

¹ *Eduardo Heredia-Arboleda*^{1*}

Master in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Professor at the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages School

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4099-9811>

eheredia@unach.edu.ec

² *Mónica Torres-Cajas*¹

PhD in Education

Professor at the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages School

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2099-7245>

mtorres@unach.edu.ec

³ *Danilo Yépez-Oviedo*¹

Master in Higher Education

Professor at the Language Center

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0265-7797>

dyeppez@unach.edu.ec

⁴ *Adriana Lara-Velarde*¹

Master in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Professor at the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages School

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2270-6843>

ABSTRACT

This investigation aimed to report University practitioners' critical reflections generated from Gosling's third POT model to raise awareness of institutional authorities and educationalists on the importance of consolidating POT programs on a regular basis. This qualitative case study was conducted with a sample of fourteen instructors currently working in a Public University situated in the Ecuadorian highlands. This group of academic practitioners was divided into pairs so that seven subgroups resulted from this division. Each subgroup worked firstly on the collaborative model process, which contemplated observation forms; then, they executed critical reflections; this data was gathered in collaborative expository essays and encapsulated in this manuscript. The obtained results disclose a high proclivity towards ongoing professional development, said differently; there is a considerable desire on the part of our participants to cultivate a teaching evaluation philosophy on a rolling basis. In general, this study had a positive repercussion on those involved due to its substantial interchangeable reflections.

KEYWORDS: Critical Reflections, Evaluation Culture, POT (Peer Observation of Teaching)

RESUMEN

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo reportar las reflexiones críticas de profesionales universitarios generadas a partir del tercer modelo POT de Gosling, a fin de concientizar a las autoridades institucionales y educadores sobre la importancia de consolidar programas POT de forma regular. Este estudio de caso cualitativo se realizó con una muestra de catorce instructores que actualmente trabajan en una Universidad Pública ubicada en la sierra ecuatoriana. Este grupo de profesionales académicos fue dividido en pares, de modo que siete subgrupos fueron el resultado de esta división. Cada subgrupo trabajó en primer lugar en el proceso del modelo colaborativo, que contempló formas de observación; luego, ejecutaron reflexiones críticas; estos datos se recopilaban en ensayos expositivos colaborativos y se resumieron en este manuscrito. Los resultados obtenidos revelan una alta propensión al desarrollo profesional continuo, dicho de otra manera; Existe un deseo considerable por parte de nuestros participantes de cultivar una filosofía de evaluación de la enseñanza de manera continua. En general, este estudio tuvo una repercusión positiva en los involucrados debido a sus reflexiones sustanciales intercambiables.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Reflexiones Críticas, Cultura Evaluativa, POT (Peer Observation of Teaching)

INTRODUCTION

The deficiency to be examined in this paper is possibly one of the most preoccupying problems in some Ecuadorian Public Universities due to the infringement of ethical parameters in the instructors' internal evaluation. The employed evaluation procedure in Public and Private cases consists of Self-evaluation, Hetero-evaluation, and Co-evaluation (Almuiñas & Galarza, 2013, p. 92).

The Self-evaluation refers to practitioners rating their academic performance through a particular and well-designed scale. The Hetero-evaluation is oriented to Academic authorities who render a score to the professorship based on fixed accomplishments planned over a particular time. In the co-evaluation, students and University instructors assign a score to any practitioner, randomly selected by an Institutional IT system.

Somehow the self-evaluation and the hetero-evaluation are appropriately done in the University

where this study was carried out. Nonetheless, the Co-evaluation refrains from being complete and reliable because of some instructors' fear of being judged. Furthermore, the Co-evaluation rating scale, despite the fact it compulsorily adheres to either practitioners and students at the end of a school year, only the apprentices can evaluate the professorship adequately due to the face-to-face interaction along a semester.

As to the practitioners, they must rate other co-workers' teaching performance without having attended at least once to one of their classes; this provokes discomfort in the University Instructors as they frequently receive scores they do not deserve. Appraising instructors' academic performance without in-situ observation is a severe ethical issue which firstly impacts their confidence, and then on the institutional prestige; therefore, the peer co-evaluation must be a public affair embedded not only in national policies but also in institutional regulation policies (Motallebzadeh, Hosseinnia & Domskey, 2017, p. 11).

To counteract the ethical issues of teaching co-evaluation, peer observation of teaching programs (POT) has been implanted in higher education, with more emphasis on the United Kingdom and Australia (Gosling, 2014, p. 16). These programs are a well-established method for evaluating and enhancing teaching quality in many higher education disciplines and are an important component of overall peer review of teaching.

The reviewer's interest relates to POT for Clinical Educators. In healthcare teaching including medicine, nursing, and pharmacy, there is sound evidence that well-designed and conducted POT programs, with adequate evaluative ethical parameters as well as the corresponding financial aid of Universities, are effective in enhancing teaching quality and teacher development (Aburahma & Mohamed, 2017; Buchanan & Parry, 2018; Cunningham & Lynch, 2016; Eva et al., 2016; Garcia, James, Bischof & Baroffio, 2017; Richard, Lillie, Mathias & McFarlane, 2019). The feedback generated by well-conducted POT sessions promotes observee' self-reflection and development (Dos Santos, 2017; Grainger, Crimmins & Burton, 2016; Jones & Gallen, 2016).

According to Gosling (2002), there are three types of POT models. The first is an evaluation model which involves assessment by a senior member of staff with the outcome being used for appraisal, promotion, and quality assurance (Beckman, Lee, Rohren & Pankratz, 2003). The second is a developmental model which involves an educationally-trained observer with the aim of enhancing the observee's teaching practice (McMahon, Barrett & O'Neil, 2007). The third and last is a peer-review or collaborative model which involves two teaching colleagues of equivalent experience and standing reviewing each other's teaching sessions and providing reciprocal, formative feedback (Bennett & Barp, 2008).

Gosling (2002) also points out that when Educational Institutions have no expertise in POT programs, they should initiate a pilot exploration with the most straightforward POT program, which is the collaborative model (p, 2). This decision is of utmost importance because if the observers are senior in a hierarchy to those observed, then issues of inequality and lack of mutuality can undermine the process (McDaniel et al., 2019; Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017; Reyes-Chua, Remollo-Mack & Vilorio, 2019).

The collaborative model seeks then to improve and stimulate teaching through dialogue and mutual reflection between two specialists with no, or limited content or subject experience, but always highlighting the essential points of observee's class and the possible aspects for professional development (Yiend, Weller & Kinchin, 2014, p. 466). So that the observee's teaching weaknesses have to be highly estimated at early stages; in doing so, a culture of acceptance for more complex POT programs will be eventually achieved, and thus collapsing the idea that the POT programs are invasive and punitive (Harvey, 2005; Hyland et al., 2018).

In any of the three aforementioned models, the POT process always begins with an episode of pre-observation, observation, post-observation, and the development of a formal report where the two involved instructors state their critical reflections (O'leary, 2020, p. 160). The critical reflections report, hence, summarizes the early stages with a final joint verbal accord between the observer and the observee; in most cases, this protocol ends only with such oral agreement, but it should also be materialized in reflective write-ups as evidence to strengthen future POT experiences in the same institution (Hamilton, 2018; O'Leary & Wood, 2017; UCU, 2013).

The most prominent items to be embodied in the critical reflection report are formative feedback on teaching content. Style or delivery of the teaching session about aspects that could benefit the observee from the review or subsequent reflection. Provision of concrete suggestions or general ideas for alternative approaches. Real desire to implement changes - or actively decide not to implement changes for specific reasons -, or participate in additional reflection as a direct result of the observation exercise (Santos & Miguel, 2016; Tenenberg, 2016).

So far, the reviewed literature outlines significant advantages of professional development which practitioners and consequently Universities can obtain from POT programs; however, the majority of this scientific literature is framed within the context of developed countries where the indefatigable sum of POT experiences has allowed its stakeholders to cultivate a satisfactory evaluation philosophy. In Ecuador, despite the regulations made by the state to safeguard the teaching co-evaluation in higher education, such philosophy has not entirely been achieved as there is a sensation that POT programs pretend to assault the academic freedom of University professorship (Aranda, 2013; Fajardo-Dack, 2016).

Incredibly such sensation is perceivable in the University where this study took place. That is why we believe it appropriate to examine Gosling's third POT model through this pilot project to move gradually towards more complex POT models, and thus reaching an inner thriving evaluation culture, just as foreign Universities. With this antecedent, we were interested in understanding the extent to which our participants perceive the in-situ collaborative model as an effective tool for professional development.

The statement above was fundamentally the initiative to begin this study with a group of University practitioners currently working in a Public University. This paper aimed to report their critical reflections generated from the collaborative model in order to raise awareness of institutional authorities, and educationalists on the importance of consolidating POT programs on a regular basis. Besides, the findings of this study provide school authorities with practical suggestions for creating in-house POT training programs, additionally to enact in other faculties a POT manual that emerged as a result of this inquiry.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Design

Before carrying out any research study, it is prudent to expose how the researcher's conception of the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge affected how the research was designed and conducted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). That is why, at an ontological level, we adhered to relativism, that is, as researchers, we assumed there are multiple realities which contemplated each member's experience as pertinent. Due to our relativist assumption, we considered this study's epistemological dimension as a variant construction that our participants assembled based on their own views, experience, and beliefs.

At a methodological level, this investigation was focused on the qualitative non-experimental paradigm, with transversal design and exploratory scope. The decision for framing this study within the qualitative paradigm was because it seeks to understand the perspective of the participants about the phenomena that surround them, to deepen their experiences, perspectives, opinions, and meanings, in other words, the way that the participants subjectively perceive their reality (Bryman, 2012).

Given the qualitative nature of the design, and considering that we desired to learn more from the collaborative model in the Ecuadorian context, an intrinsic case study was used as a method to examine and comprehend the problem in question (Stake, 1995). This type of case study was adopted because we first wanted to explore the acceptance, or the rejection for the collaborative model by our participants, to then, based on that, escalate in the future onto more complex POT experiences.

Sampling and recruitment of participants.

The population we intentionally selected consisted of fourteen University practitioners currently working in the Pedagogy of National and International Languages School of the Faculty of Education of a Public University located in Riobamba, Ecuador. The instructors possess different teaching qualifications such as Master's in Psychology, Master's in Computer Science, Master's in Applied Linguistics, Master's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Ph. D. in Education, and Ph.D.'s in Economics.

All of the participants were full-time instructors of the site with more than five years of teaching experience, working in subjects such as Educational Psychology, Educational Informatics, Contrastive and Descriptive Linguistics, Language and Culture, Didactics, and Educational Statistics. The fourteen instructors have not previously been part of POT experiences so that they were randomly paired up by accounting the mutual benefits for both peers, which can be obtained from the collaborative model, rather than the academic rank between Masters or PhDs. The pairing of our population resulted in seven working groups expected to conduct the peer review procedure at least once in each other's class.

Data collection

The peer review procedure consisted of revising academic peers' teaching performance for two full hours, a hundred twenty minutes overall, with the help of observation forms, to then proceed with a critical reflection report. Before applying the data collection instruments, the suggestions made by the consulted literature review concerning the socialization protocol with those involved in the collaborative model were followed. In the socialization, the steps to be chased were explained. The professorship, selected as the population, was informed in a briefing that the whole process was to be fragmented into two essential parts.

The first part embraced the process of pre-observation, observation, and post-observation through the observation forms mentioned above. These forms were elaborated based on the consultation of updated scientific literature regarding the collaborative model, plus previous personal experiences shared in working meetings with the research team. Moreover, they were elaborated using tools that report identifiable responses with demographic information, followed by an evaluative perception scale, which enabled the observer to revise the observee's lesson steps coherently.

The second part consisted of clustering the data of the observation forms into the reciprocal peer reflection report; in other words, at the end of the class, the selected pairs were immediately

expected to assemble a critical revision based on the pre-observation, observation, and post-observation, to then depict verbal accordance in thoughtful write-ups. These written reports aimed to highlight professional improvements rather than emitting detrimental judgments towards the employed teaching methods. Besides, they contained recognizable data of the observers and observees connected to the structure of collaborative expository essays. The essays' information was coded with anonymity and confidentiality. In this regard, the letter E, which means Educationalist, was the employed code to label our participants, followed by a number.

Data analysis

The data of seven collaborative expository essays, the final product of the critical reflection effectuated by seven work teams, were coded by the research team considering the organizational information criteria suggested by (Creswell, 2012), with regard to the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative paradigm. To this end, this information was first separated in multiple codes in accordance with the parameters of the literature review, observation forms, and data itself; after that, redundant codes were eliminated; then, these codes were synthesized in five major categories endorsed by quotes.

Triangulation .

Last but not least, in order to reduce our perceptual bias and to assure the trustworthiness and authenticity of our information analysis, within-method triangulation was used. This kind of triangulation permitted to fuse, inside the research issue at different times, more than one type of data-gathering instrument. In this sense, the data from the first instrument were analyzed separately by two researchers and then were condensed within the second one as a way to substantiate findings by the other two; in other words, the data of the observation forms were the starting point to create, validate, and corroborate the critical reflections with its categories.

Ethical considerations .

Finally, it is worth saying that all our collaborators were willing to volunteer this study with the best enthusiasm. Furthermore, before the execution of this inquiry, we elaborated informed consent forms pursuing the Belmont report with regard to the protection of human subjects of research. Such form contained the nature of the research, the purpose and benefit of the study, data collection steps, analysis management, treatment of data if any participant abandoned the project, and contact numbers of the project manager.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The following section summarizes the extent to which our participants perceived the in-situ collaborative model as an effective tool for professional development.

Compliance with the Pedagogical Model.

The University, where this investigation took place, currently offers a high-quality education focused on the well-known competency-based approach. This model is concerned with developing complex skills that allow students to think and act in various fields. Many times, in traditional education, students go to University and take different obligatory subjects without realizing the value thereof. The competency-based approach, then, seeks to improve the coordination in the training of students' results.

Decisions are made in collegiality, and the responsibility for training is distributed equally among the actors. This responsibility leads them to think of the activities in different terms because now it is not only too crucial whether the students learned the contents of each subject, but also when and how pupils employ the contents to solve situations in their professional world. This combination serves to develop superior cognitive abilities, such as analysis, critical thinking, creativity, scientific judgment, and to favor the development of affective aspects, such as values, attitudes, leadership skills, among others. In essence, what the competency-based approach looks for is not only the development of complex cognitive abilities on students but also the humanistic axiological component. In this sense, the reciprocal critical reflection has provoked these perceptions in **E3** and **E4**.

During the observation, it was possible to verify that the professor's objectives are aligned with the university's pedagogical model. This alignment allows students to improve their abilities for the development of the curricular project. Overall, I enjoyed being part of this process (Essay extract with E3).

The used methods and techniques are perceived to be the most appropriate to achieve the objectives, such as project-based learning, document review techniques, analysis, and synthesis. In the end, I think this process can contribute to strengthening our weaknesses as Educators (Essay extract with E4).

In the quote above, it is observed a massive acceptance towards the co-evaluation process. Similarly, the compliance of the University pedagogical model regarding cognitive competence is witnessed. In this regard, it can be noticed that the teaching methods and techniques employed by the host professor are not centered on the traditional approaches such as repetition or memorization. Conversely, they are framed on the new educational trends that make apprentices decompose and group information.

The reinforcement of these two components is crucial to verify whether or not students have developed their careers' cognitive competencies. The development of academic competency is imperative, but it is also significant to work on the most challenging and invisible side of competencies. This side is the axiological element dealing with students' self-image, traits of personality, and educational motives.

These three characteristics predict the intellectual abilities of students. To put it another way, their personality, self-image, and educational motives determine the academic performance towards an essay, a project, class-works, etc. (Estévez-Nenniger, 2016). The reciprocal critical reflection has also allowed the team conformed by E7 and E8 to detect a shortcoming in the axiological dimension. Indeed, they have noticed that the lack of students' academic commitment is negatively interfering with the teaching-learning process. To this regard, they sustained as follows:

Although the teaching and learning process was well organized in terms of methodology, students' behavior still hinders it. It is perceivable that students have not yet assumed their role (Essay extract with E8).

I was capable of noticing that the students' lack of interest hinders the established processes, and although, as educators, we might say that this is not our business, indeed, it is because our

pedagogical model demands to reinforce the axiology of our students (Essay extract with E7). The deficiency of students' lack of interest is one of the multiple negative aspects of what the collaborative model may bring to light. To this effect, through the reciprocal critical reflection, and based on professional experience, academic pairs can come up with and share specific pedagogical strategies that promote the stimulation of students' axiological dimension. The control of students' discipline in educational settings is always an issue, especially for novice professors. Professors decide whether or not they employ old-fashioned pedagogical techniques to control the discipline of students.

However, in the 21st century, the anachronistic techniques, beyond disciplining student's behavior, can cause frustrations that do not allow an adequate solidification of their learning (De Miguel, 2005, p. 23). In short, the critical reflection will always be the perfect opportunity for the actors involved to improve their educational praxis. Undeniably, this process has allowed the participants to develop an in-depth understanding of their abilities, as well as mistakes. Admittedly, this appreciation will eventually take them to improve their teaching and learning process.

Ethical Issues

Professional ethics is currently utilized widely in seminars, universities, or work centers, for professionals from various areas. The definition of professional ethics has been traditionally nourished by professional deontology or also known as a code of conduct. On the one hand, professional ethics refers to personal consciousness, while deontology adopts a role as an action model in a community.

When we refer to a particular profession, then, we can speak of the existence of specific ethics and deontology. The first could focus on determining and outlining the good of a particular profession, and deontology, on the other hand, would focus on defining what the specific obligations of each activity are. The definitions revolving around professional ethics and professional deontology are not contemporary.

These definitions can indeed be located in the different epochs of humanity, such as ancient Greece, specifically in the Oath of Hippocrates in the medical field. Later on, in Thomas Aquinas' Aristotelian ethics, Luther's ethics, the quantitative and qualitative Utilitarianism of Bentham and John Stuart Mill, Kant's categorical imperatives, etc. Nowadays, these concepts have been adapted to the postmodernism phenomenon, which indicates that ethics should not be understood with moral lessons (De Sousa, 2015; Dussel, 2017; Morin, 2007).

Under this light, professional ethics and professional deontology today have been reinterpreted to such an extent that there are medics in favor of abortion, journalists making up information, judges supporting corruption, or even University authorities dismissing the ethical parameters of a teaching co-evaluation despite the regulations of the state. Should the above definitions then be separated from morality? The response is negative because ethics and deontology imply moral obligations (*Naranjo, 2019*).

The analysis above was corroborated by E11 and E12, who tacitly adduced that the government action model regarding the co-evaluation process is not being attained adequately by the personal consciousness of institutional authorities. To this respect, they sustained as follows:

Unfortunately, from my perspective, the co-evaluation and the hetero-evaluation do not meet the objectives thereof; in fact, there is no responsibility and professional ethics on the part of the personnel who evaluate this process . (Essay extract with

E11).

There is a grave ethical issue in the institutional evaluation. In fact, teaching co-evaluation is purely subjective. It does not involve in-situ observation. I receive unfair scores, and that discredits my academic performance (Essay extract with E12).

The previous testimonies are in line with the postulates of professional deontology, which are seen as a manual compiling the moral obligations that those who carry out a job have to respect, that is, in the context presented by E11 and E12, what University authorities must do or avoid according to the governmental action model. Although the professional deontology might be inferred as a mandatory action model which regulates individuals' moral sympathy for them to be professionally ethical, this is not true because professional ethics is not enforceable (Filip, Saheba, Wick & Amir Radfar, 2016).

Professional ethics is associated with individuals' moral sympathy, and fortunately, moral sympathy cannot be imposed because, in imposing it on others, what we do is to diminish it (Smith, 1759). How then to achieve a spontaneous moral sympathy in this institution's professional ethics, if professional deontology cannot be imposed? The answer focuses on the wellness, interests, and needs of others.

Higher education institutions pursue goals for a general academic community, and not for a determined group so that looking after the common academic sake of others should be the sympathetic moral purpose of all educational actors, particularly that of the authorities. Feeling what the other feels will help understand that scores, without evaluative criteria, demotivate, and discredit institutional prestige.

Overall, the critical reflection executed by this academic pair has engendered critical awareness for their professional development, so much so that they have honestly criticized the lack of academic seriousness in their teaching co-evaluation. To this regard, the academic community should not see these perceptions as prejudicial or threatening; conversely, it is the perfect opportunity to apply continuous improvements for the institution's sake.

The insights of E11 and E12 have certainly added nuance of strength to this institution's ethics and deontology. Hopefully, in order to avoid more evaluative speculations, authorities will take into account validated POT instruments or the co-evaluation manual that emerged as a result of this investigation.

Evaluative Culture

Presently, Ecuadorian universities are immersed in an ongoing evaluation system. This process is conducted by CACES - Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior -. The Higher Education Quality Assurance Council aims to take care of the Ecuadorian educational quality of public and private higher institutions. Before CACES intervenes in Ecuadorian universities' educational processes, there was an incredible dissidence (Martínez, Tobón & Romero, 2017, p. 81). Somehow, dissent from opponents for this process has calmed down; however, some educationalists still oppose it because they believe that the evaluation by external entities assaults the University autonomy.

The culture of educational evaluation is tough to reach and even more so when there is no academic commitment from those involved either because of simple dissidence or fear. In recent years, relentless endogenous academic audits have contributed to change this perception

in administrative staff, students, practitioners, authorities, and other actors. However, the ostensible fear persists not only in the students but also in any person involved. The evaluation processes generate fears. That is why certain evaluation initiatives are held back. In support of this, the testimony of E1 and E2 is presented.

From pedagogical practice, the evaluation process has been conceived as an experience that frightens most practitioners. Thus, many teaching staff members would disagree that someone else visits their class (Essay extract with E2).

The evaluation process is intended to be changed by implementing the Peer Co-evaluation as it allows practitioners to seek alternatives for improvement through this process; however, the nerves to be judged are still present (Essay extract with E1).

It is noteworthy in the chunk above that this team has experienced the fear towards evaluation. Nevertheless, they are aware of the benefits of it. The evaluation culture is conformed with the sum of past experiences. In other words, it is necessary to have tested good and bad evaluation instruments, competences and incompetence of those who carried out the evaluation processes, the training of evaluators, and the criteria to make decisions (Drew et al., 2017).

The evaluation culture is also constructed by any individual in the academic community subjectively, so that the more exposure individuals have to the evaluation process, the better they will accept it. Directly, this statement is authenticated by E1 and E2. This academic pair has upgraded their evaluative perception indeed.

Although this process is new for them, they acknowledge the possible academic improvements to be found in it. In speaking of evaluation culture, it is also necessary to differentiate between existing and desirable cultures (Contreras, 2018, p. 85). In this regard, the group made up of E9, and E10 said that the existing evaluation culture of this University has stopped from belittling the initiatives of evaluation. It means that there is a desirable culture to implement changes in terms of constant monitoring of the teaching practice. In this connection, this work team declared as follows:

Today, evaluation has resurfaced, increasing its interest in this process. All educational actors seem to realize the need to evaluate and be evaluated. There is still a bit of dissent; however, this POT experience has been gratifying (Essay extract with E9).

All participants in the educational process must acquire a will to walk towards a new paradigm, where the co-evaluation is not seen as an instrument of punishment or persecution, but rather as an opportunity to improve our mistakes (Essay extract with E10).

The fragment above is assuredly impressive. The very fact that this collaborative model is no longer perceived as a punishment, but rather as an educational improvement, is a tremendous advancement in this University. It can be observed that there is a huge desire to move towards academic progress, but to get there, it is essential, in anticipation, to comply with some evaluative protocols as the one suggested above. These protocols can modify the mindset of educational actors in the long run.

Evaluation indeed has the power to positively influence education, but for that to happen, it is necessary to prioritize pedagogical and formative functions rather than bureaucratic control (Wingrove, Hammersley, Clarke & Chester, 2018, p. 8). Functional evaluation, well understood, can become a master key that opens new and broader horizons towards an authentic evaluation culture. The first step has been taken, but there is still a lot to do. The Ecuadorian educational

public evaluation has not yet reached its peak; that is why it has to be reinforced along the way; by doing so, the educational quality will be heightened, and with this, it can position itself in a plausible international ranking.

Shared Learning Experiences

POT programs provide plenty of opportunities for its actors to grow up professionally. Being inside this process enables participants to place themselves in front of a mirror as observer and observee. In observing, an educationalist can scrutinize the other's strategies and propose better teaching alternatives. Conversely, in being observed, the practitioner can listen to someone's experience, with the same objectives, challenges, and concerns, but from a different perspective (Barnard et al., 2015, p. 34). This process is very enriching, loaded by academic growth, and oriented to open closed minds reluctant to scholarly progress.

This process does not involve judging the other's class but to learn in a symbiotic way. Thus it is the feedback, guided by an observation form and professional experience that permits to increase the effectiveness of teaching (Dos Santos, 2016, p. 43). There is generally some level of apprehension associated with having a colleague watching a teaching session; however, beyond this intimidation, participants overcome this psychological obstacle in noticing that POT aims to share learning experiences rather than reporting numerical values to a punitive department. This fact was confirmed by E13 and E14 as follows:

In the development of peer observation, we could notice that an aspect that we consider to be the most relevant within professional development emerged. In this regard, we ascertained that we were able to receive experiential learning beyond the established guidelines. We were able to discover the capacity that each teacher has in the way of applying the different techniques and methods. It was very gratifying to share learning experiences (Essay extract with E13).

I was capable of sensing that the teacher has a wealth of knowledge and stored experiences that should be shared despite criticism and evaluation. In other words, the door must be opened for uninhibited participation and respectful reception. In this sense, modalities of essays, videos (which would even serve as self-criticism), conferences, talks, conversations that can start in pairs and then continue expanding the coverage, can be established. In short, we must learn to learn from the practices of the companions (Essay extract with E14).

Mutual evidential learning is seen in the chunk above. This academic team gives faith to the multitude of advantages which can be obtained from the critical reflection process. They also recognize the immense and hidden intellectual capacity of scholars, and the potential triumphs to be achieved if the insights of the professorship regarding POT programs keep going the same course.

This critical reflection has served this duo to leave the spectrum of evaluative anxiety aside and display a well-received acceptance for this study, which employed a peer allocation disregarding academic ranks. The educational peer observation at the tertiary level by colleagues is not yet common in the world; that is why every single process must be carefully examined (Lomas & Kinchin, 2006, p. 212).

Even though some POT programs employ affinity to diminish anxiety among participants, it has been said that this affinity may provoke a lack of objectivity in the evaluation as comments or

suggestions can be very positive due to an active friendship between the observer and observee (Randall & Thornton, 2001, p. 20). However, it would be interesting to review how much this affirmation has varied over time in other cultures; Can feedback be ethically concise with active friendship? In any case, more non-affinity shared learning experiences must be explored; thus, by the time POT takes place, the evaluative anxiety will have lessened; as a result, more tolerance for POT programs will be attested.

Critical Thinking.

Today much is said about critical thinking in Ecuadorian higher education. De facto, the diverse curriculums of public higher education have, in it, the desired graduation profile with the ingredient of critical thinking. Critical thinking is the capacity manifested by the human being to analyze and evaluate the extant information regarding a particular topic, trying to clarify the veracity of the foretold information and to reach a justified idea about it, ignoring possible external biases (Vieira & Tenreiro, 2016, p. 665). Moreover, having critical thinking implies consistency and objectivity when analyzing information.

The definition is clear enough to figure out that critical thinking must hold a solid foundation on pillars hard to bring down by haunting arguments (Huber & Kuncel, 2016, p. 3). These pillars encompass precise bases such as reflective ability, skills to doubt things, motivation, so forth. Nonetheless, one of the most transgressed bases is the classical logic that helps to discard contradictory elements in an individual's speech so that without classical logic, there is no critical thinking. In this vein, E5 and E6 exposed as follows:

The observed classes have a direct relationship with creating spaces for debate and creating people with a critical sense. This element stands out above the rest of the subjects due to the intense argumentative activity that the educator and students need to get the best result (Essay extract with E5).

The classical logic took place during the class to clarify contradictory discourses from the literature presented to students. A discussion about comparisons of logic among cultures also gave rise to the conclusion that, for being censorious, it is compulsory to resort to the classical logic (Essay extract with E6).

In the chunk above, interesting matters are observed. The debate guided the classes of this academic pair, and with this, the critical sense of students was stimulated. E5 and E6 also had the chance to find out profound classical logic issues in their critical reflection. Irrefutably, the critical reflection has been pretty remarkable for this academic team. Indeed, they have nurtured each other academically by elucidating the real meaning of critical thinking.

The dimension of critical thinking must be free of contradictions. In this regard, investigations ascertain that the logic, the principal component of this dimension, is absolute for all cultures of the world (Ascher, 2018; Naranjo & Naranjo, 2020; Wang, 2016). The classical logic relies on mathematics; hence, there is no truth outside of it. Mathematics even gallops in the speech of people; for example, it cannot rain and rains at the same time in the corner of my house; this declaration is a contradiction per se so that those attempts to make people believe that logic should not pursue coherent static parameters must be demonized in academia.

In short, the reciprocal critical reflection has been of total satisfaction for E5 and E6. This reciprocal critical reflection has helped them create debate spaces that analyze the truth as a static end, and not as a manipulable means. In other words, experiential learning has once

again been perceived.

CONCLUSIONS

This investigation aimed to report University practitioners' critical reflections generated from the collaborative model, to raise awareness of institutional authorities and educationalists on the importance of consolidating POT programs on a regular basis. This objective was investigated with the help of a single research question, which led us to figure out the degree of our participants' acceptance and significance towards the proposed POT model. The data of their critical reflections have revealed interesting findings.

Despite the initial anxiety experienced by the involved professorship, these findings in the foreground refer to the discovery of an endless number of hidden teaching methodologies and deep debates that were inspected and shared during critical reflection. Moreover, the findings reaffirm in academic authorities the commitment to professional development, so that the desire to implement POT programs more frequently by those involved is present.

Conclusively, this small-scale study's findings have corroborated the consulted literature regarding the empowerment of a new enhanced teaching vision in practitioners via POT programs. However, there are still some loose ends which must be addressed with great prudence and sanity in our territory. These loose ends have to do with the compliance of governmental public policies in relation to co-evaluation treatment in higher education. Incredibly, we found no reluctance in our participants for the collaborative model but rather disinterest in school administrators for the fulfillment of such public policies through POT programs.

Although the reciprocal critical reflection conducted by our participants was well received and constructive in terms of professional and mutual development, this reflection also questioned the lack of observation experience among our practitioners. This absence of expertise is somewhat associated with the foretold indifference; however, we do not disclaim our responsibility for not having enforced a flawless observation training with our teaching staff in the briefing. In any event, the observation experience can be improved substantially with the help of the educational authorities' legal endorsement, financial incentives, and with the implementation of more POT experiences.

Results of this study have unquestionably demonstrated that despite the selflessness of institutional authorities for POT programs, there is a gigantic desire on the part of participants to cultivate a teaching evaluation philosophy on a regular basis so that this study is an additional contribution to keep fortifying the evaluation culture of this establishment. Furthermore, these results provide other researchers with useful implications about record book tools to construct the critical reflection stage. On this occasion, collaborative expository essays have portrayed our participants' perceptions; nevertheless, further studies are needed to investigate other tools such as daily logbooks, voice recordings, or even video recordings.

Lastly, we are mindful that there have been two main limitations. One of them embarks on the initial allocation of peers without emphasis on academic ranks or hierarchies. Although the used pairing indeed reduced anxiety between colleagues, there is a risk that such allocation has provoked an inadequate provision of feedback as hierarchies appear to be naturally manifested in social groups; therefore, future research should consider an intentional allocation by academic rank so that their results can be compared with the result of this study. The other limitation has been that the proposed process only consisted of one observation session. These sessions were organized this way because of practitioners' schedules; hence, new investigators should consider this drawback before undertaking a similar study.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS:

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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