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2. USING ACTIVITY THEORY TO UNDERSTAND STUDENT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE WAYS FOR PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION FORUMS

INTRODUCTION

The use of asynchronous discussion forums has the potential for promoting students' critical thinking. Critical thinking is defined as the skills and dispositions "to think effectively about the matter in a sustained way" (Perkins, 2004, p. 359). Student teachers are likely to use asynchronous discussion forums as teaching-learning tools in their courses and during their future teaching career. As potential users of asynchronous discussion forums, examining their perceptions of the use of these tools becomes significant. Research on the use of asynchronous discussion forums for promoting critical thinking amongst students has mainly focused on gauging the evidence of critical thinking displayed on discussion forums (Corich, Kinshuk, & Jeffrey, 2011; Fahy, 2005; Jacob & Sam, 2010; Perkins & Murphy, 2006). Furthermore, some studies have suggested interventions for promoting critical thinking (Alexander, Commander, Greenberg, & Ward, 2010; Cranney, Wallace, Alexander, & Alfano, 2011; Shaul, 2009; Thompson, Martin, Richards, & Branson, 2003). However, little research has been done on student teachers' perceptions of effective ways for promoting critical thinking through the use of these forums. Examining students' perceptions of the use of asynchronous discussion forums is significant because it can help to know their intention for using these tools in their future teaching career. Based on their perceptions, intervention measures can be taken. To that end, this study examined student teacher perceptions of effective ways for promoting critical thinking through the use of asynchronous discussion forums. Activity Theory was used as a framework to guide the study.

ACTIVITY THEORY

Activity Theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934). His focus was on the mediation of the triad – the *subject*, *object* and *tools* (artefacts) in the interaction as indicated in Figure 2.1 (Engeström, 2001). Based on the conception of the triad,

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