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Reflection as meta-action: Lesson study and EFL teacher professional development

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Abstract

This article explores the nature of reflective practice in a professional development process based on lesson study. The authors examine how a lesson study model initiates reflection as a meta-action scaffolding reflective practice among teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) at a university in Turkey. Fieldnotes, interviews, and audio diaries were used to collect both introspective and retrospective data. These data sources enabled the researchers to focus on reflective action both as a process and as a product. Using thematic content analysis, the research demonstrates how reflective practice permeates lesson study as teachers reflect on their practice both individually and collaboratively. Moreover, the research also shows how teacher agency can be promoted in reflective practice throughout lesson study. The findings reveal how reflection as meta-action in lesson study can support transformative teacher agency among EFL teachers.

1 | INTRODUCTION

To support teachers in their long and exhausting career, various professional development (PD) opportunities are provided to improve their teaching practice and the quality of instruction. However, these opportunities traditionally follow a top-down approach and appear in conventional PD forms such as workshops, short courses, and webinars, and thus are generally one-off events (Wyatt & Ončevska Ager, 2016). In this traditional approach, PD is conceived as "something that is done by others for or to teachers" (Johnson, 2009, p. 95). On the other hand, the current turn in PD requires modifications both in form and content to make teacher development more intentional, situated, and sustainable (Tanış & Dikilitaş, 2018).

According to Freeman (2016), "Improvement in teaching comes when teachers can turn actions that are automatic and routine into ones that are considered" (p. 221). Relatedly, Borg (2015) asserted

that teachers are active, thinking decision makers who mostly shape classroom events as they have the best understanding of the actual teaching context. We argue that both Freeman's and Borg's assertions represent the ideal state and may not always reflect classroom reality in terms of many PD practices that are often implemented through a top-down approach. In the Turkish context, Oruç-Ertürk, Gün, and Kaynardağ (2014) found that such programs are rarely situated in classroom practices. Moreover, these activities generally take the form of in-service seminars, and practitioners often have little say in determining the content of these activities (Korkmazgil, 2015). Therefore, such nonsituated PD practices offer little (if any) opportunity for teachers to reflect on their actual teaching practices.

Following Dewey's (1933) seminal work on reflective thinking and Schön's (1983) elaboration, the reflective practice movement within the field of education has reemerged (Farrell, 2012), with teachers collecting "data about their teaching, examin[ing] their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and us[ing] the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching" (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 1). From a Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) perspective, this movement established a sense of ownership and accountability among teachers regarding their own teaching practice and has conceived of teacher reflection as an important forum for teacher PD (Johnson, 2009). In this vein, inquiry-based approaches such as lesson study (LS; Johnson, 2009; Tasker, 2011) have been seen as valuable tools that help teachers engage in reflective practice. However, the dynamics of LS as a reflective practice remain underexplored. In this study, we investigate how teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) engage in reflective practice during lesson study from an SCT perspective with a view to explore how LS can contribute to the development of transformative pedagogy for professional development.

2 | REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: AN SCT PERSPECTIVE

Within educational research, reflective practice–mediated development invites comparison to an SCT perspective that foregrounds how development takes place over time. Dewey's (1933) fundamental suggestion was that reflective teaching involves active, consistent, and critical consideration of any practice and belief. Later, Schön (1983) expanded Dewey's ideas to explain how reflection operates in daily teaching practice. Schön distinguished two specific registers of reflection: *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action*. According to Mann (2016), the former refers to asynchronous reflection that occurs before or after any teaching situation, whereas the latter indicates synchronous reflection while teaching.

Killion and Todnem (1991) contributed to reflective practice scholarship with the notion of *reflection-for-action*. Farrell (2012) conceptualized this type of reflection as a follow-up phase of reflective practice, which can be encouraged when reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action emerge. Systematic reflection elevates reflective practice to a form of thinking and mindset by which teachers (1) constantly and systematically investigate their teaching and learning challenges and (2) find solutions for them (Farrell, 2012); this practice, in turn, creates *reflection-as-action* (Farrell, 2018). In addition, Farrell (2016) posited that the implications of teachers' work is evidence-based in that they collect evidence about their work, analyze such evidence, and subsequently reach an understanding about their actions.

In this study, we use the term *reflection as meta-action* for two reasons. First of all, we refer to the circular reflective practice within LS-modeled professional development because there is a series of PD actions in lesson study creating an LS cycle (as shown later in Figure 1), and several LS cycles thus emerge recursively. Therefore, we argue that LS is a PD meta-activity. In tandem with this stance, we use the term *meta-action* to be in alignment with the previous contextualization of reflective practice
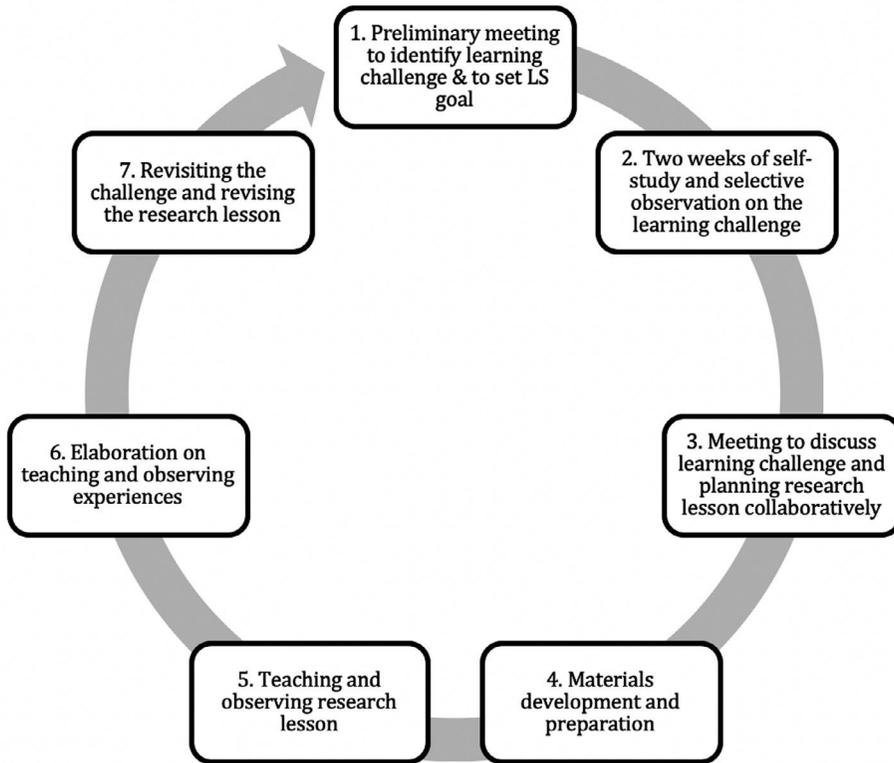
FIGURE 1 Augmented LS cycle followed in this study

(e.g., Mann & Walsh, 2017). Second, in keeping with an SCT perspective, we view LS as reflection in and of itself, because reflective practice is systematically stimulated on both individual and collaborative planes with regard to teaching practice through the LS process. In light of this, we call for a reframing of LS-modeled PD as reflection as meta-action.

Relatedly, Johnson (2009) called for an SCT approach on second language (L2) teacher education, which requires developing alternative ways for teachers to externalize and (re)conceptualize their teaching practice. According to Johnson, the reflective teaching movement is an important line for teachers to reflect on their own practices and transform their teaching in their professional contexts. Acknowledging this sociocultural turn, Ortaçtepe and Akyel (2015) argued that the aim of reflective practice is to explore teachers' development in constant relation to their social environment, working relationships, school culture and climate, and wider social circumstances.

One way to promote reflective teaching is through engaging in situated PD activities. Such activities, which are situated in teachers' local and social contexts, enable teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices (Wyatt & Ončevska Ager, 2016). Johnson (2009) argued that teachers need to have opportunities for dialogic mediation, scaffolded and collaborative learning, and assisted performance in the context of PD. Thus, an SCT approach to teacher education has the potential to promote reflective practice as collaborative action, too. Put differently, when reflective practice is collaborative, teachers may construct their knowledge collectively; moreover, they may build mental schema and concepts through collective meaning making (Mann & Walsh, 2017).

According to Pang (2017), reflective practice expands teachers' understanding of their own pedagogical practices in their classrooms; on the other hand, the locus of reflective practice transcends

individual reflections and includes the context in which it takes place. Given the importance of social context, an SCT perspective thus emphasizes the significance of a contextual understanding of reflective practice as a collaborative action. Merging these theoretical stances, we define reflective practice within the context of our current study as a process of teacher learning through and across reflections situated in social and professional contexts. Drawing on Mezirow (1997), we also argue that this kind of learning is transformative. Crucially, the transformative learning of adults differs from how children learn, because adults already have a body of experience including associations, values, feelings, and beliefs. Thus, as noted by Mezirow, it is harder for them to accept ideas that fail to fit in their existing frames of reference. Nevertheless, by critically reflecting with others, adults can become aware of these reference frames, which thus enables transformative learning (Baecher & Chung, 2020). Relatedly, Baecher and Chung (2020) proposed that social interaction among teachers with a professionally driven scope (e.g., LS-modeled PD activities) facilitates the development of critical reflection, thereby highlighting its transformative learning potential for teachers.

Interestingly, the collaborative and social nature of reflective practice has been underemphasized in the prior literature. Accordingly, Walsh and Mann (2015) proposed that systematic and purposeful reflective tools be reported to illustrate their collaborative value and impact. Additionally, Walsh and Mann observed that reflective practice has mistakenly been presented as an individualistic process, adding that these perspectives "underestimate the value of learning from others' experiences as well as from our own" (p. 353). By nature, LS prioritizes dialogic and collaborative PD activity for teachers (Cajkler & Wood, 2016); thus, we argue that LS transforms PD into a social practice. This social practice is composed of various collaborative teacher learning actions that (1) take the form of a recursive model and (2) support a process of learning actions, which, we argue, lead to reflection as a meta-action. To investigate the collaborative aspect of reflection as meta-action, we utilized an LS-modeled professional development activity for EFL teachers.

3 | LESSON STUDY

Defined as a teacher-led, collaborative activity (Cajkler & Wood, 2016; Wood & Cajkler, 2018; Yalçın Arslan, 2019), lesson study is a form of PD practice for teachers and a model based on peer observation and reflection on microlevel teaching practice (Johnson, 2009). Wood and Cajkler (2018) proposed that the basic LS cycle is composed of five major steps. First, a group of teachers identifies a learning challenge that their students experience. Second, the group plans a model research lesson to meet the challenge. Third, as the research lesson is taught by one of the group members, the rest of the members observe with a specific focus on students' reactions and learning. Fourth, the LS group evaluates the research lesson based on their reflections and observations during the previous step. For the last step, the group focuses on their own learning as teachers by revisiting the challenge and their experience. If there is consensus, the group then continues the process with another cycle by teaching the revised research lesson to a comparable group.

LS has been discussed as an inquiry-based teacher PD/education process that fosters reflective practice across disciplines. For example, Ricks (2011) maintained that reflection of the critical incidents during LS supported mathematics teacher candidates to generate more powerful and purposeful progressions of teaching ideas. Likewise, Ermeling and Graff-Ermeling (2014) described how LS provides sociocultural adjustments to promote participants' engagement in reflective practice through collective ownership of improvement and across a series of reflection meetings. In another study, Juhler (2016) contextualized postlesson discussions as the reflective stage in LS practice with science teacher candidates.

In the EFL teacher PD context, lesson study was found to promote reflective practice, which results in improved teacher confidence, learning and learner-oriented teaching, and effective lesson planning (Yalçın Arslan, 2019). However, *how* LS promotes reflective practice is unclear. Zhang, Yuan, and Liao (2019) suggested that teacher reflection emerges in the last step of LS, that is, after the research lesson is taught and the data are collected. In another EFL teacher education study, the critical reflections of the teachers participating in an LS practice were reported by Tasker (2011), who emphasized the recursive nature of the LS process—without underlining a specific LS step—and proposed that a reflective record of the LS process as a whole be produced after the research lesson is retaught. Tasker also highlighted the situated nature of reflection in LS, adding that participation in LS "transforms the way teachers conceptualize student learning because the issues they investigate are meaningful to their local teaching contexts" (p. 221).

Alternatively, Olteanu (2016) presented LS as a model supporting reflective practice throughout the process. Drawing on variation theory, she noted that reflection in LS is not limited in terms of locus and temporality. She added that reflective practice in LS helped teachers become more goal-oriented because the situatedness of LS allows teachers to connect the intended (reflection-for-action), the enacted (reflection-in-action), and the lived (reflection-on-action) objects of learning throughout the process.

As observed in the literature, reflective practice is often discussed as a set of specific steps after the research lesson is taught. However, no study in the EFL context has focused on LS as a framework of reflective practice. Thus, the enactment of reflective practice within LS as a collaborative teacher development activity and its effects on teaching practices warrant further investigation. Moreover, as problematized by Mann and Walsh (2017), what reflective practice is and how it works for teaching practitioners need to be explicated. Following their call to investigate reflective teaching and combining it with the existing LS literature, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. On what levels does reflective practice emerge in LS?
2. How is teaching practice transformed through reflection within the context of LS?

4 | THE STUDY

We conducted an ethnographic study during the 2017–2018 academic year at Western University (WU; pseudonym) in a school of foreign languages. The school's main function is to support pre-undergraduates who did not pass WU's mandatory EFL proficiency exam in order to be admitted to their respective academic programs.

Our data come from three sources. First, fieldnotes, which included researcher observations while taking part in local practices, were based on a 3-month immersion process that gave the first author the opportunity to familiarize himself with the research setting and school dynamics. Second, the teacher participants were asked to keep an audio diary that yielded their think-aloud recordings throughout the LS process. After carrying out the LS steps that required the teachers to meet (for Cycle 1, Steps 1, 3, and 7; and for Cycle 2, Steps 4 and 7; see Figure 1), the teachers were provided with facilitating prompts. These prompts were open-ended stimulators that were designed to help participants record their cognitive understanding of their respective teaching experiences at specific phases of the research project (e.g., "After teaching/observing the first research lesson, I felt/thought/realized ___," "After revising the second research lesson with my colleagues, I felt/thought/realized ___)." Third, we conducted two types of interviews. The first was a collective interview in a roundtable discussion format. We asked participants to reflect on LS activities after the LS process. The same prompts

TABLE 1 Data sources

Methods	Collection period/time	Data detail
Field observation notes	November 2017–June 2018	Journal kept by the researcher covering self-immersion period and all LS phases
Artifacts—audio diaries	February–June 2018	One entry per teacher-participant after the preliminary meeting, two entries during each LS cycle, and one entry after the whole process
Group interview	End of May 2018	Roundtable discussion mediated by the researcher after the process
Stimulated interview	Beginning of June 2018	Interview mediated by stimulated protocols based on the above-mentioned data

Note: LS = lesson study.

that were used in individual audio diaries were utilized to ignite the group conversation. The second was an individual semistructured interview with each member of the study group. An individualized, stimulated semistructured interview protocol was generated according to the first author's journal and participants' audio diaries. Stimulated interviews were carried out 10 days after the LS practice, which gave participants time for reflection after their teaching experience. For both interviews, the prompts depended on actual and observed teacher experiences and/or self-reports from the diaries. Thus, the prompts created a stimulating impact on the participants to recall their experiences (Gass & Mackey, 2017). The prompts were open-ended questions designed to welcome further elaboration by the interviewee(s). Table 1 summarizes the data collection methods explained above.

We adopted a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to analyze the data. After familiarizing ourselves with the data, we generated tentative codes. Later, we grouped the codes and generated potential themes to see the how the LS process related to reflective practice for the participants. We reviewed the themes according to substantially occurring codes such as individual reflection referring to collaborative meeting, collaborative reflection referring to an individual diary, questioning beliefs, new awareness, and agency, discussing them in light of our research concerns.

4.1 | Researcher positionality

This study is based on the first author's dissertation. He interacted professionally with the participants and adopted the role of a researcher-as-resource (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003) when working with them. Additionally, he served as the LS facilitator who designed and implemented the PD process so that the participants could focus on their teacher tasks instead of the LS timeline. This was vitally important for the research setting, given that the participants were new to both LS and agentic and bottom-up PD practice. The second author did not have direct contact with the field and the participants; instead he co-supervised the first author in analyzing the data from an SCT perspective.

4.2 | Participants

The LS group consisted of four EFL instructors who had been working for the school for more than 10 years and had taught EFL for more than 15 years (see Table 2). The participants—Oya, Nick, Eda, and Beyza (pseudonyms)—had participated in PD activities throughout their careers. Oya was an

TABLE 2 Participants

No.	Name	Gender	Years taught
1	Beyza	Female	15–20
2	Eda	Female	25–30
3	Nick	Male	25–30
4	Oya	Female	20–25

experienced nonnative-English-speaking EFL teacher who had multiple institutional experiences like the other participant teachers. She believed that being a teacher entails a constant state of learning and developing, and it should never be complete. To her, PD is an inseparable part of her practice. Nick, a native-English-speaking EFL teacher and a long-term colleague, agreed with Oya in this regard. By contrast, Eda emphasized practicality and stated that she found such activities interesting as long as they were something that she could use in her practice. However, she also underlined how such activities were not part of her job but constituted an extra responsibility. She believed PD should be a part of her teaching schedule officially rather than a free-time activity for teachers. Beyza shared the same sentiment and concern. She initially believed participating in this study would have been a burden, but her friend Oya convinced her otherwise. The participants taught the reading and writing course; as a school policy, they used the same coursebook that was decided on by all teachers in the beginning of each academic year.

Importantly, even though none of the participants engaged in LS-modeled PD, and had not even heard about it before, some had experiences of systematically reflecting on their teaching practice. With regard to reflective practice, some participants had mixed feelings due to prior experience. Several months before the current study, some group members participated in a study in which they were asked to video-record their teaching and to reflect on the recording. Oya thought this was a very bad experience because she froze while teaching due to the video camera. Similarly, Eda stated that her teaching turned out to be completely different than she had thought, and this made her angry with herself. In sum, some participants were familiar with structured reflection activities in which they recorded and evaluated themselves with a researcher. The current study, though, was unusual for them in terms of opening the doors of their classrooms to peer observation and collaborative reflection.

4.3 | Procedure

For the current study, a five-step LS cycle proposed by Cajkler and Wood (2016) was augmented for our research setting. Drawing on Cajkler and Wood's basic LS design, we took institutional teaching routines and schedules into consideration. Two additional steps were added to make the original cycle implementable in our context; that is, Steps 2 and 4 (Figure 1) were added. With Step 2, the participants could have more time to pay attention to the learning challenge. The LS group decided to identify making inferences while reading in L2 as a learning challenge. According to them, it had always been difficult for them to help EFL learners "read between the lines" (a phrase they used to define making inferences while reading), and the learners struggled with reading tasks when they were asked to infer meaning. The participants spent some individual time familiarizing themselves with the challenge by engaging in self-study and/or individual needs analyses to understand more about the nature of the challenge. Step 4 was important because the participants needed time from their other teaching duties to produce their research lesson materials and to get prepared.

After the first cycle was completed, the participants decided to go through a second cycle to try out a revised research lesson. After the second cycle was completed with the original research lesson revised for the second time, the group decided to conclude the whole process, stating that they had managed to reach their goals regarding their challenge. In total, three research lessons were created over two full LS cycles.[1]

5 | FINDINGS

We examined (1) the levels of reflective practice that emerged in LS and (2) how teaching practice was transformed through reflection in the context of LS. In tandem with our research questions, two overarching themes emerged: (1) the interface between individual and collaborative reflection in LS and (2) transformation of teaching through reflective practice in LS fostered by reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action.

5.1 | Interface between individual and collaborative levels of reflection in LS

The findings demonstrate how reflective practice permeated LS phases at both individual and collaborative levels. In the following excerpt from an audio diary, Nick discusses his first impression after the meeting that followed Step 1. In this step, participants conducted a preliminary meeting to identify their learning challenges. They decided to work on the subskill of making inferences while reading. They also shared their observation that reading and writing classes were too teacher-centered and, therefore, aimed to create an engaging research lesson as an overarching goal. Even after this decision, the LS structure prompted participants to reflect on their decision and to associate it with their teaching practice.

> *Excerpt 1*. I got more and more interested
>
> Nick: I, to be honest, didn't really think that I would be that much interested. But my initial reaction to our topic was like … not misunderstanding but maybe the concept of inference is hard for some people. So when we started to think about this project I got more and more interested and I still am interested. I realized that there is so much inference happening everywhere. We are not really aware of the amount of inferencing that goes on.

This excerpt shows that empowering teachers to decide on the content of PD creates a space for teachers to reflect on what they think about the subject knowledge that is related to the challenge. Here, we see that determining the learning challenge is a reflective action in and of itself. LS allows teachers to make the decisions from the very beginning. This example illustrates that it is not only after the first cycle, or a specific step like teaching the research lesson, but also the process design of LS that invokes critical reflection. This was also evident in our fieldnotes in which we observed that Nick

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[1]As one anonymous reviewer aptly pointed out, reflective practice is dynamic and might not always adhere to specific steps. We thank them for this astute comment, but we would also like to reiterate the value of conceiving lesson study as a multistage process that serves as a heuristic to guide EFL teachers engaged in reflective practice.

kept bringing his background reading on inferences to group discussions throughout LS meetings and cycles. Additionally, Nick's diary entry reveals an individual level of critical reflection on the content and choice of the group's LS challenge. However, this reflection transcended and developed to a collaborative dimension during the later stages of LS. The following conversation from the group discussion exemplifies this development:

> *Excerpt 2*. Clearer concept of inference
>
> Nick: For example, my students surely understood what an inference is. They had been confused before. So when I used what I learnt from all this [LS process] in the class, it made a huge difference. Inference and the concept of it is clearer for them now.
>
> Beyza: I also see that it is more concrete for my students now. It was much abstract before. A kind of awareness was raised.
>
> Eda: I think that is because the material and activities were built on one another. When we had to deal with an inference question in a reading passage, we had to explain it only within the context of one question and move on. But in our lessons, there were many visuals, video materials. It was really set step by step and got more concrete.
>
> Beyza: Otherwise we depended on what the reading coursebook offered on the issue.
>
> Nick: Some inference questions are really difficult but now I can explain these questions better. By building direct references from the text and by making them think over what they read and analyze it by what they already know.

As seen in this excerpt, Nick appears to underline how the concept of inference got clearer for him as they read and focused more on this issue as a teaching and learning challenge throughout the LS process. Beyza further stated that inference was "more concrete" for her students. Given Eda's emphasis on their research lesson and material use, the group discussed how this new understanding based on their reflection helped them deal with inference questions and activities in their coursebook and how to go beyond them while teaching. Their reflection was not only on the content of their individual PD process but also on their shared teaching experience. This conversation also demonstrated how individual reflective experiences were further developed in a social context. In other words, individual reflection is transformed into a social practice through collaboration with other LS participants. From a sociocultural perspective, the group conversation in Excerpt 2 is an example of meta-action, and it demonstrates how reflection in LS is a collaborative and social practice as it takes on an interpersonal element. Through collaborative dialoguing (Johnson, 2009), the group members made connections between their individual learning and shared teaching realities (i.e., the reading coursebook; see Excerpt 2). In other words, the teachers engaged in individual reflections and went beyond them.

> *Excerpt 3*. My awareness increased
>
> Beyza: In reading classes, it [inference] had been one of the subskills. In the meetings with my colleagues, my awareness increased, because I used to teach inference only as a reading subskill, a type of question. I didn't think of working on inference in the class with a video, or a visual material. I realized that a photograph can be a material for that.

I did not use to do it. I used to utilize only reading passages. So the term was familiar but my approach to it changed.

Here, we see that Beyza underwent a transformative learning experience as a teacher. She reflected on the materials and content that she and her colleagues, as an LS group, created. She further reflected on what they experienced as a group later in the individual interview. Beyza claimed that her awareness increased and that inference was not a "type of question" in reading and writing classes for her anymore. Elaborating further, she explained that if she had designed this research lesson by herself, she would not have created the array of materials and activities.

Tasker (2011) argued that, as a part of the expansive learning process in LS, "a contradiction is perceived by a person or group of people who are part of an activity system, which results in a reflective analysis of activity and collective questioning or rejection of the established practice(s)" (p. 207). Our examples illustrate that this expansive learning process based on the critical reflective analysis of practices took place on two levels, at both the individual and collaborative levels of reflective practice. Moreover, and in response to Research Question 1 (On what levels does reflective practice emerge in LS?), these two examples demonstrated how these two levels are intertwined. That is, individual and collaborative reflections can reinforce one another as interaction among LS group members is fostered by collective meta-action. Nick's experiences presented in Excerpts 1 and 2 are cases in point. Nick constantly reflected on the concept of making inferences and how it is so common in everyday life and language, as can be seen in his audio diary (Excerpt 1); furthermore, his individual reflection was unpacked during the collaborative meetings (e.g., group discussion in Excerpt 2). This unpacking was representative of the reflections of other LS group members as well, thereby indicating how these two levels interface with each other.

5.2 | Transformation of teaching through reflective practice in LS

In response to Research Question 2, we examined how reflection in LS transformed our participants' pedagogies in terms of them becoming more aware of their teaching practice and subsequently agentively transforming it. In other words, our LS participants realized a discrepancy between their actual teaching practice and teaching philosophies; thus, they exercised teacher agency based on their reflections throughout the LS process. In the following excerpt from a stimulated interview, Oya expressed her uneasiness about coursebook overdependency, which was not aligned with her teaching philosophy.

Excerpt 4. Teaching "like automatized robots"

Oya: Instead of entering a class and just following the instructions of a coursebook just like automatized robots, I wish we could create variety of lessons and alternatives to what coursebooks provide collaboratively and somehow put them together to create a plan, which is content-wise and time-wise realistic. Probably we could also overcome the timing problem at this institute by this [LS model]. I realize that we have problems to cover the schedule because we do not use the time wisely. This was probably the biggest realization about myself and my institution in LS.

Her statement on coursebook overdependency indicated her philosophical stance as a language teacher. However, in the group interview, she commented on her own inability to change this dependency after

her colleague, Eda, noted how their coursebook served as the surrogate curriculum at the school and how excessive focus on centralized proficiency-oriented exams curtailed their flexibility and agility (Excerpt 5). Similar to Nick's earlier experience (Excerpt 1), the following conversation shows how individual reflections are carried and revisited during collaborative phases involving teacher interaction throughout the LS process.

> *Excerpt 5*. We are not free

> Eda: In our case, our book is our plan and curriculum. Everything. We are not so free when it comes to teaching. If our classes were independent from others, my teaching styles and materials would be much more different. But we have the concern of the same central exam now. This kills your flexibility and agility…

> Oya: Indeed, we cannot change it.

> Eda: We are not free in this.

In Oya's case, LS raised questions for her in terms of what is actual teaching practice and made her realize her habit of coursebook overdependency. This habit was not limited only to her teaching practice. Our fieldnotes showed that the participants tended to regard the contents page of coursebooks as the curriculum. LS as an inquiry-based, collaborative teacher PD activity thus initiated dialogic reflective experiences among participants. Through the process, Oya found a way to identify the issue and later transformed her beliefs on her teaching practice, which were elevated to a new level. Put differently, LS acted as a catalyst to promote her teacher awareness and agency through reflective practice (see also Excerpt 6 below).

The dialogic exchange of ideas between Oya and Eda in Excerpt 5 was echoed in the stimulated interview data with Eda. According to Oya, coursebooks are "somehow treated like holy books but [in LS] there is not one coursebook," which, she believed, allowed teachers to exercise some degree of agency. It is also possible, in Eda's case, to trace her agentic initiation as stemming from her reflections on the teaching practice at the institutional level. She later suggested to her school administrators after her LS experience that they would promote English for specific purposes. Eda believed her LS team created and were able to choose the materials they taught with, and she believed this approach would lead to her realizing her teaching "ideal." Her actions in reaching her ideals were indeed agentic because in sociocultural theory, human agency includes "progressive movement from external, socially mediated activity to internal mediational control by individual learners, which results in the transformation of both the self and the activity" (Johnson, 2009, p. 2).

In short, the structure of LS as presented in seven steps (Figure 1) brought a group of language teaching professionals together to address a learning/teaching challenge that they had identified. This challenge was already there before LS-modeled PD practice; however, in Oya's case, for example, LS made her graduate from using coursebooks, which were functioning as their proverbial pedagogical crutches. Supporting Johnson's (2009) assertion of human agency, Oya's earlier uneasiness about overdependency on coursebooks re-emerged during LS as *external and socially mediated activity*, and throughout LS she reflected on the issue individually in several diary entries. This reflection indicated how her own sense of regulation and awareness took place first on an intermental plane before developing to the level of the self. Later in the group interview, Oya proposed an agenda to her colleagues with regard to overcoming the culture of coursebook overdependency at the institute:

Excerpt 6. Questioning the routine

Beyza: I really hate teaching by the book. This [LS] is an alternative way to teach only by the book.

Oya: Maybe after a pilot study, we would not have to follow a coursebook. I mean, as the students are not familiar with the material from before, their interest would increase and they would become more alert.… So I believe this is much better than coursebooks. In some other schools, it is being done. But unfortunately not here.

Beyza: Students also do not want to follow coursebooks. They hate this routine.

Eda: They are naturally bored when it is a routine. Today, we continue with page 60, tomorrow with 65.… No matter how hard you try to make the lesson interesting for them, it doesn't work.

Oya: And they are sometimes very obsessed with completing every part of the book even though I think it is not necessary or this is not the perfect time for this activity.

Nick: I also have the same cases. A lot.

Oya: So how important are the books?

This excerpt summarizes how LS provided a teacher PD experience that was generative for language teachers; by initiating reflective practice that permeated LS cycles and steps and phases on both individual and collaborative levels of reflection, the LS group fostered a shared realization regarding their teaching practice. What is more, we also observe how Oya moved from the stance of "we are not free in this," as seen in Excerpt 5, and problematized how coursebooks were used, arguably to determine the content and extent of their teaching practice.

Johnson (2009) observed that human agency plays an important role in facilitating and sustaining sociocultural practices; specifically, such agency determines what is internalized and how a new understanding is externalized. In other words, agency may lead to new ways of engaging in activities. Based on this observation, Eda and Oya's new understandings about the established school culture made them question crucial aspects of their teaching practice. This critical reflection on their LS experience enhanced their agency; consequently, they recategorized their existing resources (such as coursebooks) and their practices in relation to them, repositioning themselves as "teachers who are not free" to teachers who think changing "the routine" is doable.

6 | DISCUSSION

From a sociocultural perspective, teacher PD and education are distributed across individuals, tools, and activities (Johnson, 2009). In LS, we observed that teacher learning is also distributed across different steps and cycles of the process. At the very beginning (Step 1 of the LS model), we see how giving teachers the opportunity to identify a learning challenge in their context fosters reflection (Excerpt 1). In Nick's case, the identification of the challenge took place during the preliminary meeting. When Nick was given the opportunity to choose what to work on, a natural reflective process subsequently

developed. This led to a sense of empowerment coming from bottom-up teacher PD. Our findings are consistent with Wyatt and Ončevska-Ager's (2016) observation that involving teachers in making decisions about their own development promotes agency, and this bottom-up approach supports reflective practice. Given that LS meta-action fostered reflective practice with a bottom-up approach and Oya's comment about being (and later becoming) free (Excerpts 5 and 6), it is possible to argue that as teachers reflect in LS, they exercise agency; thus, reflection-as-meta-action can be discussed as a liberating action for teachers.

In addition to the reciprocal influence of individual and collaborative reflections throughout the LS, this model, in line with our conceptualization of LS as a meta-action due to its integrative and recursive structure, depicted the reflective encounters throughout the process (see Figure 1). Relatedly, Farrell (2018) proposed that reflection-as-action includes reflective processes including individuals reflecting on self, context, and teaching problems in a systematic structure. In the light of this conceptualization, we view LS as a teacher PD activity that goes beyond singular temporal divisions of reflection, such as reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, or reflection-for-action. Instead, LS as a process made our participant teachers engage in higher awareness about the learning challenge (Excerpts 1 and 2), their professional selves (Excerpts 3 and 5), and their teaching practice (Excerpts 4 and 6) in a transformative learning experience. Similarly, Yalçın Arslan (2018) argued that teachers engaged in LS-oriented PD raise their pedagogical awareness by taking into consideration their colleagues' experiences and practices. Within LS, teachers thus have the opportunity to go through a series of professional actions in which they take professional decisions, plan, organize, realize, observe, analyze, evaluate, and revise their actions. These actions create a viable platform for meta-action. Therefore, LS can be seen as a model that promotes reflection-as-action for language teacher PD.

In relation to earlier LS research, our findings corroborate those of Ricks's (2011) study, which suggested that reflections of the LS group helped participants develop a more purposeful progression of ideas. In our case, teacher positions and philosophies were in constant negotiation on both the individual and joint collaborative levels, and this negotiation was supported by the LS model and the common purpose of the group. Due to the collaborative dimensions of lesson planning, material development, reflection, and revision meetings within LS cycles, LS cannot be perceived merely as an individual or social practice; that is, it forms a meta-action that enables various reflective actions within itself. Crucially, this meta-action bears both individual and collaborative learning actions as well as a critically reflective element for LS group members. Further, Ermeling and Graff-Ermeling (2014) emphasized that sociocultural adjustments were needed for participants in their study to engage in LS. In our study, such adjustments were not necessary in order for LS to become a social practice for EFL teachers. If anything, we found that LS cycle scaffolds reflection as meta-action, which was both individual and collaborative in nature.

Our findings are also in alignment with Tasker (2011), who reported that one benefit of LS is that it opens up possibilities for student learning. As evidenced in Excerpts 2 and 3, the participants created awareness of subject matter they deemed to be critical. Moreover, our findings show that teachers were able to explore and negotiate the gaps in their teaching practice by problematizing their own selection of materials and textbooks.

Finally, our study demonstrated the links between reflective practice in LS and improved teacher agency. Having identified the overarching goal that drove their own learning processes, our participant teachers decided themselves what was critical to work on. This finding is consistent with Tasker (2011, 2014), who noted that by selecting an overarching goal, activities for the research lesson, and encouraging student responsibility, teachers can develop a new understanding regarding their teaching; accordingly, they can make decisions and externalize different activities to reach a solution. Similarly, in our study, Oya's LS experience seems to afford her the opportunity to adopt some degree

of agency in her teaching practice by reflecting on her philosophical stance (Excerpt 4). Within a sociocultural view of learning, successful agency implies that what is internalized and how the process of internalization occurs shapes new understanding and teacher learning (Johnson, 2009). We found evidence of this in Excerpts 5 and 6, for example, when we observed Oya's altered beliefs about coursebooks. Significantly, this finding corroborates with Ortaçtepe and Akyel (2015), who suggested that PD processes increased teachers' perceived self-efficacy.

Mediated by the LS model, our participants engaged in dialogic and collaborative teaching practice as a part of a PD endeavor. Regardless of whether they fulfilled their learning challenge objective, the pursuit of this objective yielded a greater positive outcome. With this outcome, they reinforced their teaching agency (from the very beginning by choosing what to work on) and philosophy (throughout the transformative process by developing new understandings and reframing their teaching practice). Accordingly, the scope of this transformation went well beyond creating a "perfect single lesson plan"; rather, it included new and/or renewed understanding of their teaching practice in general. Additionally, our participants reached an understanding that is relevant to their teaching practice at their home institution.

7 | CONCLUSION

In the current study, we investigated the relationship between LS and reflective practice in a longitudinal LS-oriented PD process that took place at a tertiary-level EFL teaching institution in Turkey. We demonstrated that LS is a meta-action that bears multiple and multifaceted opportunities to foster reflective practice on both the individual and collaborative levels. In our case, this awareness prompted participants to negotiate the critical position of their teaching status quo and subsequently take the initiative to interrupt "the routine" (Excerpt 6).

Based on our findings, we put forward several pedagogical implications that are informed by this perspective. First, teacher development as a social practice can foster and enhance reflective practice, and LS is a beneficial form of meta-action to reframe teacher development as a social practice. Second, we posit that LS can be enacted as a social PD practice among teachers through collaborative dialoguing (Johnson, 2009). Finally, teacher agency that is nurtured and boosted by LS has the potential to help teachers recast their frames of reference with respect to their teaching practices (i.e., associations, values, feelings, and beliefs; Baecher & Chung, 2020; Mezirow, 1997), and, if necessary, take transformative actions to reduce misalignments between negotiated teacher positions and philosophies and actual teaching practice.

Notably, this study is limited to the research context, participants, and their social contexts. Further studies may replicate a similar research agenda to yield new insights on how reflection as meta-action can be operationalized in different LS settings. Furthermore, different critical teacher collaborations based on communities of practice norms other than LS can be investigated to better understand the collaborative reflection. However, most importantly, our experience with teacher interaction in group discussions and our participants' engagement in reflective interviews (Mann, 2016) suggest a huge potential of the LS model in terms of providing conversational data. As proposed by Gray and Morton (2018), a conversation analytic approach to social interaction can illuminate our understanding of teacher professional development. In tandem with their observation, future research might want to adopt a conversational analytic approach to examine teacher interaction during LS practice in order to yield microlevel insights into how teachers negotiate their respective reflections on a turn-by-turn basis. With such further inquiry, reflective teaching practice can also be better integrated into and extend the social turn in educational linguistics research.

8 | THE AUTHORS

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