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Counting on the Experience: A Comparative Study of Novice and Expert English Teachers at Public Junior High School in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study of a comparative analysis between expert and novice English teachers in the Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) context of public junior high school. In Japan, since we are facing school teachers' aging and mass-retirement in the near future, it is essential to take over expert teachers' knowledge to younger generation. In order to seek expertise knowledge and experience, the study attempted: 1) to clarify the differences in viewpoint on classroom observations of a video-recorded English lesson by novices and experts, and 2) to explicitly elicit the experts' teaching knowledge to be able to enrich the understanding of novices. The procedure first involved video-recording an English lesson taught by a relatively inexperienced teacher. Three expert and three novice teacher-participants were then asked to watch the video-recorded lessons, commenting on what they observed on the screen. Their observations were likewise recorded. The participants' comments were subsequently analyzed by dividing them into the two categories of descriptive comments and evaluative comments, which were further sub-divided into 21 types. The results showed a great difference in the total number of comments between the novices and experts, the former of whom made only 16, while the latter contributed 72. By contrast with the novices' observations, which were largely descriptive, the comments by the experts were widely diverse, including suggestions, knowledge gained from experience, and beliefs. Implications for teaching English are discussed in light of their insights.

Keywords: *Teaching Expertise, EFL Education, Teaching Experience, Expert and Novice Teachers, Comparative Analysis*

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1. Introduction

English undoubtedly plays an important role as a tool of international communication worldwide. Especially in today's global society, teachers and students of English as a foreign language (EFL) are facing increasing demands to improve their English competence. However, EFL teachers are faced with the additional task of improving their classroom skills in language pedagogy as part of their professional development. Novice teachers, in particular, may have little understanding of how to do so. The purpose of this paper is thus to identify differences in viewpoints on English classroom observations between novice and expert teachers in the Japanese EFL context, in which teachers may lack support with regard to their early professional

development. As Carter (1990) maintains, comparative studies between experts and novices are essential to investigating teachers' knowledge and thus paving the way to expertise for others. The study thus aims to provide relevant insights from the expert teachers with implications, in particular, for novice teachers.

2. Expertise in Teaching

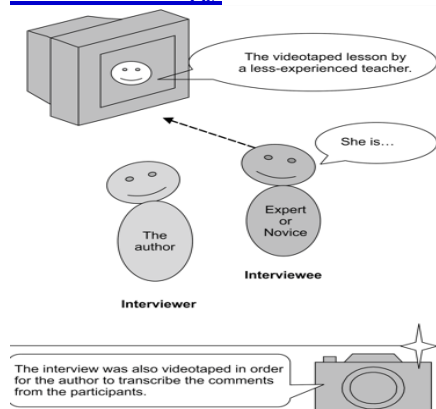
The first research undertaking comparative analysis between experts and novices dates back to the study of chess masters in the field of cognitive psychology (see Chase & Simon 1973, deGroot 1965). According to Tsui (2003), there has been relatively little research on expertise in English as a Second Language (ESL), and still less in the field of teacher training development.



As for comparative studies between novice and expert teachers, it is necessary to define what features make a teacher a novice or an expert. The term “novice teacher” is commonly used in the literature to describe student teachers in training (e.g., Richards, Li, & Tang, 1995) or teachers with little or no teaching experience (e.g., Sabers, Cushing, & Berliner, 1991). However, the identification of expert teachers is considerably more complex. As Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993, p. 6) point out, “[i]t is much harder to identify expert teachers, because everyone can and does teach.” In most studies, in addition to teaching experience, nominations or recommendations from school administrators are also one of the criteria of selecting an expert teacher (Sabers, et al., 1991). The expert teachers of the current study are also selected on such basis, in addition to holding extensive teaching experience of more than 20 years.

Schön (1983, 1987) emphasizes the importance of self-reflection in becoming an expert, considering professional teachers to be reflective practitioners, as much of their knowledge has been acquired through reflective practice. Sowden (2007) also underscores the relevance of skills of self-reflection, such as self-monitoring, self-assessing, and modifying behaviors. Tsui (2009) further maintains that there are distinctive differences between expert and experienced non-expert teachers in their ability to integrate aspects of teacher knowledge, their response to their contexts of work, and their ability to engage in reflection and conscious deliberation. Comparative analyses of novice and expert teachers can thus provide a valuable opportunity to uncover the degree to which their self-reflection may differ at different stages of their professional journey.

3. Methodology



3.1 Aims of the Study

This was a comparative qualitative and quantitative study between expert teachers and novices based on semi-

structured interview with watching videotaped lessons. The study’s aims were: 1) to clarify the differences in viewpoint on classroom observations of video-recorded English lessons by novices and experts, and 2) to explicitly elicit the experts’ teaching knowledge to enrich the understanding of novices.

3.2 Participants

The study involved six participants who were Japanese teachers of English: three novices and three experts. The three novice teachers comprised graduate students with a teaching certification in English who were majoring in English education. Table 1 shows background information on the novice teachers.

Table 1: Information on the novices.

Code	Sex	Teaching Experience	Teaching Period
N-1	Male	Cram school	½ year
N-2	Female	Tutoring	1 year
N-3	Female	Tutoring	1 year

The three expert teachers were selected from among junior high school teachers. They were unequivocally considered to qualify as expert teachers, as they all had more than 20 years of teaching experience, during which time they had received awards for their teaching. Table 2 displays background information on the experts.

Table 2: Information on the experts.

Code	Sex	Teaching Experience	Award experience	Year
E-1	Male	More than 20 years	Award received	2001
E-2	Female	More than 20 years	Award received	2000
E-3	Female	More than 20 years	Award received	2007

3.3 Data Collection Technique and procedures

In this study, in order to clarify differences in viewpoint of the English classroom between novices and experts, the author videotaped a 45-minutes lesson by a teacher with relatively little experience, who did not otherwise participate in the study. The teacher provided full written consent for the use of the video for the purposes of the current study, whose aims were explained to her. The class was in 8th grade and comprised 40 students in Kyoto. The video-recording equipment was positioned in the back of the classroom, by the vicinity of the door, and recorded the

teacher throughout the lesson, from beginning to end. The intent was to capture a series of the teacher’s behaviors, such as remarks, directions, explanations, and responses to the students. Table 3 presents a progress chart of the lesson.

Table 3: Progress chart of the lesson by a less-experienced teacher.

Activity & Time	Detailed content
Attendance 0:00	The teacher checks the attendance register and calls out the missing students' names.
Greeting 2:13	The teacher asks all students to stand up and greet her.
Game 5:15	The teacher moves her hands from side to side and up and down quickly. The students respond to questions depending on the direction in which she points.
Checking words 17:10	The teacher explains the meaning of vocabulary on the blackboard and has the students pronounce the words.
Questions 23:22	The teacher asks some questions relevant to the contents of the text book.
Explanation 1 26:18	The teacher writes "him = a dog" on the blackboard and explains the contents of the text book.
Reading aloud 29:08	The teacher tells students to read the text book aloud.
Home Work distribution 38:02	The teacher distributes homework to the students and tells them to paste it into their notebooks.
Explanation 2 40:10	The teacher explains what the subject is and what the verb of the sentence is. She tells students to underline or double-underline words, depending on whether they are subjects or verbs.

One month after the video had been recorded, the expert and novice teachers watched it individually. A series of tasks, from monitoring to interviewing, was conducted in Japanese, and participants were encouraged to express their own comments freely at any point. The monitoring work was also videotaped in order for the author to transcribe and capture more detailed responses from the novices and experts. The author used a stimulated recall interview approach in this study. This is a qualitative research technique, triggering participants to notice events and increase their awareness, which is widely applied to the study of teachers’ interactive decision-making (Borg, 2008).

4. Data Analysis

During the monitoring, novices made many descriptive comments such as “The teacher speaks fast, doesn’t she?”, while the experts contributed a variety of comments, including suggestions, knowledge of the learners, and some insights from their own experiences such as “Students want to speak English so that the teacher should have organized everything in advance.” The author first classified the comments into the two most prominent types: descriptive comments and evaluative comments. The comments were then further sub-classified into several mid-level and smaller-level units.

Figure 2 shows the classifications of the descriptive comments and Figure 3 shows those of the evaluative comments.

The inter-rater reliability with another colleague was .928.

Figure 2: Classification of descriptive comments

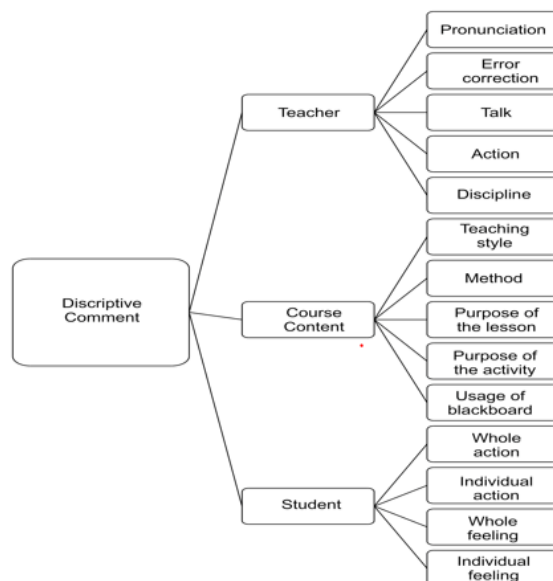
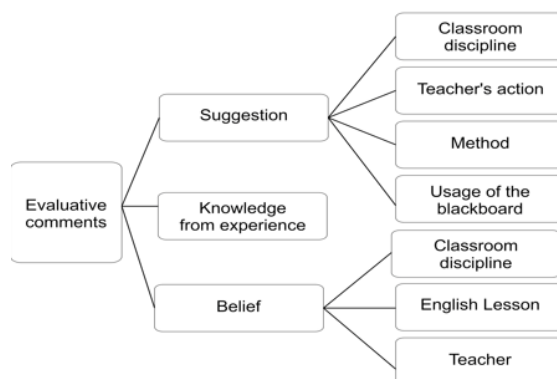


Figure 3: Classification of evaluative comments



5. The Results

5.1 Quantitative Results

Table 4 shows the results of the total number of comments. Table 5 presents the detailed content of the comments for each activity.

Table 4: The number of comments

Subject Classification	N-1	N-2	N-3	E-1	E-2	E-3
Descriptive Comments	13 (68.42%)	13 (86.66%)	15 (93.75%)	45 (56.96%)	34 (40.0%)	21 (39.62%)
Evaluative Comments	6 (31.58%)	2 (13.33%)	1 (6.25%)	34 (43.04%)	51 (60.0%)	32 (60.38%)
Total	19 (100%)	15 (100%)	16 (100%)	79 (100%)	85 (100%)	53 (100%)

Note. The third decimal place is rounded.

From Table 4, it is obvious that there are distinctive differences between experts and novices in the total number of comments: whereas the average number of the comments for the novices is 17, the average number for the experts is 72. This can be attributed to the timing of comments: while the comments from the novices were observed only intermittently for each scene, the experts made ongoing comments throughout. This inevitably led to these numerical differences.



Second, the comments made by the novices tended to be descriptive. The paucity of the evaluative comments suggests that it might have been easier for them to depict the situation while watching the video than to make suggestive comments or to predict what would happen.

Third, by contrast with the novices, the experts made a relatively high proportion of evaluative comments. In particular, E-2's and E-3's comments accounted for more than half of their comments in this category.

5.2 Findings from Individual Comments

According to the classification scheme, comments were categorized into 21 groups. Some types of comments are common to experts. The findings of expertise knowledge and experience are as follows.

1. Rules
2. Student-oriented approaches
3. Paying attention to students
4. Engaging in self-reflection

The following individual comments have been translated into English by the author.

Rules

When it comes to rules and discipline in the English classroom, two novices (N-2 and N-3) described the posture of learners who were not looking at the teacher, but they did not mention what the teacher should do to remedy the situation.

N-2's case

Video scene: Reading aloud (35:10)

Situation: The teacher in the monitor is telling students to read aloud in pairs. N-2 points to a particular student who is looking down at his notebook. She does not mention what the teacher should do in order to make the student face forward.

N-2: Students are not looking at the teacher.

N-3's case

Video scene: Check words (17:10)

Situation: The teacher on the screen is checking some words in the textbook. While N-3 points to a particular student who is looking down, she does not mention what the teacher should do in order to make the student face forward.

N-3: This student is not looking at the teacher.

All of the experts, on the other hand, emphasized that it is extremely important to impose rules to a certain degree in order to keep order in the English classroom as well as to teach good manners, such as using greetings or showing that one is listening during class. Two experts (E-1 and E-2)

mentioned the significance of maintaining eye contact with the students. They also maintained that teachers should set rules at the beginning of the school year. E-1 placed particular emphasis on disciplining learners in order to promote morals, while E-3 argued for the importance of using students' names with honorific titles.

E-1's case

Video scene: Greeting (2:13)

Situation: The teacher on the screen tells the students to stand up several times to do the greetings. In the midst of this scene, E-1 presses the pause button and begins to explain the importance of disciplining students. According to him, the teacher in the video should have warned the students to do the greetings one more time as a means of disciplining them.

E-1: She didn't give the students any warning beforehand. She can't discipline her students. She should have told the students to do the greetings properly one more time.

E-1's case

Video scene: Greeting (3:50)

Situation: While the author is standing in front of the students and greeting them, the students do not respond to her. E-1 also emphasizes the roles students and teachers should assume, such as politely greeting those who visit their classroom. As if he were in front of the students, he proceeds to act it out and explain the importance of adopting roles to the author.

E-1: When visitors come, there is no relationship between you (students) and them (visitors). Also you (students) don't hate them, do you? Let's greet them politely at the initial meeting. Here, such discipline is needed.

E-1's case

Video scene: Game (12:48)

Situation: While the teacher is instructing the students on how to play a game, a few of them are not looking. E-1 strongly argues for the importance of disciplining students and maintaining eye contact with them.

E-1: I think that it is an absolute imperative that when the teacher starts talking the students must be quiet and look at the teacher. Also, it is important for teachers to maintain eye contact with the students. She has to discipline them at the beginning of the new academic year. For example, I say "listen" and students also say "shh," putting their fingers up to their mouth.

E-2's case

Video scene: Attendance (0:00)

Situation: When the bell at the beginning of class rings, the teacher on the monitor is writing down the names of absentees. Some students are not ready for class. As soon as E-2 watches this scene, she talks about the importance of disciplining students and using eye contact with them. According to her, eye contact between teachers and students plays a significant role at the beginning of the school year.

E-2: At the beginning of the school year, in April, it is better to make rules. As soon as the class starts, students must quickly stand up and look towards the front. The teacher and students need to pause a moment to establish eye contact. It is a rule and a sign to start.

E-3's case

Video scene: Greeting (2:13)

Situation: The teacher on the screen tells students to look to the front several times. While students are standing, they are not looking at the teacher. She calls a particular student by his name and tells him to look to the front. E-3 is watching the monitor silently. After a while, she explains the importance of establishing roles between the teacher and students. Also, she emphasizes that it is very important for teachers to use honorific expressions.

E-3: The students have not realized that when the teacher starts talking, they must listen to her. She should not call the students by their nicknames.

Student-oriented approaches.

During the video monitoring, while the novices were focusing on the teacher, the experts were always also focusing on the students. All the experts emphasized that the students must be active in the classroom. Therefore, they made various recommendations concerning the teaching method.

E-1 emphasized the importance of having discussions among the students, while E-3 underscored how vital lesson planning and getting all of the students to participate was. Furthermore, E-1 and E-2 stressed the benefits of students expressing their own opinions and gaining practice in understanding each other in English.

E-1's case

Video scene: Explanation (26:18)

Situation: The teacher on the screen is explaining the contents of the textbook. As he is watching, E-1 repeatedly emphasizes the importance of having discussions among students in each scene. According to him, thinking, sharing information and ideas, finding out differences, noticing, and self-organizing are absolute musts in order

to make students actively engage in the lesson.

E-1: If I were the teacher in the video, I would say "Think alone and discuss with your friends." During the discussion, the teacher walks around the classroom, listens carefully and tells certain students "You have a good opinion, please make a presentation." I always schedule this in. Learners will forget the teacher is there when they concentrate on the discussion.

E-2's case

Video scene: Reading aloud (35:10)

Situation: The teacher tells the students to read aloud in pairs. E-2 is watching the monitor silently. After a while, she begins to explain the importance of self expression, stating its significance for the students so that they are able to notice that studying English is a way of expressing themselves.

E-2: There are no individual presentations in this lesson. The most important thing is whether all students can read the textbook by themselves or not. So we do pair work and practice. Finally, when students are able to speak about themselves in English, they come to notice that studying English is a means of self-expression. Once they find themselves having fun, they also like to listen to others.

E-3's case

Video scene: Reading (21:09)

Situation: The teacher on the monitor tells the students three times to read the textbook silently. She does not notice that there is a student who does not have his textbook with him. E-3 is watching the monitor silently. After a while, she emphasizes that all students, even those who have left their textbooks at home, must participate in the class.

E-3: When a student fails to bring something to class, the teacher should think about how to handle it. In class, all students must be involved as a whole.

E-3's case

Video scene: Explanation 2 (40:10)

Situation: The teacher in the monitor is explaining the grammatical structure of the textbook. She tells the students to underline or double-underline the words, depending on whether they are subjects or verbs. As soon as E-3 watches this scene, she begins to explain the importance of lesson planning. After watching the video, she begins to talk about her experience at a problematic school. She explains that she tried to make both low- and high-achieving students participate in class at that time.

E-3: Those of low ability may think "What does this activity mean?" She should have



distributed prepared handouts. I think lesson planning is one of the most important things. For example, at a problematic school, I used to use music and games in order to make low-achieving students participate in class. However, those who really understand the content well aren't stimulated by games and music. Therefore, lesson planning should be a top priority

Paying attention to students.

While they were watching the videos, the experts often noticed that some students were not looking at the teacher or did not participate in the activity. They emphasized that paying attention to students, especially to low-achieving students, is extremely important for teachers. E-1 also mentioned the importance of respecting students' pride. E-2 placed emphasis on taking care of weaker students in order for them to actively participate in class and have fun. E-3 placed emphasis on giving attention to low-achieving students during class.

E-1's case

Video scene: Game (7:20)

Situation: The teacher on the screen is instructing the students how to play a game in pairs. E-1 is watching the monitor silently. After a while, he points out that the teacher does not respond to the male student who has been imitating her actions for a while. According to him, teachers always need to pay attention to students.

E-1: Now, this boy is imitating her (the teacher).

But, she did not respond to him. She must nip his actions in the bud. She also has to respond to him. For example, "What?" "Are you ready?" or "Shall we begin?" Something like this. Teachers always have to watch their students at any angle, even from behind.

E-1's case

Video scene: Game (7:20)

Situation: The teacher on the screen tells the students that those who have finished the game can sit down. Students are working in pairs.

The teacher is timing how fast all the students can finish doing the activity. E-1 strongly argues that teachers must take care of the weaker students and must not leave them behind.

E-1: This female student is not a high-achieving student, is she?

She was left standing at the very last moment in the previous activity. The teacher didn't take care of her. I don't think, in this activity, that it is worth doing the

timing. I never do activities such as "Finish in XX seconds" and "When you finish, you can sit down."... Eventually, there are many students who have already finished sitting down, and a decreasing number of those who are standing. Then, do the slow learners feel that it is easy to participate? Do they have fun? Of course not! This is a typical class style that doesn't take students' feelings into consideration.

E-2's case

Video scene: Game 2 (7:20)

Situation: The teacher on the screen is instructing the students how to play a game in pairs. As soon as E-2 watches this scene, she points out a student who is bored doing the activity. She begins to explain the importance of taking care of the students.

E-2: The teacher has to take care of lower-scoring students.

The boy in front of the teacher's desk was bored doing it. It would be better for her to think about who needs support today while students are doing the activities. She should pay attention to them in order to make them actively participate and have fun in class.

E-2's case

Video scene: Game (12:48)

Situation: The teacher in the monitor is asking some questions. Certain students are answering. They are playing another game. E-2 is watching the monitor silently. After a while, she points out a male student who is not interested in the class. She emphasizes that it is very important for every student to participate in class. She also mentions that teachers need to watch the students and try to involve those that are apathetic in the class.

E-2: The student in front of the teacher's desk is not listening to her. The teacher should not overlook the student. It is very important for every student to participate in the class. That girl and boy are not listening to the teacher. The teacher must ask them some questions. Just asking questions with a few words can make students get involved in the class. For example "Listen" or "Do you know the answer?"

E-3's case

Video scene: Game (12:48)

Situation: The teacher on the screen is asking some questions. Certain students are answering. They are playing a game. E-3 is watching the monitor silently. After a while, she points out that some students are talking. She emphasizes that it is very important for every student to participate in class.

N-3: She should make every student participate in the game. Only certain students are participating in this activity. This student is not listening. They are talking. Not only games but in every activity, decide which students need support beforehand: she has to pay attention to them all the time.

Reflection on their own practice.

During the monitoring session, the experts often talked about themselves and their practices in teaching. They said that they often reflected on themselves and tried to improve their performance in class. E-2 and E-3 explicitly stated that they reflect on themselves after every lesson. E-2 mentioned that the students themselves are good indicators of the lesson. Teachers come to be able to improve their classes by listening to the students' opinions. E-3 also emphasized that it is essential for teachers to pursue changes in their ways of teaching in order to set appropriate goals, improve the lessons, and try to make effort to get there.

N-2's case

Video scene: Explanation 2 (40:10)

Situation: After a series of explanations, the teacher on the monitor is finishing up the class. She tells the students to stand up and do the greetings. E-2 argues for the importance of reflection and recommends a method for doing so.

N-2: For the matter of finishing up the class, teachers should to ask the slow learners if they have understood today's lesson. This is an indicator of your teaching. When the class ends, I ask low-achieving students. They are good commentators. For example "How was it today?" They are so honest. That is my way of reflection.

E-3's case

Video scene: After video monitoring

Situation: After the video monitoring, E-3 explains that it is extremely important for teachers to set goals and reflect on their lessons.

N-3: One more thing, we (teachers) should not be content with the present situation and always pursue change. As far as I am concerned, I have changed my teaching method, compared to that of the last year. I set an annual goal based on my reflections of the last year at the beginning of the new class term.

Likewise, I strongly hope every teacher has his/her own individual annual goal.

6. Conclusion

In summary, compared with the experts, the novices made fewer comments while watching the videos. Moreover, the

comments they did make were intermittent and mostly focused on the teacher—not on the students. The novices tended to describe the situation occurring on the monitor and make quite easily recognizable points, e.g., concerning the teacher's pronunciation and actions.

The experts, on the other hand, viewed the scenarios comprehensively from multifaceted perspectives. They focused on both the students and the teacher.

They were further able to associate the events with various types of existing knowledge or experience, so that they were able to understand what was happening and make suitable recommendations depending on the situation. Unlike the novices, the experts underscored the importance of disciplining the students in order to keep order in the English classroom. They also tended to place emphasis on teaching good manners in the class, such as using greetings and showing a good attitude towards listening. Eye contact between teachers and students was also a significant aspect for the experts.

In addition, the experts emphasized that students needed to develop their skills in thinking, expressing their own opinions, having discussions with others and understanding each other in the English class. They argued that observing students carefully was crucially important for teachers, especially in the case of the slow learners, to ensure that these would be able to keep up, participate, and enjoy the class. This included taking their feelings into consideration. For example, the experts felt that teachers should not introduce activities only suitable for high-achieving students.

The expert teachers mentioned that they often reflect on their teaching in order to improve their classes and actively solicit feedback from students to help them do so. They felt that it was advisable for teachers to pay attention to students and adjust their level to that of the students in response to their feedback.

The participants' comments raise pedagogical implications, which can be passed on as advice to novice teachers. From the outset, i.e., from the beginning of the new academic year, teachers should discipline their students in order to keep order in the English classroom. This includes teaching them good manners, such as using greetings and demonstrating a positive attitude towards listening.

Teachers are then advised to continue to pay attention to every detail concerning the students in their English



class. In order to encourage all of them to participate, it is necessary to carefully draw up lesson plans in advance. Teachers should also bear in mind that it is necessary to take care of low-achieving students, not only inside the classroom but also outside, so that they are able to keep up with the class and participate.

In order to encourage active participation in class, teachers need to give students the opportunity to think, discuss their opinions with other students and find differences among them. To develop as an English teacher, it is advisable to always reflect on one's own classes and to fathom out what has not worked well for the students. In order to do so, teachers must constantly seek to garner students' responses. It is on the basis of the students' attitudes and opinions that teachers are able to improve their own teaching skills through self-reflection.

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