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# DEMYSTIFYING CRITICAL REFLECTION

Improving Pedagogy and Practice  
with Legitimation Code Theory

Legitimation Code Theory



# 8

## WRITING BLOG CRITIQUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Teaching students what is valued with semantic gravity and genre theory

*Lucy Macnaught*

### Introduction

Tertiary education institutions commonly identify non-discipline-specific outcomes through terms, such as graduate attributes, graduate qualities, or generic competencies. As Faulkner and colleagues elaborate, recent years have seen an “international convergence towards a common set of skills” or outcomes, including critical thinking (Faulkner et al. 2013: 871). Such ‘skills’ are assessed through a wide range of tertiary assessment tasks, including reflective journals, eportfolios, case studies, narratives, reflective essays, and reports (Szenes & Tilakaratna 2021). In these kinds of writing tasks, a challenge for student-teachers is to use academic discourse to show that they are ‘being critical’ as they reflect on educational theories and classroom practices. In this sense, there is not one all-encompassing definition of what ‘critical reflection’ is, but rather varying manifestations of it in different types of assessment tasks. As scholars have identified, this perspective marks a shift from examining abstract definitions, processes or perceptions of critical reflection to examining practices where students have to demonstrate it in the form of academic discourse (Szenes, Tilakaratna & Maton 2015).

Compared to more traditional forms of assessment, one distinctive expectation of critical reflection in academic discourse is for students to engage with ‘self’. Students are expected to write about ‘their emotions and express their opinions’ (Szenes & Tilakaratna 2021: 2), and this is widely seen as important to improving professional teaching practice as well as on-going professional development (Hume 2009; Otienoh 2009). Standards for graduating teachers, for instance, commonly expect teachers to critically examine their own assumptions and beliefs (see New York State Education Department 2012; Department for Education 2013 [England]; Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand

2019). However, as scholars have observed, teaching, assessing, and producing assessment tasks that are regarded as ‘reflective’ and/or ‘critical’ poses challenges related to atypical text structure (Shum et al. 2017), assessment rubrics and marking criteria (Chan et al. 2020), and shared expectations of what constitutes ‘success’ (Stevenson et al. 2018). The significant time spent on such writing tasks also does not guarantee that students will improve their quality or ‘level’ of reflection (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl 2012; Orland-Barak 2005).

A hierarchical classification of reflection has long been evident in scholarship concerned with the gradual process of becoming a reflective practitioner (e.g., Calderhead 1989; Hatton & Smith 1995). Models or frameworks of reflection commonly identify lower levels of reflection as being limited to description and reporting, whereas higher levels of reflection involve explaining the reasoning behind decisions and events, and also considering these in light of future choices (e.g., Bain et al. 2002; Hatton & Smith 1995). The ways in which these higher levels of reflection manifest as language choices can be illuminated through the analysis of texts that students produce. A focus on practices, including assessment tasks, enables educators to identify and then teach what is valued. The underpinning rationale is that features of successful texts are ‘teachable’ and that students benefit from not only seeing what a high-scoring ‘end product’ looks like, but also understanding choices that contribute to its success (Rose & Martin 2012). The analysis of writing samples and use of model texts in teaching is particularly relevant in light of research which shows that assessment task descriptions, rubrics, and learning outcomes are always open to varied interpretation by students – even in cases where extensive efforts are made to make assessment standards clear (O’Donovan, Price & Rust 2004).

One widely used framework that has been used to identify what is valued in student writing is Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). Studies that draw on the dimension of Semantics from LCT (Maton 2009, 2013, 2014, 2020) have, thus far, mostly focused on how changes in context-dependence contribute to successful writing. This includes changing the degree to which meanings are bound to a specific context in order to relate the concrete particulars of experiences to theories and concepts. Recent contributions with a focus on student writing span a wide range of fields, including: social work (Boryczko 2020), nursing (Brooke 2019), history (Macnaught et al. 2023), physics (Steenkamp et al. 2019), and English for academic purposes (Brooke, Monbec & Tilakaratna 2019). The complementary framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has also been used to reveal what is valued through the analysis of key semiotic features in specific types of texts, such as the contribution of evaluative language in critiquing one’s own practice (e.g. Szenes & Tilakaratna 2021).

This study involves research in the field of teacher education. A recent study drawing on Semantics from LCT focused on reflective writing tasks within the first year of a Bachelor of Education program (Macnaught 2020). This

chapter examines a ‘blog critique’ assessment task in year 2. In this context, blog critiques contribute to students developing ‘an educational philosophy that will guide and improve their teaching practice in classrooms’ (Hume 2009: 247). A step towards this long-term goal is for student-teachers to respond to the educational practices and opinions of others, such as those represented in blog posts written by teachers. The overall aim of the study is to use text analysis with concepts from LCT and SFL to better understand what constitutes a ‘critique’ for a specific assessment task at a particular point in a program of study. Building on insights from year 1, these findings from year 2 aim to generate knowledge about how students can be supported to reflect on and critique educational practices as part of completing assessment tasks within a Bachelor of Education program.

## Context

Research in this chapter is part of a wider project called Sustainable Embedded Academic Literacy (SEAL). This project investigates collaborative practices for teaching academic literacy development within a Bachelor of Education program at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). This chapter focuses on one second-year course titled, Principles of Learning and Teaching (EDUC651). One of the assessment tasks involves critiquing published blog posts as a precursor to writing a series of new blog posts. According to the lecturer (see Macnaught et al. forthcoming), the pedagogic purpose of this type of assessment task is for students to draw on the ideas of fellow teachers, respond to the opinions of others, and engage with theory-based ideas in a practical and accessible way. It is also designed to encourage students to identify and provide reasoning for their own views. Past students, however, have tended to find integrating theory and managing multiple points of view difficult. In particular, they have tended to elaborately describe specific classroom events, but struggled to clearly and consistently identify and relate these to more abstract concepts in their field of study. They have also had difficulty with using language to clearly distinguish between the view of the blog author, views expressed by researchers (within the blog or in literature), and their own view.

In response to these challenges, learning advisors at AUT have collaborated with the lecturer of EDUC651 to design and deliver face to face and online teaching materials for writing blog critiques (Macnaught et al. 2022). An example teaching sequence from 2019 appears in Figure 8.1. The eighth and ninth steps of using model texts and guided note-taking are discussed in this chapter<sup>1</sup>. While these strategies for teaching academic literacy development are strongly influenced by SFL genre pedagogies (see Rose & Martin 2012), the focus of this chapter is on the text analysis that informs what is included in model blog critiques and note-taking templates.

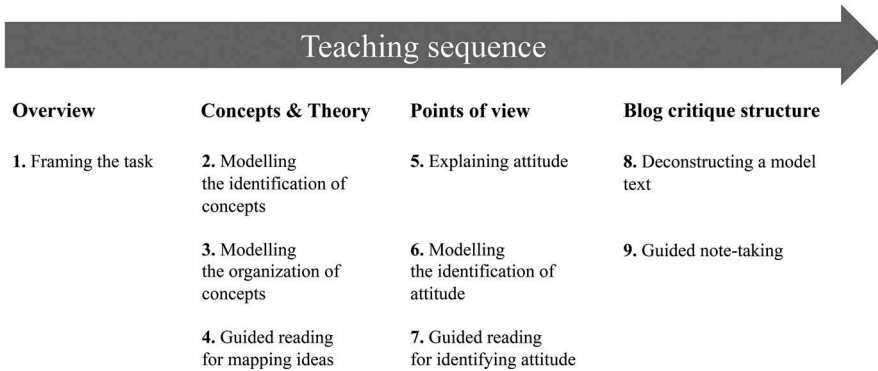


FIGURE 8.1 A teaching sequence to prepare students for writing blog critiques

## Methodology

The teaching reported on in this chapter is informed by the qualitative discourse analysis of student writing. The purpose of collecting blog critiques that have been awarded a high grade is to identify common features that contributed to their success. With permission from three students who had completed EDUC651 in a previous semester, three complete sets of blog critiques were collected for use in teaching future cohorts of students. This text collection provided a set of 15 blog critiques – each being approximately 400 words in length. Each of these critiques focused on a published blog written by an accredited teacher about their teaching practices.

Analysis of the data set focused on two significant challenges for students. Based on the marking criteria (see Table 8.2, further below) and conversations between the lecturer and learning advisor, it was clear that students need to not only respond to the specifics of classroom teaching practices and the ideas of others – as described in the blog posts – but also integrate theory. Students also need to manage multiple points of view, including those of the blog authors, the researchers as represented in the blogs and/or published research, and their own view. The theoretical frameworks with which to conduct the qualitative discourse analysis of data are chosen specifically to investigate each of these challenges.

### *LCT – semantic gravity*

To address the issue of how students can successfully integrate theory as they write about teaching practices, this study draws on the concept of *semantic gravity* (Maton 2013, 2014, 2020). Semantic gravity describes the degree of context-dependence of practices. Where something has *stronger* semantic gravity (SG+), it is said to have more dependence on a particular context for its meaning, such as writing details about the actions and behaviours of

specific teachers and students in a specific classroom setting. Where something has *weaker* semantic gravity (SG-), it is said to have less dependence on any particular context, such as identifying the classroom behaviour of students as an instance of a type or category of motivation. Semantic gravity is chosen because it considers how more to less abstract representations of knowledge work together. In teacher education, this has been shown to generate insights about how student-teachers can successfully integrate theory with personal experiences in reflective writing tasks (Macnaught 2020).

More specifically, in order to examine the language that students use in their blog critiques, this study uses a newly developed *generic translation device* by Doran & Maton (forthcoming) that explores how a particular kind of semantic gravity is realized within English discourse. It should be emphasized that a *generic translation device* is a means of describing for a broad phenomenon (such as the whole of English discourse or all images) how a concept may be realized (see Maton & Doran 2017). It is not a model of English discourse, not a model of clauses and not a model of context-dependence. The generic translation device is simply (though it is anything but simple) a set of ‘rules of thumb’ for how an LCT concept is realized within an object of study and thus how what it conceptualizes can be seen in data.

The focus of the generic translation device by Doran & Maton (forthcoming) is *epistemic-semantic gravity*, which explores the context-dependence of meanings involving formal definitions and empirical descriptions, rather than *axiological-semantic gravity*, which concerns affective, aesthetic, ethical, political and moral stances (Maton 2014: 153–70). They are developing several tools that explore how context-dependence for these kinds of meanings appear in English discourse at the levels of wording, word-grouping, clausing, and sequencing. Here I focus on the ‘clausing’ tool. This identifies how changes in epistemic-semantic gravity (ESG) are created when words are brought together into clauses; it explores how different combinations change the context-dependence of the constituent meanings to different degrees. This change in ESG is called *epistemological gravitation* (EG). Put simply, some kinds of ‘clausing’ change the context-dependence of constituent words more than others, and some not at all.


The two main types of ‘clausing’ identified by Doran & Maton (forthcoming) are *atemporal* and *temporal*. This distinction centres on the extent to which meanings are tied to some particular time, as indicated by verb choices. Weaker epistemological gravitation (EG-) is created through atemporal clausing, as meanings are not bound to particular times and settings. There are two main sub-types of atemporal clausing: *atemporal-transcendent* and *atemporal-potential*.<sup>2</sup> An example of atemporal-transcendent clausing in a blog critique is: *She prefers not to promote extrinsic rewards [atemporal-transcendent]*. Here, the verb choice of ‘prefers’ indicates some sort of habitual or generalized time.

Stronger epistemological gravitation involves *atemporal-potential* clausing where some sort of modality is used in terms of possibility, obligation, necessity, etc. An example in a blog critique is: *An extrinsic approach to learning can stifle the development of a learner's internal drive and motivation to study* [atemporal-potential]. Here the verb choice of ‘can stifle’ uses possibility to discuss the impact of teaching choices.

The second main type of clausing, *temporal clausing* has stronger epistemological gravitation (EG+) than atemporal clausing. It is organized into two sub-types: *temporal-elsewhen* and *temporal-current*. Temporal-elsewhen is where clausing indicates that meanings occur at a point in time that is different to the current time, generally either the past or future, such as: *I first heard about the idea of a community circle when I spoke to a senior teacher in my school*. The verb choices of *heard* and *spoke* identify meanings as occurring sometime in the past. Even stronger epistemological gravitation occurs in temporal-current clausing where meanings are positioned at the current time, such as: *As a student teacher who is studying early childhood education, I am currently experimenting with using prizes and rewards*. The verb choices (*is studying* and *am experimenting*) indicate current time.

Table 8.1 provides an overview of the four clausing types used in this paper. This newly developed generic translation device enables context-dependence to be consistently analyzed in unfolding texts that use English discourse.

**TABLE 8.1** The clausing tool for EG with concepts translated for use with our specific data set

EG	Type	Subtype	Examples
EG –		<i>transcendent</i>	She <u>prefers</u> not to promote extrinsic rewards.
	<i>atemporal</i>		
		<i>potential</i>	An extrinsic approach to learning <u>can stifle</u> the development of a learner's internal drive and motivation to study.
		<i>elsewhen</i>	I first <u>heard</u> about the idea of a community circle when I <u>spoke</u> to a senior teacher in my school.
	<i>temporal</i>		
EG+		<i>current</i>	As a student teacher who <u>is studying</u> early childhood education, I <u>am</u> currently <u>experimenting</u> with using prizes and rewards.

Source: Doran & Maton (2018, 2021)

### **SFL – genre analysis**

To address the issue of how students can successfully manage multiple points of view in a blog critique, this study draws on genre theory within the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL). In this applied

linguistic tradition, genre is theorized as an abstract layer of meaning about the recurrent “social practices of a given culture” (Martin & Rose 2008: 6). For the pedagogic purposes of examining the social practices related to what students have to read, write or create, genres are characterized as “staged, goal-oriented processes” (Rose & Martin 2012: 54). This practical definition centres on what a text is trying to achieve and the main steps or ‘stages’ that a text moves through to achieve that goal (see Martin (2014) for locating the concept of genre within the broader theoretical architecture of SFL). Complex texts may have sections that contribute to one main social goal (i.e. there is a unified ‘whole’). Alternately, sections may each have their own distinctive social purpose. When purposes vary and shift from one section to another, a text can be theorized as a *macrogenre* (Martin 1994). The justification that one genre is different to another or that one text consists of a series of genres arises through analysing language and other semiotic choices that are used in specific social settings: different configurations of meanings provide evidence of distinctive genres.

Genre analysis in this chapter focuses on language resources that contribute to allowing for and responding to “alternate positions and voices” (Martin & White 2005: 102). More technically, this is referred to as dialogic expansion with the opposite being dialogic contraction. As Martin and White explain, these terms draw on Bakhtin’s and Voloshinov’s influential notions of dialogism and heteroglossia where “to speak or write is always to reveal the influence of, refer to, or to take up in some way, what has been said/written before, and simultaneously to anticipate the responses of actual, potential or imagined readers/listeners” (Martin & White 2005: 92). In SFL, the main heteroglossic choices of dialogic expansion or contraction and their subtypes are theorized as the system of ENGAGEMENT (Martin & White 2005).

For data in this study, four choices within the system of ENGAGEMENT are particularly relevant. The first resource, *acknowledge*, creates dialogic expansiveness through identifying the positions of ‘others’, such as the i) blog author (*Flanagan believes that...*), ii) named researchers (*Duchesne and McMaugh argue that*) or iii) researchers that are identified through referencing conventions (*Research has defined... (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016)*). The second resource, *pronounce*, involves authorial emphasis, such as the student blog critic inserting their own view by writing: *I strongly agree with Flanagan that...* This choice creates dialogic contraction by limiting the scope of alternate positions. The third resource, *endorse*, also creates dialogic contraction but in a different way. Alternate views are excluded from an unfolding text when ‘the internal authorial voice’ construes an external source “as correct, valid, undeniable or otherwise maximally warran- table” (Martin and White 2005: 126). An example is: *As research shows... (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016)*. This choice serves to take over “the proposition or at least shares responsibility for it with the cited source” (Martin & White 2005: 127). The fourth resource, *counter*, contributes to dialogic contraction through resources that create a shift in point of view, such as the use of *however* in: *Smith stated in her blog that she mainly uses techniques related to extrinsic motivation. However this form of motivation has been associated with rote learning.*



In this chapter, such language choices contribute linguistic evidence for arguing that one genre is different to another.

## Findings and discussion

In this section, the clausing tool is used to analyze context-dependence in blog critiques that have been awarded a high grade. In particular, findings focus on how changes in epistemological gravitation – as identified by changes in clause type – are used for specific functions in blog critiques. This analysis is complemented by genre analysis which focuses on identifying the overall social goal of blog critiques and language features that create clear shifts between points of view. Analysis shows how theory from LCT and SFL usefully informs the design of a note-taking template and model texts for use in teaching.

### *Findings and pedagogic insights from analysis with the clausing tool*

The first finding is that atemporal-transcendent clausing is very prominent and serves at least five different functions in blog critiques. As a type of clausing with generalized or habitual time, it can be used to explicitly identify theory through introducing a concept and also elaborating on it. For example, weaker epistemological gravitation is maintained throughout clausing, such as:

[Extract 1] One major type of motivation is intrinsic motivation (atemporal-transcendent). This term refers to motivation (atemporal-transcendent) that is generated from within children themselves (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016) (atemporal-transcendent). Research associates intrinsic motivation with a tendency for students to think deeply and explore complex concepts (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause 2013) (atemporal-transcendent).

Such sustained use of atemporal clausing (see the verb choices of *is*, *refers*, *associates*, *think*, *explore*) enables writers to create a distinctive section about theory without simultaneously trying to juggle any concrete particulars about teaching practices. This creates a space to demonstrate that key readings have been found, read, and understood. A distinctive theory section contributes to addressing marking criteria about demonstrating knowledge and using terminology (see marking criteria 1 in Table 8.2).

Three further functions of atemporal-transcendent clausing in blog critiques involve expressing points of view. Recurrent functions include summarising a blog author's view, encapsulating this view with a blog extract, and connecting these to one's own view, as in:

[Extract 2] In her blog post, Smith emphasizes the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation (atemporal-transcendent). She states this clearly in the following extract (atemporal-transcendent): 'too many treats lead to

rotten teeth and rotten motivation!’ (atemporal-transcendent). I strongly agree with Smith (atemporal-transcendent) that intrinsic motivation is critical to successful practice (atemporal-transcendent).

**TABLE 8.2** The blog critique marking criteria

Criteria:	A
1 Key concepts and terminology of chosen topic.	Evidence of comprehensive knowledge of the topic and some use of related terminology.
2 Critique of excerpts with links to literature & personal views linked.	Excerpts are critically analyzed in a comprehensive manner with clear links to the literature. Own views are comprehensively given.
3 Discussion of the role of the teacher in relation to the topic.	Comprehensive discussion shows understanding of the role of the teacher in relation to the topic for the chosen sector.
4 Referencing and citations.	Referencing is consistently accurate.
5 Clarity of expression (incl. spelling, grammar & word limit).	Fluent writing style. Grammar and spelling accurate.

In such examples, the choice of atemporal clausuring (as evident in the verb choices of *emphasizes, states, lead, agree, is*) sustains a point of view. Weaker epistemological gravitation, without change, suggests that these views are carried through time and not necessarily dependent upon specific or changing settings and circumstances. In terms of marking criteria, these functions contribute to a critique that succinctly interprets the main message of a blog and includes the view of the student who is writing the blog critique – hereafter referred to as the ‘blog critic’ (see marking criteria 2 and 3 in Table 8.2.) All five main functions of atemporal-transcendent are represented in Table 8.3 (page 154).

The second finding is that atemporal-potential clausuring is particularly important for providing reasoning that underpins a point of view about theoretical constructs. A change from atemporal-transcendent clausuring to atemporal-potential clausuring (stronger epistemological gravitation) marks a shift from writing about theory towards starting to consider its application. An example is:

[Extract 3] I strongly agree with Smith that intrinsic motivation is critical to successful practice (atemporal-transcendent). Intrinsic rewards that come from exploring interests in depth, and mastering difficult concepts and problems can be smothered by a reward system that focuses on grades rather than understanding (atemporal-potential).

Here, stronger epistemological gravitation is used to specify the possible impact of applying or enacting concepts in teaching practices. In this case, the

**TABLE 8.3** The main functions of atemporal-transcendent clausing in blog critiques

Clause type	Function in a blog critique	Example
atemporal-transcendent	1. Introducing a concept	One major type of motivation <u>is</u> intrinsic motivation. This term <u>refers</u> to motivation that <u>is</u> generated from <u>within</u> children themselves (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016).
	2. Elaborating on a concept	Research <u>associates</u> intrinsic motivation with a tendency for students to <u>think</u> deeply and <u>explore</u> complex concepts (Duchesne et al. 2013).
	3. Summarising a blog author's view	In her blog post, Smith <u>emphasizes</u> the importance of fostering <u>intrinsic</u> motivation.
	4. Encapsulating a view with a blog extract	She <u>states</u> this clearly in the following extract: 'too many treats leads to rotten teeth and rotten motivation!'. Smith <u>views</u> herself as a 'mere facilitator' of learning activities which are fun, challenging and designed to develop curiosity.
	5. Connecting own view	I strongly <u>agree</u> with Smith that intrinsic motivation <u>is</u> critical to successful practice.

use of *can* in *can be smothered* involves reasoning about the negative impact of taking a different approach.

The modality of possibility is also used to show understanding of how a practice or outcome can be achieved, such as:

[Extract 4] I strongly agree with Smith that intrinsic motivation is critical to successful practice... As research points out (atemporal-transcendent), intrinsic motivation can be fostered through practices, such as giving students the space for self-directed learning (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016) (atemporal-potential).

Here, stronger epistemological gravitation is used to specify the possible means through which a desired outcome can be achieved (*can be fostered through...*). This function contributes to reasoning by providing more details about how something conceptual can be enacted in a classroom. What is valued is thus positioned as grounded and achievable. These two main functions of atemporal-potential clausing are represented in Table 8.4. In terms of marking criteria, a focus on impact and means contributes to a critique that articulates the value of theoretical constructs for practitioners and their students. Such explicit reasoning serves to relate concepts to the role and decision making of the teacher (see criteria 2 and 3 in Table 8.2).

**TABLE 8.4** The main functions of atemporal-potential clausing in blog critiques

Clause type	Function in a blog critique	Example
atemporal-potential	6. Specifying the possible impact of teaching practices	Intrinsic rewards that come from exploring interests in depth, and mastering difficult concepts and problems <u>can be</u> smothered by a reward system that focuses on grades rather than understanding.
	7. Specifying possible means of achieving pedagogic goals	As research points out, intrinsic motivation <u>can be</u> fostered through practices, such as giving students the space for self-directed learning (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016).

The third main finding from clausing analysis is the use of temporal clausing to identify completed activity. One recurrent function of temporal-elsewhen clausing is to introduce the selection of each blog post, as in:

[Extract 5] The second blog that I selected for the topic of engagement (temporal-elsewhen) was written by Cooke in the Mindshift blog (temporal-elsewhen).

Here the blog critic identifies their own actions (*I selected*) and those of the author of the original blog post (*was written* by Cooke). In an assessment task that requires students to critique multiple blog posts by different blog authors, this choice of clausing can usefully mark the shift from writing about one blog to another.

A further function of temporal-elsewhen clausing is to elaborate on teaching practices that are discussed in the blog post. In the following example, the blog critique includes details from the blog post, such as when the blog author encountered a particular teaching strategy and how students responded:

[Extract 6] Cooke really values building a sense of belonging in her classroom (atemporal-transcendent). She explained (temporal-elsewhen) that a colleague introduced her to Tribes Learning Communities (temporal-elsewhen). It really worked for her students (temporal-elsewhen) because they participated much more than previously (temporal-elsewhen).

Such changes to stronger epistemological gravitation (from atemporal-transcendent clausing to temporal-elsewhen clausing) are important to blog critiques ‘bringing in’ the practitioners who are thinking about and enacting teaching practices. This is vital because the assessment task asks student-teachers (as blog critics) to overtly state whether they agree or disagree with what is being discussed and who is discussing it. The use of

temporal-elsewhen clausing thus provides one option for tying the discussion of teaching to specific people, their actions, and the settings in which something is being applied.

The third and final function of temporal clausing involves the blog critic firmly positioning themselves in their field of study. An example is:

[Extract 7] As a student teacher who is studying early childhood education (temporal-current), I am currently experimenting with engagement strategies (temporal-current).

Here, temporal-current clausing is one option for the student-teachers to ‘join the conversation’ with other practitioners. This is achieved by locating who they are and what they are doing in current time (*is studying, am experimenting*). This choice of clausing is relevant to crafting a critique that is less like an isolated response, and more like a contribution to an ongoing dialogue within a field of study and practice. Part of personally responding to other practitioners and researchers may include locating your experience (and standing), in this case, a *student teacher who is studying early childhood education*. These three main functions of temporal clausing in blog critiques are represented in Table 8.5. With regards to marking criteria, a focus on locating the thoughts and activity of practitioners (teachers and student-teachers) and school children in relation to time contributes to contextualized and concrete discussion of the role of teacher, including the student-teacher’s own emerging role (see marking criteria 1 in Table 8.2).

**TABLE 8.5** The main functions of temporal clausing in blog critiques

Clause type	Function in blog critique	Example
temporal-elsewhen	8. Introducing a blog	The second blog that I <u>selected</u> for the topic of engagement was <u>written</u> by Cooke in the Mindshift blog.
	9. Elaborating on teaching practices	Cooke <u>explained</u> that a colleague <u>introduced</u> her to Tribes Learning Communities. It really <u>worked</u> for her students because they <u>participated</u> much more than previously.
temporal-current	10. Positioning self	As a student teacher who is studying early childhood education, I am currently experimenting with using prizes and rewards.

### ***Using findings from analysis in teaching***

Prior to analysis with the clausing tool, teaching included guided reading activities. For example, a note-taking template was developed to support the

student-teachers with extracting relevant content from the blog posts. This kind of template involves prompt questions that guide students to look for specific things as they read. One key rationale for this activity choice is that the blog posts are sometimes more like a stream of consciousness than a tightly structured and organized text. The student-teachers, therefore, sometimes have to work hard to sift through the blog content in order to interpret the main message and identify the underlying reasoning. The use of prompt questions for guided reading thus contributes to critical thinking processes (such as what to look for while reading) that are less generic (e.g. Gibbs 1988) and more tailored to a specific assessment task.

The insights from the new analysis have been used to revise and improve this note-taking template. In particular, the section pertaining to interpreting the blog now draws on the findings about atemporal-potential clausing. To briefly recap, two main functions of this type of clausing in a blog critique are to identify the possible impact of teaching strategies on students, and the possible means for achieving teaching goals. This contributes to ‘critical analysis’ (see criteria 2 in Table 8.2), that is, analysing a blog post to find and then respond to the author’s reasoning. The importance of identifying the reasoning behind a point of view can be made more explicit through prompt questions, such as those represented in Table 8.6. Language that creates a clear shift between different points of view is discussed in the next section.

**TABLE 8.6** Part of the updated note-taking template for the guided reading of blog posts

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**Interpreting each blog post**

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What blog did you find that relates to the concept?

What is the blog author’s view (in a nutshell)?

What short quote from the blog encapsulates the author’s view?

What reasoning and elaboration does the teacher use to support their view?

- research findings about benefits/consequences?
  - views of other experienced teachers?
  - possible impact of strategies on students?
  - possible practical means of achieving teaching goals?
  - other?
- 

***Findings and pedagogic insights from analysis with the system of***

**ENGAGEMENT**

Linguistic analysis with the system of ENGAGEMENT shows that successful blog critiques make a clear distinction between the view of the blog author and the view of the blog critic. This is achieved by organizing one section of the blog critique for interpreting the blog post and a subsequent section for personally

responding to it. A shift between these sections is marked by a change in heteroglossic resources. In the data, the part dedicated to interpreting the blog post primarily involves dialogic expansion through acknowledging ‘the other’ (e.g. *Flanagan emphasizes the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation*). At this point, the internal voice of the blog critic is in the background. A shift to the section pertaining to the blog critic’s own view is marked by dialogic contraction. Here the internal voice of the blog critic is made explicit with proclamations, such as: *I strongly agree with Flanagan that intrinsic motivation is critical to successful practice*. After this shift in voice is created, the blog critic’s view is sustained and justified by bringing in the voice of researchers. For example, after pronouncing their own view, the blog critic may write: *As research shows... Duchesne & McMaugh 2016*. Here the authorial voice is selectively endorsing the view of the researchers. This enables the blog critic to substantiate their own views with literature and not just their personal experiences. These differences in heteroglossic resources contribute linguistic evidence for the differentiation of two social goals: a text response with the purpose of interpreting the main message of a text; and a text response where the writer responds personally. In genre terms (Martin & Rose 2008), these sections can be labelled as two different genres: *interpretation* ^ *personal response*.

Additionally, the voice of researchers may be used at the start of the blog critique. This involves designating a section of the blog critique for theory that is relevant to all of the subsequent blog posts. In genre terms, this section constitutes a short *classifying report* (Martin & Rose 2008). Heteroglossic resources of acknowledgement are used to identify an external source for the purpose of classifying and then describing a theoretical construct, such as:

[Extract 8] One major type of motivation is intrinsic motivation. This term refers to... (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016). Research associates intrinsic motivation with... (Duchesne et al. 2013).

Here, the voice of researchers is identifiable as *research* and through referencing conventions. As noted in the complementary findings about the sustained use of atemporal-transcendent clausing, by organizing the blog critique with a substantial section for theory, the student, as the blog critic, is attending to the marking criteria about integrating ‘key concepts’, ‘terminology’ and ‘literature’ (see criteria 1 and 2 in Table 8.2).

Analysis also shows some flexibility with where theory can be integrated across the blog critique. It can also be used in the interpretation section to re-affirm or challenge the view of the blog author. For example, the blog critic could write: *Duchesne and McMaugh (2016) support Flanagan’s viewpoint stating that...* In such instances, dialogic expansion is created by bringing in or ‘acknowledging’ another view (i.e. Flanagan’s + Duchesne and McMaugh). Conversely, challenging the blog author’s view serves to contract the dialogic

space by narrowing to the view held by the blog critic, as in: *Flanagan stated.... However this form of motivation is has been associated with... (Duchesne et al. 2013)*. Here, the blog author's view is firstly acknowledged, but then a counter view is introduced, as indicated by 'however'. In year 2, few students countered a blog author's view; they tended to choose blog posts that they agreed with. As the final section of this chapter will discuss, such 'positioning by agreement' indicates that challenging the view of others is an aspect of critique that may be developed later in students' program of study.

To sum up, the analysis of heteroglossic resources for dialogic expansion and contraction contribute to the identification of a blog critique as a macro-genre. It unfolds as a series of three distinctive genres: *classifying report* <sup>^</sup> (*interpretation* <sup>^</sup> *personal response*)<sup>n</sup>. In this notation, the brackets and 'n' indicate iteration. This means that the genres of interpretation and personal response repeat for each blog post that is critiqued. A brief overview of the underpinning analysis that has been discussed appears in Table 8.7.

### ***Summary of complementary findings contributing to the creation of model texts***

The findings about genre and context-dependence provide complementary perspectives on recurrent features that are important to successful blog critiques. The SFL analysis has highlighted that successful blog critiques can be organized into three distinctive sections or genres. These genres are differentiated by the use of varying heteroglossic resources which enable the clear identification of who holds a point of view. Analysis also highlights language resources that enable blog authors to align with the views of others, including those of experts in the field of education. From this perspective, 'being critical' involves identifying points of view, making clear shifts between them, and using the views of experts to support your own view. Such language use can be included in model texts to show students how to manage multiple points of view successfully.

The analysis of epistemological gravitation has highlighted that blog critiques have a wide semantic range where maintaining or changing epistemological gravitation serves particular functions within the blog critique. The functions of specifying the possible impact of teaching practices on students, and the possible means of achieving pedagogic goals are particularly important for providing explicit reasoning that underpins a point of view. Clausal analysis has shown that this is achieved by a change to weaker epistemological gravitation from atemporal-transcendent clausal to atemporal-potential clausal. From this perspective, 'being critical' involves using a focus on impact and means as a way of articulating the value of theoretical constructs for practitioners and their students. It also grounds what is valued as practical and achievable in classroom settings. Like the insights about heteroglossic resources, the types of clausal that create such changes in context-dependence can be included in model texts.



TABLE 8.7 A blog critique as a macrogenre

Genre	Stage (1 <sup>st</sup> Capital)	Example	Dialogic expansion or contraction	Voice
report: classifying report	Classification Description	This term refers to... (Duchesne & McMaugh 2016). Research associates intrinsic motivation with... (Duchesne et al. 2013).	acknowledge acknowledge	researcher researcher
text response: interpretation	Evaluation  Synopsis (Re-affirmation or Challenge)	In her blog post, Flanagan emphasizes the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation. Flanagan further supports this argument by... Duchesne and McMaugh (2016) support Flanagan's viewpoint stating that... Flanagan stated... However this form of motivation is has been associated with... (Duchesne et al. 2013).	acknowledge  acknowledge acknowledge counter	blog author  blog author researcher
text response: personal response	Evaluation  Justification*	I strongly agree with Flanagan that intrinsic motivation is critical to successful practice. I agree with Hutchins and Bentham (2012) that... As research shows... (Duchesne & McMaugh, 2016).	pronounce  contract: proclaim: endorse	blog critic  blog critic

**KEY**

Genre name = lower caps

Stages within the genre = 1<sup>st</sup> capital

() = optional genre stage

()n = iteration. In this case iteration involves a series of two genres for each blog post that is critiqued.

\*Adapted from Martin & Rose (2005).

Students can then see how different representations of knowledge enable them to demonstrate engagement with theory and also tie it to practitioners and students in specific pedagogic contexts.

An overlay of findings about genre and context-dependence in blog critiques is represented in Figure 8.2. These complementary findings can inform model texts that can be examined interactively with students as a way of making successful features visible. The analysis of ‘where theory goes’ has also shown that there are different options for integrating theory successfully, and such variation is an important part of using exemplars with students.

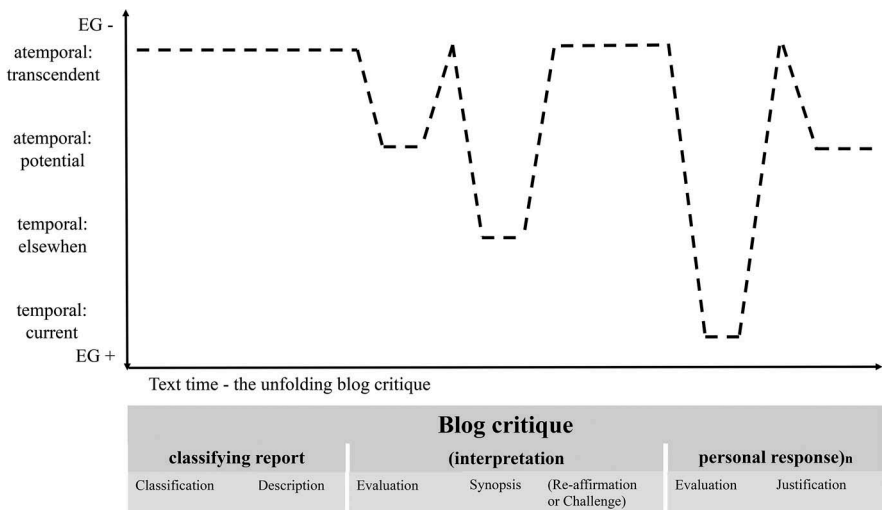


FIGURE 8.2 Relative shifts in epistemic gravitation in the unfolding genres and constituent stages of a blog critique

### Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how critical reflection manifests in academic discourse. Rather than use broad decontextualized definitions of what ‘being critical’ involves, it has used theory within LCT and SFL to identify key features of critique in a specific kind of assessment task. This text analysis has been motivated by wanting to reveal what second year students in a Bachelor of Education program are expected to do and demonstrate as they craft a blog critique, and one that would be awarded a high grade. The findings about the structure of blog critiques and their intricate clausing and language resources informed the creation of model texts for use in teaching. They also informed the creation of a note-taking template, as one of several guided reading activities. Scholars have long argued that such explicit teaching is particularly relevant for assessment tasks where expectations are not always obvious to students (Rose & Martin 2012; Stevenson et al. 2018).

These findings raise questions about claims that blogs may be ‘ideal’ for developing reflective and critical thinking (Dudley & Baxter 2013). While blogs may be a type of assessment task where ‘pre-service teachers feel comfortable in revealing their levels of understanding’ and teacher-educators may ‘gain real insight into what students are actually understanding’ (Dudley & Baxter 2013: 195), this study has shown that students need to demonstrate ‘critical analysis’ through specific types of language choices. Therefore, notions of blog writing as an example of an assessment task where students can engage in ‘exploratory risk-free talk’, use a ‘conversational voice’ (Fawcett 2010: 82), and ‘express their own personalities’ (Christie & Morris 2019: 578) may be misleading. The successful blog critiques in this study were highly-structured with very deliberate shifts in points of view and explicit connections to theory. Clearly, like other types of tertiary assessment tasks, a blog critique is a specialized way of making meaning.

Findings from this study invite further investigation of how demonstrating critical reflection through academic discourse can be taught gradually and cumulatively across a program of study. Previous findings related to assessment tasks in the first year of a Bachelor of Education program indicate that student-teachers are expected to predominantly focus on personal life experiences, connecting these experiences to theory, and identifying the relevance of concepts and issues (Macnaught 2020). Then, as this chapter has shown, around year 2, the focus of critique extends to the specific pedagogic practices of others. This includes positioning one’s own view in relation to the views of others. Students are expected to use literature to provide reasoning for their own views, consider the impact of actions, and specify means of achieving pedagogic goals. In terms of frameworks that classify reflection (e.g. Bain et al. 2002 reviewed above), this shift, from approximately year 1 to year 2, involves ‘deeper’ levels of reflection, such as extending ‘reporting and responding’ to ‘reasoning’, as illustrated in Table 8.8.

Depending on the practical element of their program, students in year 2 may have had limited opportunities to reflect on classroom experiences where they are taking a leading role as teachers. This means that, at this point in time, ‘critical analysis’ may not involve what Bain and colleagues (2002) refer to as a ‘reconstruction’ of classroom events where students relate their teaching experiences to future actions. In other words, what frameworks regard as the ultimate level or outcome of reflection may not be required until later in their program. Further research is needed to investigate the expectations of ‘being critical’ in the assessment tasks during year 3, such as identifying where students may move beyond ‘positioning through agreement’ to challenging the views of others. A progression where expectations of critique are specified, like in Table 8.8, could inform a systematic and visible way to teach and assess what is valued.

**TABLE 8.8** A possible progression of critique in Year 1–3 assessment tasks

Year	Assessment task examples	Focus of critique	5Rs Framework for Reflection (Bain et al. 2002)
1	Annotated bibliography Autobiographical essay (see Macnaught 2020)	<i>Personal life experiences</i> a) Connecting experiences to theory b) Identifying the relevance of concepts and issues	Reporting & Responding Relating
2	Blog critique (as analyzed in this chapter)	<i>The teaching practices of others</i> a) & b) + c) Identifying views of others d) Identifying/differentiating one's own view e) Supporting own view with research f) Identifying the possible impact of actions/choices g) Specifying the possible means of achieving pedagogic goals	Reporting & Responding Relating Reasoning
3	Extended essay (for future analysis)	<i>Own teaching experiences</i> a), b), c), d), e), f), g) + h) Challenging the views of others i) Specifying future actions	Reporting & Responding Relating Reasoning Reconstructing

## Notes

- 1 For steps related to the process of collaboration see Macnaught et al. (forthcoming).
- 2 As the tool has yet to be published, changes by Doran & Maton (forthcoming) to the names of categories may occur. However, if this does happen, which categories I am referring to will be obvious.

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