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# Developing Preservice EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Competence through Lesson Planning

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This qualitative case study explored how the lesson planning experience of eight EFL preservice teachers in a content class on critical literacy was intricately related not only to their reconceptualization of lesson preparation and teacher work, but also to the development of their pedagogical competence. Data were collected from multiple reflection papers, a one-time interview, the final lesson plan, and the researcher's reflection log, and were qualitatively analyzed. The findings indicate that the preservice teachers' engagement with lesson preparation promoted a renewed understanding of lesson planning as a complex and dynamic process requiring coherent pedagogical reasoning on the part of a teacher, building on an initial conception of technical knowledge alone. Devising a lesson plan further served to enrich their theoretical understanding of critical literacy and improve their abilities as critical readers. In addition, throughout the lesson planning phase, the preservice teachers engaged in an active process of searching for effective ways to represent the content for students' successful learning, which contributed to the development of their pedagogical content knowledge. The findings of this study highlight the importance of engaging preservice teachers in planning practice during their initial teacher education to enhance their professional knowledge base.

**[lesson planning/pedagogical competence/preservice teachers/pedagogical content knowledge/content knowledge]**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Second language teacher education (SLTE) has witnessed a major shift in understanding the nature of teacher knowledge and teacher learning since Freeman and

Johnson's (1998) call for reconceptualizing the knowledge base of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) teacher preparation. Pointing to the fact that the traditional knowledge base of SLTE has mainly focused on applied linguistics, Freeman and Johnson urged expanding it to include the processes of teaching as well as teachers' knowledge, thinking, and beliefs that inform their teaching, while highlighting the need to center on the task of teaching itself in conceptualizing teacher education in language teaching. Reconstructing the knowledge base in SLTE further required moving beyond the transmission model of language teacher education to a constructivist one, all the while acknowledging the importance of understanding teacher cognition and practice within the larger sociocultural context. In the new framework of SLTE, teachers do not passively learn transmitted knowledge from experts and apply it in practice, but actively participate in creating new situated knowledge while interacting with the concrete context of teaching (Johnson, 2006; Richards, 2008; Wright, 2010). This centrality of teachers' knowledge embedded in practice draws our attention to the need to engage prospective teachers in practical activities during their years in SLTE programs, thereby increasing opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge and expertise. As one example of this endeavor to enrich prospective teachers' practical competence, the present study focuses on the practice of lesson planning among EFL preservice teachers. Although lesson planning has been understood as being "much a part of teaching as is the actual performance itself" (Shulman, 1987, p. 17), little is known about the way in which preservice teachers' engagement with lesson planning is connected to their development of professional development. In light of the paucity of studies that foreground the knowledge development of preservice teachers while engaging in lesson planning in their initial teacher education program, the present study[1] aims to examine the extent to which lesson planning offers a potential site for preservice teachers not only to redefine the task of lesson planning and teacher work, but also to develop their pedagogical competence.

## II. BACKGROUND

In his seminal work on conceptualizing the knowledge base for teaching, Shulman (1987) defines teacher knowledge as constituting seven interrelated categories of knowledge that include content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their

[1] This is the first published work of a larger study on critical literacy teacher education for EFL preservice teachers in Korea.

characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values. Among these, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) has been the most widely used and influential construct in understanding teacher knowledge and cognition in the field of teacher education and teacher learning. According to Shulman (1987), PCK "represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (p. 8). Differently put, it is teachers' "distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8), i.e., teachers' understanding of how best to represent and formulate the subject matter in order for students' learning and comprehension to be achieved. Shulman (1987) highlights its importance by adding that PCK is the category of knowledge "most likely to distinguish the understanding of content specialist from that of the pedagogue" (p. 8). He further extends the definition of PCK as follows:

> Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons. (Shulman, 1986, p. 9)

For Shulman (1987), teaching is the process of "comprehension and reasoning" as well as "transformation and reflection" (p. 13). In his conceptualization of teaching, he views teaching as a process of transforming teachers' knowledge and comprehension of the content by selecting the most appropriate representational forms to make it accessible to students. This process of reformulating the content and making appropriate pedagogical decisions entails teachers' ability to reason soundly. Therefore, in explicating his model of pedagogical reasoning and action, he presents the idea of teaching as involving a cycle of the five phases or steps, i.e., *comprehension*, *transformation*, *instruction*, *evaluation*, and *reflection*. In order to teach successfully in this model, teachers first need to *comprehend* the ideas and concepts to be taught critically and in several different ways both within and outside the discipline. With this comprehension, teachers in the *transformation* phase are expected to engage in some combination of the following processes: preparation, representation, instructional selection, and adaptation. Preparation refers to the teacher's critical interpretation and analysis of teaching materials "in light of one's own comprehension" (Shulman, 1987, p. 6). Representation is a process of finding alternative ways to represent the central concepts and ideas in the lesson in order to make students' learning possible. Instructional selection is the process of the teacher's search for instructional methods of

teaching, while adaptation refers to the process of making representations suitable for the general characteristics of students, such as student ability, motivations, prior knowledge and skills, expectations, and difficulties, to name a few.

We can see that the *comprehension* and *transformation* phases in Shulman's teaching cycle are preparatory stages before the actual performance of teaching occurs. Shulman (1987) emphasizes that teachers' pedagogical reasoning in these phases is as important as actual teaching. Moving onto the next phase in his teaching model, *instruction* refers to a variety of observable acts of classroom teaching. *Evaluation* involves not only checking students' comprehension and understanding but also monitoring the teacher's own teaching as well as materials used. *Reflection* is the process whereby teachers look back at their teaching bearing in mind the teaching goal. Though presented in sequence, Shulman points out that these different phases do not constitute a fixed set of stages but can occur in a different order or can be shortened or expanded on.

Research on teacher cognition in SLTE has received considerable attention for the past few decades. This fast-growing interest on "what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg, 2003, p. 81) arises from the realization that if we want to make sense of what teachers do in the classroom, we need to understand teacher cognition. Studies on language teacher cognition thus far have provided insight into how teachers' prior experience as learners has an enduring impact on teachers' knowledge and beliefs, the extent to which teacher education is influential in developing teacher cognition, and the way the contextual factors intersects with the intricate relationship between teacher cognition and classroom practice. A great deal of studies in teacher cognition in SLTE has been conducted focusing on language teachers' practical knowledge base for several specific domains of ESL/EFL teaching, such as grammar (Andrew, 2001, 2003; Borg, 1998, 1999; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Sanchez & Borg, 2014) reading (Irvine-Niakaris & Kiely, 2015; Johnson, 1992; Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 1999), vocabulary (Macalister, 2012), writing (Burns, 1992; I. Lee, 2010; Shi & Cumming, 1995), and pronunciation (Baker, 2014). However, studies that centered on exploring the possibility of lesson planning in developing teachers' practical competence has been scant.

Among the few examples on lesson planning and teacher cognition in SLTE, Morton and Gray (2010) demonstrated the way shared lesson planning sessions served to assist student teachers in constructing their professional knowledge and professional identities in the context of a part-time Cambridge ESOL CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) course at a UK university. The findings illustrated that during their participation in shared lesson planning conferences in which a teacher educator and a group of six student teachers worked collaboratively on one student teacher's lesson plan, the student teachers actively engaged in the process of planning for instruction by

suggesting actions, evaluating, explicating TESOL principles, and imagining the effects of the plan in a classroom setting. It was further shown that through this process, the student teachers came to build the pedagogical content knowledge as well as identities as members of the community of practices of English language teachers. In an undergraduate general methodology class in the United States, Salajan, Nyachwaya, Hoffman, and Hill (2016) showed how the collaborative learning atmosphere in designing a lesson plan and in having the lesson plan peer-reviewed among teacher candidates through a wiki platform contributed to their learning and enhancement of lesson planning skills. The findings further indicated that while engaging in both providing feedback for revisions and receiving meaningful comments, the teacher candidates came to create richer lesson plans and improved their lesson planning expertise. Recently, in proposing an ESL/EFL pedagogical reasoning and action model inferred from Shulman (1987), Pang (2016) presented a coherent argument on the need to explore the role of the lesson planning task in enhancing teachers' practical competence, while calling for future empirical studies exploring teachers' lesson planning experiences in relation to their professional development. As one response to this call, the present study examined EFL preservice teachers' experiences in preparing a lesson in a content class, aiming to shed light on the way lesson planning was closely connected to their renewed understanding of the lesson preparation task and teacher work as well as the development of their practical knowledge base.

# III. METHODOLOGY

## 1. Context and Participants

The present study was conducted at a private university in Korea. The participants were eight preservice teachers[2] enrolled in EFL/ESL Literacy Education[3] which I taught during the fall semester of 2017. The course was one of the electives for students on a teacher training track in English department, but was open for anyone in the department interested in ESL/EFL education and in pursuing a career in a TESOL-related field in the future. All participants, from sophomores to seniors, were females in their early to mid-twenties. They had all taken at least one course related to TESOL in English department prior to taking the class. Four of them had teaching experience, in

[2] There were thirteen students taking the class. For this study, however, I focused on eight preservice teachers' professional development as they were the ones who successfully completed their final lesson plan, submitted all reflection papers, and took part in the interview.
[3] The name of the course is a pseudonym.

the form of either private tutoring or part-time teaching at a private institute.

The goal of the course was to introduce critical literacy to preservice teachers. More specifically, I designed the course with two objectives in mind: (1) have them develop a conceptual understanding of what critical literacy is and (2) provide them with an opportunity to apply their knowledge into practice by designing a critical literacy lesson plan. The students spent a little more than the first half of the semester studying the principles of critical literacy through instructor lecture and class discussion. Then, for the practice-oriented phase of the course, they worked on creating a critical literacy lesson plan either individually or with a partner of their choice. During this phase, they were first provided with an opportunity to experience critical literacy firsthand by reading two different versions of the fairy tale, *Little Snow White* − one was the original; the other was written from a feminist perspective. After experiencing critical literacy as readers, they embarked on their project of planning a lesson for secondary classrooms in Korea using popular fairy tales. Before they began devising their own lesson plan, they had an opportunity to analyze sample lessons in the textbook[4], first with a partner, and then as a whole class. In the process of completing their lesson planning project, they had two individual conferences with me, during which they shared their concerns, asked questions, and received feedback on their draft. They also shared their lesson plan draft with their classmates through a short presentation after their first individual conference.

## 2. Data Collection and Analysis

The main data of the present study were the three reflection papers[5] written by the preservice teachers while working on their lesson plan. During the practice-oriented phase of the class, students were encouraged to contemplate their experience of engaging in lesson preparation, while recoding their new learning experience, ideas, thoughts, and feelings. The reflection papers did not have any specific format but contained a few general questions that were designed to assist the preservice teachers to engage in the reflection process such as: what their overall experience was like during the previous week (or the last two weeks), what issues they confronted, and what successes and/or difficulties they experienced. The data were also collected through an end-of-semester interview. The semi-structured interview lasted for about 10 to 15 minutes and was conducted at my office. The preservice teachers were encouraged to share their overall

[4] The textbook of this course was Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students' Comprehension of Texts (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

[5] The preservice teachers wrote five reflection papers, but as data for this research, I used three reflection papers (3, 4, and 5) which they wrote when working on lesson planning and the final presentation.

impressions about the experience in the classroom as prospective teachers while learning critical literacy and planning a lesson. When applicable, I also asked specific questions to individual students to extend my understanding of their semester-long experience. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim right after the interview. I also wrote my own reflective journal documenting my thoughts, feelings, ideas, and observations each week, thinking through the process of assisting the students to develop as competent prospective teachers. The students' final lesson plan was also collected as part of the data. For this study, however, I incorporated the three reflection papers and an end-of-semester interview as data. All data were originally in Korean and translated into English for writing up the findings of this paper.

The systematic qualitative data analysis was conducted in an inductive and iterative manner (Merriam, 2002, 2009). The data analysis began concomitantly when I started collecting data, but more intensive data analysis was carried out after the data collection was completed. While gathering data, I also read related literature in an attempt to understand my findings in the field within the larger theoretical framework. In search of regularities and recurring themes, I read the entire data set several times, constantly comparing units of information with the new ones (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The multiple readings of the data produced initial coding categories, which were then applied back to the data. Through this process, some of the initial coding categories were subsumed under the new ones, while others were discarded. Still some new coding categories evolved. The final coding categories emerged from this fine-tuning process, some of which include, "the first experience in lesson planning," "an opportunity to grow as prospective teachers," "lesson planning as a simple paperwork," "lesson planning as a complex reasoning process," "lesson planning as a simulation for teaching," "a new understanding of teacher work," "gaining confidence as future teachers," "improving knowledge on critical literacy through lesson planning," "becoming more adept at reading critically," "striving to make the lesson effective for students' learning," "issues in constructing and sequencing coherent problem-posing questions," "anticipating students' difficulties in participating in the dialogic process," "making appropriate instructional choices," and "prioritizing students' interest and their academic level in planning." This analytic process of breaking the data into pieces of information and reassembling them in a new way allowed me to better understand the way the lesson preparation experience assisted the preservice teachers to reestablish the definition of the lesson planning task and teacher work as well as developing their pedagogical knowledge base.

## IV. FINDINGS

For all eight preservice teachers, this was their first experience of learning how to plan a lesson. Though they found "the experience of working on a sample lesson plan" (Yuna[6], R3[7]) prior to their actual lesson planning activity was "helpful" (Boyoung, R3; Heesun, R3; Jenny, R3; Jimin, R4), they confessed that it was still "difficult" (Boyoung, R3) and "confusing" (Jenny, R4; Jimin, R5) to create a lesson plan on their own for the first time. Despite their initial frustration, however, they stated that they became "more motivated" (Mina, R3) and "passionate" (Heesun, R3) as time progressed and felt the experience to be "gratifying" (Boyoung, R3):

> I believe this is a perfect opportunity for us as preservice teachers. I am trying to make the most of what I have learned in the class and apply it to my lesson plan. We have much more time to deliberate over how we would want to plan and organize our lesson compared to real teachers out there. I want to try out everything I can so that I have no regrets. (Heesun, R3)

The preservice teachers indeed considered the experience "a precious opportunity as prospective teachers to grow" (Boyoung, R5; Eunjoo, R4; Yuna, R3) and "a process of developing [their] teacher competence needed to provide better learning opportunities for students in the future" (Mina, R3). Their involvement in the lesson planning activity allowed them not only to reconceptualize the meaning of lesson planning, which in turn helped them develop a better understanding of what the vocation of teaching entails, but also served to develop their professional competence.

### 1. The New Understanding of Lesson Planning and Teacher Work

The preservice teachers recounted that their involvement in the lesson planning task "changed the way [they] understand what lesson planning is" (Sohyun, R4). Reflecting back on their experience of drafting the first version of the lesson plan, they remarked that they "just followed the format and the order of the template unconditionally" (Eunjoo, R5) while "focusing on just getting the task done" (Jimin, R4). Sohyun added that she "used to think of a lesson plan as a simple piece of paperwork or a plan in its literal sense … that lists different activities to do in different parts of a lesson" (R4).

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[6] All participants' names are pseudonyms.
[7] In order to save space and increase readability of the Findings section, the reflection papers are represented as R with a number next to it.

Describing her changed view of lesson planning, she commented:

> Unlike my past experience of simply jotting down class activities in different time slots in a lesson plan template, I am now thinking more deeply about the way the class will proceed while anticipating how students will participate in different activities and what questions they will ask. (Sohyun, R4)

In other words, through their hands-on experience of planning a lesson in EFL/ESL Literacy Education, the preservice teachers became aware that preparing for effective teaching through a well thought-out lesson plan is "a hard work" (Boyoung, R3) that "requires elaborate and detailed thought with regard to the class process" (Boyoung, R3; Heesun, R3; Sohyun, R3) and that "necessitates envisaging what is going to happen in a real classroom" (Heesun, R3). Speaking of her new learning, Jimin said:

> After the first cycle of lesson planning and feedback, I was able to develop a clearer understanding of what a good lesson plan is. I learned that the tasks and activities that we choose to incorporate in our lesson plan should have a clear leaning goal that is in line with the educational objective of the larger unit and be sequenced coherently in order to maximize student learning. (Jimin, R4)

Their engagement in the process of carefully considering the flow of a lesson and purposefully selecting and sequencing class activities when planning it led the preservice teachers to think that they were actually "experiencing teacher's work in advance" (Boyoung, R3). Sohyun commented that planning a lesson made her "imagine that [she] had been carrying out an actual lesson in the class" (R4). Jenny shared a similar opinion:

> As I became involved in working on the overall flow and organization of a lesson with students' learning in mind, I realized that lesson planning is actually a simulation of teaching. … I feel like I am doing a teacher's work. As a preservice teacher, I really like this experience because it allows me to simulate actual teaching in my mind by considering how coherently the class will progress and whether the class materials will match the students' academic level. (Jenny, R3)

Furthermore, the preservice teachers' engagement with such a detailed and laborious lesson planning process seemed to provide them with an opportunity to realize that "teaching does not come easy" (Jenny, R3). "Surprised to recognize that such enormous efforts must be put into preparing for a class" (R4), Yuna commented:

> As I do not have any experience in teaching, I did not have a clear understanding of what the teacher's work entails. I just had this vague idea that it is a vocation that transfers knowledge of English to students. It was through this class that I came to understand what a great deal of effort and energy on the part of a teacher is poured into in coming up with a well-devised plan to carry out a lesson. (Yuna, R5)

Similarly, Mina shared her new realization of the teacher's work:

> I have learned a lot from this class. What strikes me the most is that everything in the class, even the simplest thing such as asking students background questions before the actual lesson begins, is all based on what the teacher has planned prior to the class, and that having a good lesson requires many times more preparation than actual teaching. (Mina, R5)

Eunjoo commented that the class was an opportunity that made her redefine the meaning of "the teacher quality" (R5):

> It is certain that the more detailed the lesson plan, the better the actual class will turn out to be. Through our hands-on experience of planning a lesson in class, I came to realize the significance of teachers' preparation because the quality of a class and students' learning ultimately depends on how much the teacher prepares for the class. It was an experience that made me reconsider the importance of the teacher's sense of responsibility. (Eunjoo, R5)

As the preservice teachers became cognizant of the importance of lesson planning as part of a teacher's work, their hands-on experience of planning a lesson in class seemed to give them "confidence" as prospective teachers (Boyoung, R3; Eunjoo, R5; Heesun, R4; Jimin, R5):

> What we have been working on is actually time-consuming and difficult, but I am sure that I can do a better job of preparing a lesson on my own when I become a teacher with less trial and error because of this experience. (Jimin, R3)

> I have worked on devising a detailed and practical critical literacy lesson for the past few weeks while receiving feedback from the professor and other preservice teachers. Creating my first lesson plan through several revisions was

> definitely an experience that builds my confidence as a preservice teacher. (Boyoung, R4)

> I have always wanted to take this type of class in which I not only learn theories of teaching and learning but also have an opportunity to apply them in practice. My experience of preparing for a lesson in this class assured me that I will do a successful job in planning and carrying out a good lesson in the future. (Mina, R4)

Mina further added that such a practical experience in the class made her "eager to put [her] lesson plan into practice" and to teach it in a real classroom (R4):

> I used to feel some burden about the idea of teaching others because it seems to me that with teaching comes great responsibility. After this experience, however, my burden changed into curiosity. I become anxious to know, for example, how my lesson plan will turn out in a real classroom, what will be successful, and what needs to be modified. … This experience is definitely a turning point for me because it aroused my interest and passion in teaching again. (Mina, R4)

## 2. The Development of Professional Competence

Not only did the experience of lesson planning provide the preservice teachers with an opportunity to redefine the task of lesson planning as well as teacher work, but it also worked to develop their professional competence.

### 1) Developing Content Knowledge through Lesson Planning

The preservice teachers considered their experience of "engaging in a lesson planning activity" (Eunjoo, Jenny, Jimin, Yuna, Interview) to be one that consolidated their understanding of critical literacy. They were well-aware of the fact that "teachers need to be able to read texts critically if they are to deliver a successful critical literacy lesson" (Jimin, R4). Therefore, in preparing for a lesson, they made sure that they "read the chosen text several times from a critical perspective" (Jenny, R4) and "with care" (Yuna, R3). This close reading of the text with a critical edge was believed to "strengthen [their] ability to approach texts critically" (Jenny, R4; Jimin, R5):

> We were to prepare our plan to teach a critical literacy lesson, so I paid special attention to reading through the text from a critical standpoint. Through this

> thorough and active reading, I think I became better able to take a critical stance on texts. (Heesun, Interview)

> Our team prepared the critical literacy lesson plan using *Hansel and Gretel* by the Grimm Brothers. *Hansel and Gretel* is a popular fairy tale that everyone reads in one's childhood, but I think we used to read it uncritically and passively. Therefore, while preparing a plan for a critically-oriented class using this fairy tale, we had to approach and analyze it from a critical perspective ourselves first. This critical reading allowed us to reinterpret the text in a whole new way. (Boyoung, R3)

Their critical engagement with the chosen text while planning a lesson further worked to enable them to better understand the theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy. The preservice teachers agreed that they came to "develop a deeper understanding of critical literacy through their hands-on experience of creating a lesson plan" (Boyoung, R5; Jenny, R4; Jimin, R5; Sohyun, R4):

> During the theoretical learning phase in the class, we learned that critical literacy enables learners to read against the power of the author. I did not quite understand what this means at that time. Although I understood the principle in a literal sense, the idea that readers have power and, if so, what power readers possess was still vague to me. I was also uncertain of how teachers can help students to use their power while reading. It was through our lesson planning experience that I came to understand what it actually means. (Jimin, R5)

> Through the process of applying and integrating what we had learned to create a lesson plan, I was able to make the theory of critical literacy as mine in its entirety. … Analyzing and selecting the components of critical literacy to design a lesson that suits the class objectives of our team, I was able to gain a clearer understanding of what critical literacy is. (Heesun, R5)

Thus, the preservice teachers enhanced their understanding of critical literacy while involved in a lesson planning activity.

2) Developing Pedagogical Content Knowledge through Lesson Planning

With their more refined knowledge of critical literacy, the preservice teachers recounted that their major issue during lesson planning was "how to impart [their]

knowledge to students most effectively" (Jimin, R5; Mina, R4). Eunjoo said that she put much effort into "come[ing] up with ideas on how effectively and in what ways [she cloud] deliver the content to students" (R3). As critical literacy encourages learners to challenge the biased worldviews of the author hidden in texts and rewrite them from a whole new perspective with a vision of social justice, the preservice teachers invested much of their time and energy in devising and sequencing problem-posing questions, one of the strategies of critical literacy classrooms in fostering students' critical consciousness. The preservice teachers stated in one voice that they paid special attention to "developing questions that [would] promote students' questioning stance" on the chosen topic (Boyoung, interview; Eunjoo, R4; Jenny, R4):

> I was particularly concerned with generating questions that would assist students in engaging with texts critically. … It was difficult to make a coherent lesson plan that aligns with the larger objective of critical literacy. What I devoted my time the most to was whether my lesson plan could encourage a critical perspective on the given issue among my students. (Boyoung, R4)

As problem-posing questions are open-ended, instead of just listing down potential questions that will help students approach texts from a critical stance, the preservice teachers also engaged in anticipating "how students [would] react to those questions" (Heesun, R4; Jimin, R3; Yuna, R3). This endeavor to consider students' responses in advance further made them contemplate situations where "students do not or are unable to answer [their] questions" (Boyoung, R3; Sohyun, R3), which in turn led them to think about "how they [would] handle those situations in an actual classroom" (Boyoung, R3; Sohyun, R3). They also thought of situations where "students' answers are not what they predicted when preparing a lesson" (Mina, R4):

> I think it is necessary that we design our lesson with the possibility of students' coming up with a multitude of creative answers in mind. It is very possible that the actual class will diverge from our planned lesson with students responding to our questions in unexpected ways. Therefore, critical literacy teachers need to anticipate this spontaneity and unpredictability while preparing a lesson, bearing in mind various potential directions the class will proceed. (Sohyun, R5)

> With such open-ended questions, it is only natural that we expect a full of novel and whimsical responses from students. Therefore, we have to be prepared as thoroughly as possible while anticipating a wide range of responses that our problem-posing questions will invoke among students. (Jimin, R5)

As a dialogic process in which teachers and students participate as co-constructors of knowledge through problem-posing questions constitutes the key to defining critical literacy classrooms, the preservice teachers specified that they "[made] efforts not to frame students' thinking" in creating problem-posing questions (Jenny, R4) and were particularly careful "not to devise leading questions that force students to provide certain predetermined answers" (Jenny, R4; Mina, R4; Yuna, R4). Although each preservice teacher's lesson plan had a specific topic and focus that they intended for their students to tackle with a critical stance and gain a new understanding, they still wanted to make sure that the priority would be "the opportunity for students to think critically and creatively on their own" (Sohyun, R5) and "to actively participate in and enjoy the dialogic process" (Jenny, R5).

As the preservice teachers focused their time and energy on carefully designing the problem-posing sessions in their lesson planning, they also recounted that they worked hard to come up with class activities such as "grammar and vocabulary worksheets, poster samples, and switching samples … to better help students actively take part in the class" (Eunjoo, R4). They added that it "[took] quite some time to find class materials, such as video materials, that would attract students' interest" (Yuna, R3), and that would "be appropriate for [their] proficiency level and match with the class purpose" (Boyoung, R3):

> My partner and I worked very hard to find and devise activities for each step of our lesson plan, such as drawing a picture in the guiding stage, and writing 'the rest of the story' and creating/displaying posters in the extending and action stage. While putting together these activities, we constantly related our lesson plan to an actual classroom setting, imagining how these would turn out in a real classroom. (Mina, R3)

The preservice teachers further commented that they centered their lesson planning task on developing class activities "with the target students and the educational context in mind," which they "[found] more complex than [they] [had] expected" (Eunjoo, R3). More specifically, they articulated that they "paid close attention to how students [would] respond to diverse class activities at each stage of the lesson" (Sohyun, R3). The preservice teachers in particular gave priority to whether the lesson "draws students' interests" (Heesun, R3) and "motivates [them]" (Sohyun, R4):

> I believe one of the best ways to motivate students to learn in class is to connect class activities to students' personal lives. … Therefore, I planned my lesson with some guiding questions at the beginning that asked students about their

experiences when they read *Little Mermaid* when they were young. (Jimin, R3)

Not only did the preservice teachers concentrate on boosting students' motivation, but they were also concerned with whether their lesson would be appropriate for the target students' academic and psychological level:

> It required a meticulous and well thought-out decision to select a topic, design class activities, and develop problem-posing questions that are appropriate for our target students – 2nd-year middle school students. My partner and I put a lot of efforts into deciding whether our topic – gender equality and materialism – would be something that middle school students can easily relate to, whether our video material would be suitable for them, and whether our task of writing an alternative text would be too demanding or not. We were engaged in a continuous process of thinking and reflecting whether our plan would be appropriate for our target students. (Yuna, R4)

> When we were working on critical reading practices as readers in the class, I remember most of us found it difficult to answer the professor's question of whose voices are missing in the text. This experience made me realize that it would be difficult for middle school students to come up with answers to problem-posing questions. Therefore, I worked hard on creating problem-posing questions that are proper and meaningful for students. (Jimin, R3)

Thus, the preservice teachers recounted that they were committed to "finding ways to assist students to better understand the critical themes and to actively participate in the dialogic process" (Yuna, R3).

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explored eight EFL preservice teachers' lesson planning experience in an SLTE content class to gain insights into the extent to which lesson preparation contributed not only to a renewed understanding of the lesson planning task and teacher work, but also to their development of pedagogical competence. The findings illustrated that through their engagement with the lesson planning process, the preservice teachers reconceptualized the task of lesson planning, moving beyond their initial understanding of it as a technical exercise to recognizing the complexities involved in the work that reflect teachers' pedagogical reasoning. In addition, their renewed understanding of

lesson planning as a practice in and of itself informed by coherent pedagogical thinking directed them to redefine teachers' work from a new perspective. Furthermore, the preservice teachers' involvement in preparing a lesson strengthened their knowledge of critical literacy, while reinforcing their theoretical understanding of it and improving their critical reading abilities.

The study also illustrated that throughout their lesson planning practice, the preservice teachers engaged in the continuous process of searching for the most effective ways to represent content to enable students' learning. Not only did they deliberate over the selection and sequence of problem-posing questions, but they also anticipated students' difficulties in taking part in the dialogic process, while making efforts to come up with pedagogical activities. In their endeavor to make the content more accessible for students, they further kept the students' interests and their academic proficiency a top priority when devising a lesson plan. In other words, while preparing for a lesson, the preservice teachers engaged productively with pedagogical reasoning to promote student learning, which served to develop not only their content knowledge but also their pedagogical content knowledge.

Despite the attention given to lesson planning as a practice in itself, rather than only as a preparation for teaching practice (John, 2006; Shulman, 1987), the potential of lesson planning in enhancing preservice teachers' professional competence has not been widely investigated in EFL/ESL teacher education research. Given this scarcity, I believe the present study adds to the current understanding of teacher learning and teacher preparation by highlighting the impact of lesson planning on the development of preservice teachers' professional knowledge and expertise. Since the sociocultural turn in the field of SLTE (Johnson, 2006) that takes to the fore the need to understand teacher learning within the framework of situated teacher knowledge in practice, the component of practicum in teacher preparation programs has gained presence as it engages preservice teachers not only in designing a lesson but also in implementing the plan in an actual teaching context.

Regarding the practicum experience among EFL preservice teachers in Korea, however, research findings have been somewhat conflicting. While the field experience allowed preservice teachers to face the reality of secondary educational contexts, redefine the teacher role as well as teaching philosophy in their efforts to better accommodate the reality, and confirm their aspiration to become a teacher (Kim, 2008; Kim & Lim, 2008; Kim & Oh, 2011; S. Lee, 2007; Rha, 2007), it was also shown that the overall practicum experience was heavily influenced by the attitude of and support from cooperating teachers (Heo & Kim, 2010; Kim & Lim, 2008; Paek, 2015). The four-week practicum period was also considered rather short for preservice teachers to learn anything substantial from the field (Chang, Jung, & Choi, 2008; Heo & Kim, 2010; Kim

& Yi, 2013). While it is obvious that the field experience provides a valuable opportunity for preservice teachers' professional development, we need to diversify the ways of enriching preservice teachers' learning from practice during their years in teacher education programs. Intensive engagement with lesson planning in either a methodology or a content class holds great potential in promoting preservice teachers' construction of different categories of knowledge as demonstrated in this study.

Given the dearth of studies on teacher learning through lesson planning, more studies in diverse teacher education settings are needed for a better understanding of the way preservice teachers' engagement in lesson preparation contributes to their development of abilities to reason their way through to facilitate students' learning. Where viable, exploring the way in which preservice teachers experience the thinking process when implementing the predesigned lesson plan during their student teaching would broaden our understanding on how preservice teachers' pedagogically reasoned plan is modified and appropriated during interaction with particular groups of students within their immediate teaching context, while enriching their professional knowledge growth as prospective teachers.

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**Examples in: English**
**Applicable Language: English**
**Applicable Level: Tertiary**

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