Professing Education

Theme Issue:

Theorizing Pedagogies of Teacher Education

Guest Editors:
Mary Kay Delaney, Fiona McDonnell, and Paula Moten-Tolson

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President’s Note

With this issue of Professing Education, the Society of Professors of Education launches a new format and direction for Professing Education. Professing Education, now an e-journal (no print copies), features full journal length articles and aims to stimulate and sustain dialogue among the members of the Society of the Professors of Education about teaching in education. We see and hear in ourselves and colleagues a need for a forum to discuss teaching in education—the aims, craft, histories we inherit, challenges, approaches, content. Professing Education aspires to provide a place for starting and continuing these conversations. Please consider submitting a manuscript.

The current editor, George Noblit, took over for a two-term providing the energy to make a transition to the new format. A new editorial team will take up the journey in January 2018. The new team includes Mary Kay Delaney, Gretchen Givens Genrett, Paula Groves Price, and Joseph Rayle.

We invite your comment and recommendations on the format and the content. Contact the editors at professingeducation@gmail.com.

Isabel Nuñez

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Professing Education is a journal of the Society of Professors of Education. The Society was founded in 1902 when the National Society of College Teachers of Education was first formed in cooperation with the National Education Association. Among its early presidents were Charles DeGarmo and John Dewey. The Society is an interdisciplinary, professional and academic association open to all persons, both theoreticians and practitioners, engaged in teacher preparation or related activities. Its purpose is to serve the diverse needs and interests of the education professoriate. The Society’s primary goal is to provide a forum for consideration of major issues, tasks, problems, and challenges confronting professional educators. We invite you to join us. Visit www.societyofprofessorsofeducation.com for more information.

Call for Papers: Professing Education publishes substantive articles focused on the practice of teaching in the discipline of education. Recognizing that the “discipline” of education is multi- and inter-disciplinary, the editors seek articles from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, on all matters related to teaching “education.” We accept essays related to and studies of all aspects of teaching education. Submissions are peer and editor reviewed. Manuscripts should be 4000-7000 words in length, 12-point Times New Roman, double spaced, APA-style, with 1 inch margins. In support of the Society’s goal of stimulating and sustaining dialogue among its members, all accepted authors are members of the Society or join prior to publication. To view the membership form, go to www.societyofprofessorsofeducation.com/membership.html.
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Theorizing Pedagogies of Teacher Education: Introduction from the Guest Editors

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This issue of Professing Education centers on Theorizing Pedagogies of Teacher Education. The issue opens with the text of the DeGarmo Lecture 2016 by Christine Sleeter. Sleeter calls for “‘critical family history’ to challenge people to situate family histories in the context of colonization, racism, and other relations of power (Sleeter, 2011).” To show this process and the history it reveals, Sleeter tells her critical family history by situating “a branch of my family within colonial relationships, asking how my White ancestors’ participation in taking the land of Indigenous peoples ultimately impacts on me today.”

While Sleeter’s address preceded the call for this issue, the authors of the six articles that follow describe commitments to uncovering, confronting, and challenging. In theorizing pedagogies of teacher education, the authors write from diverse settings, disciplinary perspectives, backgrounds, and interests. They share the premises that teacher education should be transformative and that transformation requires an embodied understanding of inequities and injustices that result from power disparities based on race, language, class, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, religion.

The authors of the first three articles include a program perspective and they theorize pedagogies of teacher education in the contexts of networks of teacher educators, K-12 teachers, and developing teachers; through the institutional structures and components of programs; and in the processes of teaching, reflecting, and researching.

In “Democratic Teacher Education: From Theory to Praxis,” Stephanie Schroeder writes, “Under neoliberal policy, commitments to democracy are ‘tucked safely away in the rationale and mission statements’ (Parker, 1996, p. 11) of both school districts and teacher education programs. The resulting lack of civic competence and engagement is, therefore, not surprising.” She argues that democratic teacher education is necessary if K-12 schools are to move toward democratic education. Drawing on the work of feminist scholars, Noddings, Gutmann, Nussbaum, and Grumet, Schroeder identifies eight descriptors of democratic education and then from these develops a model of democratic teacher education that recognizes the pedagogical potential of democratic processes in teaching, curriculum, course design, and program-level committee processes.

In “Being and Becoming: Teacher Education, Praxis, and/in the Liberal Arts,” Zachary Casey describes his “pedagogical commitments in three movements” including culturally responsive teaching, anti-oppression education, and critical pedagogy. He describes his own experiences as student, teacher, and teacher educator revealing the iterative relationship between experience and “public theory” (Bullough, Jr., 1997) about teaching teachers. On this foundation Casey then describes the process of building a new teacher education program at a small liberal arts college—taking the three pedagogical commitments and a history of practice into design of courses, majors, and field experiences and making the case through the pedagogical commitments for a liberal arts education as part of teacher education.

In “Curriculum Theory and Teacher Education: Reframing the Relationship,” Kathy Sanford and Lisa Starr call for deeper, embodied connections between teacher education and...
curriculum theory: “Aligned with a conceptual framework featuring complexity, relationality and Indigenous knowing as well as Deleuze and Parnet’s (1997) notion of be(come)ing, our methodological approach is intricately connected within a synergistic relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education.” They describe the principles underlying the Transforming University of Victoria (TRUVic) Teacher Education Project, key components of the transformative program, and their method of working in “liminal spaces” with teachers, students, and each other, asking “questions originally posed by Canadian curriculum scholar, Cynthia Chambers (1999): Who are we?, Where are we?, and Who are they?”

The next three articles focus deeply on teaching and reflecting within particular courses—making visible how theory and practice interrelate and inform each other in the everyday work of the teacher educators. The authors take us into their thinking and their work as teacher educators.

In “Toward Theorizing a Phenomenological Teacher Education Pedagogy to Develop Reflective Teachers,” Katie Wester-Neal focuses attention on the development of reflective teachers and the tools of phenomenology. She traces key elements of phenomenology and focuses on two concepts for their importance to teacher education—attitude shifting and bridling. Noting the potential for these practices to encourage critical reflection, Wester-Neal continues by narrating how these two concepts/processes guided her teaching as she sought to understand: “How can phenomenological practices be used in teacher education to encourage reflection as teacher candidates work through the messy, often problematic, situations that arise in teaching?”

In “Theorized Pedagogies: Revising Clinical Practices to Foster Dispositions of Reflection in Teach For America Novice Teachers,” Teresa Fisher-Ari, Monica Alicea, and Barbara Meyers also focus on reflection, reflection as a way of learning for novice, provisionally certified teachers and reflection as a way of learning for the teacher educators. As a result of novice teachers’ reflections that “were not as meaningful or transformative as we had hoped,” the authors embarked on a five year reflection process poring over the developing teachers’ work to understand how to change pedagogy to support the developing novice teachers: “Across five years, we have systematically and iteratively engaged in a recursive and multi-phase inquiry, considering the ways in which structures for reflection were taken up (or not) by these novice teachers and altering our practices based on lessons we have learned.”

In “Affective or Effective? A Black Female Professor’s Critical Reflection on Teaching Effectiveness of Multicultural Courses,” Jemimah L. Young also takes us into her multicultural education course, a required course in teacher education at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). In the first part of the paper, Young describes the tenets of multicultural education and offers illustrations of assignments and student responses, including areas of student resistance to ideas. In the second part, Young reflects on students’ open-ended responses in her course evaluations and contextualizes the comments through the lenses of “pedagogy of discomfort” and research on racial and gender disparities in student responses on course evaluations. In the third section, Young revisits her aims as a Black female scholar of multicultural education and recommits to her aims, offering recommendations to professors and department heads for understanding multicultural education and interpreting evaluations.

Across all the articles in this issue emerge intimate portraits of teacher educators’ interweaving of theory and practice. The articles, read separately, suggest paths or starting points for us. Read together, the articles interact inviting us to re-imagine possibilities in teacher education. As we read, we found ourselves thinking anew about our teaching, programs and field. In thinking, doing, and becoming in teacher education, the strength and beauty of the
articles is in careful accounting of how theory and practice inform pedagogies in particular places and spaces. We can see connections and discontinuities with our own work and with state and national orientations to policy. We know well that this strength can be a vulnerability in the context of neoliberal policy making. These articles are acts of leadership in our field. Here we turn to John Dewey, one of the founders of this Society. In his paper, “The Relationship of Theory to Practice in Education,” Dewey (1904) asserted that for teacher educators, “…educational leadership is an indispensable part of their office.” (p. 30) He continued, “The thing needful is improvement of education, not simply by turning out teachers who can do better the things that are now necessary to do, but rather by changing the conception of what constitutes education.” (Dewey, 1904, P. 30)

References


The DeGarmo Lecture 2016: Situating Oneself in a Critical Multicultural History

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How can one envision oneself as having the power to change the trajectory of history others have made? How might a White person question and disrupt historically constructed relationships of racism and colonization? Seeing oneself within a critical multicultural history may help to address these questions.

Surprisingly perhaps, the phrase “critical multicultural history” rarely appears in the literature. Aldridge (2015) explains that critical historians examine power relations; they “dig beneath the surface of events and phenomena using critical theoretical interpretive frames to interrogate and challenge traditional canons” (p. 103). Multicultural historians examine the interaction of diverse racial and ethnic groups in history, becoming critical when interrogating power. Consider Takaki’s preface to his book Iron Cages, which he characterized as

...a comparative analysis of racial domination within the context of the development of capitalism and class divisions. ...Where scholars have examined separately the oppression of blacks, Indians, Mexicans, and Asians, I have tried to analyze the ways the experiences of these different groups related to each other. Where scholars have tended to isolate racism as a history of attitudes, I have attempted to relate it to the broad political, social, and economic developments that occurred ...Both my efforts have had a common purpose: to understand how the domination of various peoples of color in America had cultural and economic bases which involved as well as transcended race. (1979, p. xiii)

Critical multicultural history, then, examines the workings of race, colonization, class and gender in order to “de-normalize” and question unjust power relationships today, with the purpose of changing those relationships. But situating ourselves within a critical multicultural history is challenging.

First, there is the challenge of seeing history as relevant at all. History teachers constantly struggle with how to engage their students, partly because most people do not identify with historical narratives about, and from points of view of, those with power, which is how history is generally written and presented. Second, White people tend to see “multicultural” as meaning “Other,” and a critical multicultural history that identifies perpetrators as well as victims of injustice, as threatening. Yet, in order to learn to work for justice, it is necessary for White people to see ourselves within rather than outside of a critical multicultural history. A third challenge is problematizing assumed understandings of history learned at home that situate families within dominant national narratives. It is common for people, particularly those who are White, to take mythologies learned at home and reinforced at school as given. For example, Norquay (1998) found systematic gaps and silences in the family immigration stories of her Canadian students, who generally interpreted their family histories in a way that “reflected officially sanctioned understandings of immigrants and immigration” (p. 179) – the myth that Canada, despite not welcoming or affording opportunity to everyone, enabled impoverished immigrants to prosper.
Family History as an Entrée into History

Critical family history can serve as a tool for addressing these challenges. I coined the term “critical family history” to challenge people to situate family histories in the context of colonization, racism, and other relations of power (Sleeter, 2011). But family history as usually practiced does not do so. People generally research their family history for a sense of belonging and personal identity (Bottero, 2015; Kramer, 2011). A focus on identity means that the information most family historians seek builds out the ancestral family tree (Darby & Clough, 2013), rather than locating the family within wider social contexts. This is particularly true of family historians of dominant social groups. For example, Parham (2008), while observing White and Black genealogists researching their Haitian/Dominican immigrant family histories in New Orleans, noticed a distinct difference between how each group navigated their family’s position in relationship to slavery and racial oppression. The White genealogists, tracing individual ancestors, used the past only as a backdrop on which to locate their ancestors within a traditional narrative that minimizes racism. In contrast, the Black genealogists linked their family’s story with a larger narrative of navigating and challenging racial oppression.

Family histories built on national mythologies hide as much as they reveal. In societies based on the violence of colonization, such as the U.S., national mythologies involve massive forgetting and reconstruction of collective memory. Historical amnesia characterizes the national mythology of immigrants arriving into an empty space, staking their claim, and having the opportunity to achieve their dreams through hard work. This mythology greatly minimizes the genocidal violence Europeans and White American perpetrated against the Indigenous peoples and the violent enslavement of people of African descent. It brackets off that historic violence from the present, creating an imaginary distance between its perpetrators and their descendants.

Critical family history attempts to close that distance. The research methodology includes both genealogical research and contextual research. Genealogical data include sources such as family documents and oral history interviews, census and other vital statistics records, religious records, military records, digitized newspapers, land and probate records, and so forth. Contextual data come from the range of sources historians normally use, particularly primary historical data, using questions posed by the various critical theoretical traditions. Critical race theory, for example, examines systemic and customary ways in which racism worked and continues to work. A branch -- TribalCrit theory -- holds that colonization is “endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430), continuing into the present through “European American thought, knowledge and power structures [that] dominate present-day society in the United States” (p. 430). Critical race theory asks how racial location mattered and how, through commodification of land and people for profit, colonizers cemented their racial identity with property (Harris, 1993).

To show where critical family history might take us, I will situate a branch of my family within colonial relationships, asking how my White ancestors’ participation in taking the land of Indigenous peoples ultimately impacts on me today.

Benefiting from Colonization

Growing up, it did not occur to me to think of myself as a descendant of colonizers, even though my ancestors were European immigrants. I was born into a professional class family; my father was a physician and my mother stayed home to raise four children. The few family stories I grew up with emphasized my grandparents’ hard work, such as my mother’s stories about her father who, with only a second-grade education, worked as a house painter and eventually bought, renovated, and sold property. When I was six, my father died suddenly of a
heart attack. Between my mother’s parents and my father’s life insurance, we were able to keep our house, my mother was able to continue to stay home to raise us, and we were able to continue attending public schools with other middle and professional class children. Years later, the same grandparents helped put me and my siblings through college. My share of maternal grandfather’s will helped fund my graduate education. My maternal grandmother, whose parents had been from Appalachia, established a trust that gave my mother and my aunt financial security for the rest of their lives. Since my grandmother never held a job I was aware of, I was not clear where her financial assets came from, but didn’t think to ask. When my mother died, I inherited a share of the trust, which served as a down payment on my house, and when my aunt died, the additional share I inherited helped me pay off my home mortgage.

I have researched my family history for over a decade. Some of my extensive data sources include land records and wills, mainly deeds in county courthouses, property sales reported in digitized newspapers, and other land records available on Ancestry.com. I located original wills, wills on microfiche and transcribed wills mainly in county courthouses.

In my research, I began to notice that several ancestors, in different states and at different times, acquired land from the federal or state government, rather than from a specific person. I gradually realized this was land that had just been taken from the original Indigenous inhabitants. As examples, during the 1700s, the state of North Carolina granted each of two ancestral families on my mother’s side over 700 acres of land that had been Cherokee. During the mid-1800s, my father’s great-grandfather homesteaded 200 acres in Illinois that had been Kickapoo. In 1882, my mother’s maternal grandparents homesteaded acreage in Colorado that had been Ute. In what follows, I trace a link between seizure of Ute land in Colorado during the 1800s, and me paying off my home mortgage in the 2000s.

The Utes had lived for hundreds of years throughout what is now Colorado, southern Wyoming, northern New Mexico, and much of Utah. The band closest to Steamboat Springs, where my ancestors went, hunted and gathered along the Yampa River and considered the hot springs sacred. French and English trappers arrived during the 1700s. In 1858, gold seekers began to arrive in the Denver area. Three years later, the U.S. government made Colorado a territory, disregarding the Utes as a sovereign nation. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed a settler to exchange five years of living on public land for 160 patented acres for a family, or 40 acres for a single person, paying only the cost of the patent and surveying. In 1868, spurred by Whites moving west following the Civil War, and following from years of conflicts and tensions, the U.S. government pressured the Utes to cede two-thirds of what became Colorado (Simmons, 2000).

In 1876, Colorado was admitted to the U.S. as a state. In the Yampa River area, White families began to build homes. The more White people arrived, plowing up land for farms, building ranges for cattle grazing, and hunting animals, the more difficult it was for the Utes to survive. Indian Agent Nathan Meeker taunted and browbeat the Utes until a group of them finally retaliated, ambushing the agency in 1879 and killing eleven white people. Newspapers quickly published articles urging that, “The Utes must go.” In 1880, the Colorado State legislature overwhelmingly passed resolution demanding their expulsion. By 1881, the Utes had been deported from Colorado to a reservation in Utah on arid land Whites did not want.

That same year, my great-grandfather left Tennessee for Colorado with a party of other young men, in search of gold. He didn’t find gold, but he homesteaded a year later west of Steamboat Springs. Returning to Tennessee in 1884, he married my great-grandmother and took her back to Colorado. The couple and their children (one of whom was my grandmother) moved into Steamboat Springs in 1892, where,
over the next seven years, my great-grandfather managed to buy at least twenty-one city lots. I assume he bought them with proceeds from the sale his homestead.

My great-grandparents relocated to California in 1899, where my great-grandfather continued to drift from job to job. In 1912, and then again in 1919, he transferred the titles of the Steamboat Springs lots into my great-grandmother’s name. She immediately sold most of these lots. Around that time, he abandoned the family and moved to southern California, eventually ending up in prison. My great-grandmother, who was renting a house in San Francisco, managed to accumulate money over the rest of her life, most likely by investing proceeds from the sale of Steamboat Springs property. She also probably inherited money from her parents in Tennessee, her great-grandfather having benefited financially from acquiring land that had been Cherokee.

Their eldest daughter was my maternal grandmother. Both she and my grandfather invested in property (as well as the stock market) in the San Francisco Bay area. Since my grandmother did not hold a job outside the home, I can only surmise that the funds she had available to invest came from her mother. These were the grandparents who helped my family when my father died, put me through college, and established trusts that supported my mother and later helped me.

**Implications**

As my story illustrates, wealth disparities created historically through land theft, and maintained through legal processes such as inheritance, remain (Shammas, Salmon & Dahlin, 1997). In 2007, the median wealth of White non-Hispanic families was $170,400, while that of non-White families was only $27,800 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In 2013, while the median household income of American Indian families was $36,252, for the nation as a whole it was $52,176. While 29.2% of American Indians lived in poverty, this was true of 15.9% of the nation as a whole; American Indians have the highest poverty rate of any racial/ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

White people’s institutionalized processes for gaining wealth and keeping it in the family over generations, and Indigenous peoples’ continued marginalization and poverty, reflect ongoing colonial relationships. But White historical narratives that minimize genocide and land theft, and that distance White ancestors from violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, enable White people to claim moral innocence and to view White wealth as legitimately accumulated. Indeed, the memories I grew up with minimized the existence of family wealth, linked what we had with hard-working my grandparents, and placed our family narrative within the dominant rags-to-riches mythology.

Critical family history challenges family historians to look beneath such transmitted family stories, and to tease out the impact of larger socio-cultural relationships on the family over generations. For White people, focusing on power relations involving colonization means acknowledging ourselves as colonizers, and learning what decolonization might mean in today’s context. Decolonization should mean individually and collectively supporting Indigenous nations’ work for land reclamation, economic development, cultural reconstruction, and political sovereignty.

Situating oneself within a critical multicultural history implies the capability, and indeed the responsibility, to re-story history. As Regan (2010) put it with respect to relationships between descendants of colonizers and colonized peoples:

Whether one is an educator, a policy maker, a negotiator, a church layperson, a professional or blue-collar worker, or an ordinary citizen committed to social justice, reconciliation as resistance involves accepting personal and political responsibility for shifting colonial attitudes an actions that do not serve us well in our relationships with Indigenous peoples. (p. 217)
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Democratic Teacher Education: From Theory to Praxis
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Introduction
Since the founding of the United States, many Americans have recognized the “fragility and rarity” of democracy (Michelli & Keiser, 2005, p. 246). As a result, many have called for schools to inculcate the values of democracy in American youth (Barber, 1994). As one would expect, the nature of these calls has shifted over time as the perceived needs of the nation have fluctuated. This paper is yet another call for democratic education, an education that is as Ayers (2009) argues “eye-popping and mind-blowing” (p. 3), an education that not only promotes and inspires democratic dispositions, knowledge, and values in students, but leads students through and engages them in the deliberative and collaborative processes of democracy. While contemporary scholars have called for democratic education at the K-12 level in order to increase civic participation (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Collins, 2009; Mitra & Serriere, 2015), I join the ranks of those scholars who call for the democratization of teacher education programs as a means to that same end. Soder (1996) explains that while “much has been said about the importance of schools in a democracy…many of those very same people…lapse into uncharacteristic silence as to the education of educators in these matters” (p. 249). In the twenty years since Soder made this claim, more has indeed been written, but arguably the silence around democratic teacher education has been raised to barely a whisper.

This paper is an attempt to bridge the divide between the scholarship calling for democratic education in our K-12 schools and the scholarship calling for the democratization of the institutions that educate and prepare our nation’s teachers. More specifically, I argue that any attempt to promote democratic education in K-12 schools must first begin by engaging teachers in the process of democratic education (Apple, 2000; Michelli, 2005), a shift that requires a drastic turn from the status quo and more mechanistic or methods-oriented models of teacher education. Indeed, “if democratic principles are to become an integral part of public education, such understanding must be incorporated into teacher education programs” (Pearl & Pryor, 2005, p. x). Incorporating democratic pedagogies and redesigning teacher education to be more democratic, then, is necessary if we wish to develop democratic citizenship in K-12 students. To foster a move towards democratic teacher education, I offer in this article both a philosophical framework for democratic teacher education and, tied to this framework, examples of democratic pedagogies, structures, and content that democratic teacher education programs may wish to implement to live up to the demands of a thriving democracy.

Rationale
Perhaps the greatest challenge in any democracy is cultivating democratic citizens (Parker, 1996). Democratic thinking is not natural; it is a learned habit rather than an innate human disposition (Michelli, 2005). In short, “Democrats are not born but educated” (Banks, 1996, p. xi). In a democratic society such as the United States, one would expect a thriving system of public education dedicated to the cultivation of citizens who are daily engaged in the processes of democracy, what Collins (2009) claims to be both “a way of building community and getting business done” (p. 12).

The reality, however, is quite the opposite. Across the country time spent on liberal arts education in K-12 schools is declining (von Zastrow & Janc, 2004) and student knowledge of civics and history is dismally low (Gimpel, Lay, &
Schuknecht, 2003). Kanter (2015) explains, “Few Americans can name all three branches of government, or one Supreme Court justice, or the current vice president” (p. 66). Those who do have civic knowledge generally hail from the middle-to-upper class, revealing an ominous civic achievement gap that disadvantages lower income students (Nieves, 2013). This lack of civic competence “leads to a diminished sense of citizenship” (Sehr, 1997, p. 13), as those who lack knowledge of civic affairs are significantly less likely to engage in political discussions (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). Interest in voting, arguably the most basic expression of citizenship, is also low. In 2014, the New York Times reported that voter turnout was the lowest it had been in over 70 years (Editorial Board, 2014), perhaps because of the sense of powerlessness that pervades the public consciousness (Boyte, 2015), resulting in both anger (Kluger, 2016) and apathy (Girod, 2016). “Most people have become passive listeners and viewers,” Sehr (1997) argues, “not active discussants and participants” (p. 60). In a society characterized by vast economic inequality, homelessness, joblessness, and poverty (Anyon, 2005; Sehr, 1997; Boyte, 2015), a lack of civic engagement is simply unacceptable.

Despite the contemporary challenges to democracy, teacher educators have a powerful role to play in reversing these trends. Each generation has the responsibility to cultivate democratic citizens (Levine, 2007), and in the contemporary-era policymakers have neglected these responsibilities in exchange for neoliberal policies, manifested in education through school accountability, high-stakes testing, school choice, and vouchers (Giroux, 2002; Hursh, 2013). Neoliberalism endorses “maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2007, p. 22) and to some is seen as the most democratic expression of freedom and liberty. Neoliberalism is not without its critics, however. Giroux (2002), for example, alleges that neoliberalism assaults all things public, mystifies the basic contradiction between democratic values and market fundamentalism, and weakens any viable notion of political agency by offering no language capable of connecting private considerations to public issues (p. 428).

In this line of thinking, the rise of neoliberalism in education reform is dangerous to the functioning of a democracy. In fact, the outcomes of neoliberal reforms have worked in opposition to the cultivation of democratic citizens, as schools have reverted to what Au (2011) calls “21st century Taylorism” in which “labour is controlled vis-à-vis high-stakes testing and pre-packaged, corporate curricula aimed specifically at teaching to the tests” (p. 25). In this environment competition is valued—not the democratic skills of cooperation, collaboration, dialogue, interdependence, and creativity necessary in the 21st century (Noddings, 2013).

Both teacher education programs and K-12 classrooms have felt the impacts of neoliberalism through the narrowing of curriculum, the deskilling of the teaching profession, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the focus on methods and techniques rather than conceptual or philosophical underpinnings (Apple, 1986; Au, 2011; Bartolome, 1994; Haerr, 2004). Under neoliberal policy, commitments to democracy are “tucked safely away in the rationale and mission statements” (Parker, 1996, p. 11) of both school districts and teacher education programs. The resulting lack of civic competence and engagement is, therefore, not surprising. In fact, it is even expected.

Although an entire system is clearly implicated in the lack of civic engagement in the United States, teacher education programs can play a critical role in reversing these negative trends by becoming more democratic. Indeed, Grumet (2010) claims, “Of all the participants in
this pageant, we still have more agency, more than the school, more than the state, to imagine and create other arrangements” (p. 66). Uniquely able to instill in prospective teachers the spirit of democratic citizenship, teacher education programs must engage prospective teachers in the processes of democratic education before they can be expected to implement democratic pedagogies in their own classrooms. It is unreasonable to assume that prospective teachers entering colleges and universities, having been educated in a neoliberal age, understand or have experienced democratic education. It is also unlikely that they are familiar with deliberative and discussion-based pedagogies or the process of co-planning with peers and teachers. It is even less likely that they enter teacher preparation programs with a sense of agency or the belief that they can make change. Studies of prospective elementary teachers confirm these assertions (Galman, 2012) and suggest that prospective elementary teachers are socialized to act in ways that protect the status quo rather than challenge it (Fry & O’Brien, 2015; Iverson & James, 2010). Coupling this reality with the assumption that teachers “must themselves know the content and possess the skills and attitudes that they are trying to develop in their students,” (Cunningham, 2011, p. 141), it is absolutely necessary for teacher education programs to begin to cultivate a democratic spirit in prospective teachers by “providing models of democratic pedagogy” (Bloom & Herzog, 1994, p. 200). If we ignore this challenge in teacher education, we can only expect more of the same—more authoritarian and oppressive forms of teaching, more standardization, more silence and inaction from our nation’s citizens and, as a result, far less democracy (Thomas & Weichel, 2011).

**Democratic Education: A Philosophical Framework**

Despite the dominance of neoliberal reform in education, a consistent voice of opposition remains. Current calls for democratic education—education that leads students through processes that are both democratic and at the same time meant to cultivate the skills and dispositions necessary for democratic life—from Gutmann (1987), Noddings (2013), Nussbaum (1997), and Grumet (1988) stand in stark contrast to the current neoliberal educational environment, yet offer a sound vision of what could be. Unlike many public school advocates and reformers before them, these scholars understand democracy to be a pedagogy in and of itself. Their philosophies form the philosophical foundation of my proposed model of democratic teacher education, and were chosen specifically because they build on Dewey’s progressivism (1916/1996; 1938) while also introducing an essential feminist element missing in Dewey’s earlier calls. This feminist element is necessary as the hierarchal patriarchal system of schooling has been a stumbling block on the path towards democratic education (Grumet, 1988).

Particularly as patriarchal, neoliberal policies have significantly decreased female teachers’ autonomy, and blame for poor educational outcomes have been “deflected from the men who establish these policies onto the women who teach the children who fail (Grumet, 1988, p. 23), I argue that it is perhaps time for women to guide the policymaking that they will subsequently be tasked to implement.

This framework, culled from the work of Noddings (2013), Gutmann (1987), Nussbaum (1997), and Grumet (1988), synthesizes their visions of democratic education into eight essential descriptors. The descriptors overlap, each component operating in tandem with the others. Taken together, the eight descriptors both simplify the vast theory of democratic education and at the same time reveal the inherent complexity of a democratic classroom.

**Protodemocratic**

An overarching principle of democratic education is the acknowledgment that the democratic classroom need not be an exact replica of a fully functioning democratic society. School, Grumet (1988) reminds us, is a liminal
space between the home and the workplace, the private and the public. It is, by definition, a site of growth and development. As a result, Grumet (1988) urges teachers to refuse to run the classroom like a conveyance, designed to transport children from the private to the public world, but to make it instead a real space in the middle, where we can all stop and rest and work to find the political and epistemological forms that will mediate the opposition of home and workplace (p. 20).

The classroom, as the intermediate zone between private and public life, should teach students respect for the common good, and, calling on the “classical concept of edudos, meaning ‘to lead out of,’” the classroom should be the space where children are led away from distinctly private concerns and introduced to the notion of the common good (Grumet, 1988, p. 170). Schools, then, should not be places of didactic authoritarianism where absolute rights and wrongs exist. Instead, schools should be a site of mediation where students and teachers grapple together with the complexities of democratic life (Grumet, 1988).

**Participatory**

Active and engaged participation in the learning process is essential to a functioning democratic classroom. Noddings (2013) explains that one method to create a participatory classroom is to offer students choice, as “choice is a basic concept in democracy” (p. 66). One single curriculum, she argues, is undemocratic, as it does not meet the myriad needs of students. Understanding that students lack competence to make fully-informed decisions, teachers must guide students through the available options, helping them ask essential questions to make the most informed choice possible.

Participatory pedagogies also engage students in “issues of current importance—importance to them, if possible” (Noddings, 2011, p. 492). By allowing students to make connections to their personal lives, “students may begin to experience school as a place to which they can bring some meaning” (Noddings, 2011, p. 494). According to Gutmann (1987), “Participatory approaches aim to increase students’ commitment to learning by building upon and extending their existing interests in intellectually productive ways” (p. 89). Students should be engaged in the day-to-day life of the school, not because they have been disciplined to be, but because the life of the school is made to be engaging (Gutmann, 1987).

**Deliberative**

Perhaps the most essential feature of democratic education to Noddings (2013) and Gutmann (1987) is deliberation. Noddings (2013) explains that deliberation is not predicated on common values, but is, in fact, the method we use to establish common values. Indeed, Noddings (2013) emphasizes the impossibility of teaching democratic values “in didactic form” as democratic dispositions must be learned through participation in democratic processes. Didactic teaching in Noddings’ (2013) view, “will not produce deliberative thinkers” (p. 22).

While Noddings emphasizes deliberation as a means to establishing common understandings and values, Gutmann emphasizes its ability to reveal fundamental disagreements in order to enable cooperative solutions. She argues, “The most distinctive feature of a democratic theory of education is that it makes a democratic virtue out of our inevitable disagreement over educational problems” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 11). Similarly to Noddings, Gutmann believes that without adequate preparation in deliberative processes, children are encouraged to passively conform rather than actively question and critique.

**Nonrepressive and Nondiscriminatory**

Gutmann’s (1987) policies of nonrepression and nondiscrimination help to set boundaries on democratic deliberation. Put simply, these
principles set limits on individual liberty and “majority tyranny” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 97) by rendering any suggested policy, statement, or action that would repress any citizen’s potential participation in democracy outside the bounds of democratic discourse. These principles are necessary to a functioning democracy, Gutmann (1987) explains, because “A society is undemocratic…if it restricts rational deliberation or excludes some educable citizens” (p. 95). These principles remind us that democracy is not simply ‘majority rule,’ but is instead bound by certain principles and rights.

Moral

Bound by certain principles, democratic education is not neutral, nor should it be. Gutmann (1987) argues that teachers in a democracy must instill moral character in students, as “Education in character and in moral reasoning are therefore both necessary, neither sufficient, for creating democratic citizens” (p. 51). Deliberation in democratic classrooms must be guided by a commitment to “good morals,” in addition to the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Indeed, teachers should not respect all views and commitments in their classrooms. Instead, teachers and schools must reinforce democratic values of diversity, liberty, justice, and equality as the values that connect and unite democratic citizens (Parker, 2012). In this environment, controversial topics that challenge these aforementioned values are discussed and interrogated for their merit.

Empathetic

According to Noddings (1984), moral education is characterized by care, which should be the “primary aim of every educational institution” (Noddings, 1984, p. 172). In the classroom, the ethic of care does not ignore content or subject matter, but always places the ethical needs of the student first. Students are subjects, and should be seen as responsible humans, not objects or “a succession of roles” (Noddings, 1984, p. 183). Educators have a responsibility in this paradigm to “point out and question the foolishness that pervades current school practice” (Noddings, 1984, p. 183). In an education system characterized by care, educators must engage in dialogue with communities, learning must be “offered freely with no demands for specific achievement” (Noddings, 1984, p. 192), and teachers must not have policy forced upon them, but instead be engaged in a cooperative process of decision-making.

Care is integral to democratic education because it is the outgrowth of empathy, which allows us to better deliberate and collaborate with others. Cultivating empathy will foster citizens who have a “responsiveness to another’s needs” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 90). As it stands currently, education is “increasingly mechanized and impersonal” making “human relationships of sufficient intimacy” nearly impossible to cultivate (Grumet, 1988, p. 56). This isolation turns teachers and students inward to their own needs rather than encouraging them to concern themselves with the common good. Indeed, the classroom community, as an embryonic society, must be made up of empathetic individuals. As a result, Noddings (2013) claims that “time spent developing relations of care and trust is not time wasted. Everything goes better as a result. Telling stories, listening to complaints, deliberating on social problems all have a place in good teaching” (p. 52-53). Without these social bonds and sense of connectedness, students are likely to retreat to self-interest (Grumet, 1988).

Global

Both Noddings (2013) and Nussbaum (1997) emphasize the importance of global thinking in a 21st century democracy. Rather than promote nationalism or authoritarian patriotism, schools should cultivate in their students a belief in global unity. Democratic education also promotes “comparative cultural study” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 55) which will help individuals realize that their customs and beliefs are not natural or inevitable. Because “ignorance…is often an essential prop of hatred”
learning about other cultures with a detachment from one’s own culture will promote peace and a better democracy, ultimately enabling us to come together in “mutual solidarity” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 60).

**Critical**

Critical thinking, Nussbaum (1997) argues, requires self-examination. Inspired by Socrates, self-examination is required in a democracy, as “democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves rather than simply deferring to authority” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10). Persons who have not undergone Socratic self-examination do not think critically about their worldviews or biases and therefore cannot fully engage with others. As a result, “people talk at one another,” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 19) trading opinions that have not been tested by logic and reason. Socratic self-examination promotes good citizenship because, through logic and reason, we are able to engage in “healthy ways…as citizens” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 36). Critical thinking builds “thoughtful effective change agents” who are able to listen to others and cooperate, rather than “wild-eyed revolutionaries” (Noddings, 2013, p. 88). By reasoning collaboratively about “choices rather than just trading claims and counterclaims” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 10), individuals can embrace “genuine dialogue” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 19).

**Summary**

Taken together, these scholars present a coherent vision of what is necessary to be a democratic citizen, and they call for schools to cultivate in students prototypical citizenship traits. Although establishing schools that abide by these descriptors may seem impossible or idealistic, Sehr (1997) argues that this is a choice that schools, programs, individual teachers, and policymakers can make—and if we do make this decision, we can remake public education to prepare young people to build a new public life and begin to reshape American society into the kind of place we’ve always been told it could be: a place of tolerance, care, justice, individual and social responsibility, and equal opportunity for all our citizens to develop themselves fully and prosper (p. 180).

Our choices in teacher education directly impact the choices teachers will make in K-12 classrooms (Gutmann, 1987). Teacher education programs and the faculty who build their careers within those programs cannot assume teachers will magically learn to teach democratically. We must take on the responsibility to ensure prospective teachers learn these skills. As Grumet (2010) reminds us, “Democracy is at stake every time we decide what it is that the school will teach. Democracy is at stake every time we decide who speaks and who is silent in a classroom or a meeting or what interpretations of a text make sense to us” (p. 70). If we believe in the ideals of democratic education, teacher education programs must move toward a more democratic model.

**A Model of Democratic Teacher Education**

Building on the philosophical framework outlined in the previous section as well as the existing literature on democratic teacher education, this section outlines suggested goals, content, and structures of democratic teacher education. Each suggested practice is connected to one or more descriptors of democratic education, although it is important to note that there is no single recipe for democratic education. Yet, even as these are suggestions, not prescriptions, a piecemeal approach to democratic education is unlikely to result in widespread or lasting change (Bucci, 2005; Michelli & Keiser, 2005; Novak, 1994). Indeed, operating a teacher education program...
democratically requires no less than a paradigm shift. Tinkering at the edges of an authoritarian teacher education program guided by neoliberal policy will not produce publicly oriented democratic citizens (Novak, 1994). As Bucci (2005) contends, teacher education programs require a “multifaceted approach that permeates the program” (p. 127). As a result, democratic teacher education is less about specific processes and more about adhering to a coherent vision. Indeed, without a shared vision and commitment to democratic processes, the suggestions that follow will do little to cultivate democratic dispositions in teacher candidates. (Michelli & Keiser, 2005).

**Goal**

The primary goal of a democratic teacher education program is to engage teachers in the participatory, deliberative, nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory processes of democracy. Through engagement in these processes, a democratic teacher education program should cultivate in teachers a commitment to the moral, empathetic, global, and critical dimensions of citizenship. An ancillary goal, of course, is that engagement in these democratic processes ultimately encourages teachers to provide democratic experiences for students in their future classrooms.

**Cultivating Democratic Processes**

How might democratic teacher education programs engage prospective teachers in the participatory, deliberative, nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory processes of democracy? How can programs model democratic processes? What follows are five suggested practices and/or features of coursework that facilitate participatory, deliberative, and nonrepressive/nondiscriminatory operations in teacher education, including the co-creation of coursework, engagement with student and faculty committees, engagement in practitioner inquiry for policy change, service learning, and the development of community-district-university partnerships. Each of these suggestions engages prospective teachers in participatory and deliberative processes that are guided by the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination.

**Co-Creation of Coursework.**

Democratic programs should provide prospective teachers the opportunity to co-create syllabi and coursework. Bloom and Herzog (1994) explain that if prospective teachers are offered a list of required competencies and skills, they can deliberate and decide how to best organize class syllabi to meet their needs. Through this process curriculum becomes more integrated, based on problems rather than isolated ideas or bits of knowledge to be consumed (Beane, 1997). Allowing students to co-create syllabi offers more buy-in, as “they [prospective teachers] become more comfortable with active participation in discussions and decision making”…and “they become more invested in the learning process” (Bloom & Herzog, 1994, p. 211). Experiencing this process themselves can help prospective teachers develop the necessary confidence to allow their own students the opportunity to co-create coursework.

**Committee Work.** Committees, while common in all schools and organizations, are often not organized democratically. Egalitarian committees guided by the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination model the deliberative aspects of the democratic system and engage students, faculty, district officials and teachers, and the community in collaborative, participatory processes to answer the question, “How shall we do it?” (Macalusco, 2005). Course committees and program committees can both be implemented to democratize teacher education and give voice to those who have previously been marginalized.

**Course Committees.** Course committees engage students directly in the process of democracy by asking them to provide feedback throughout a course to instructors. These students, chosen by their peers as representatives, bring concerns forward from the class and work with instructors to develop a
mutually acceptable course of action. The overarching goal of the course committee is to encourage active participation from students. Providing space for students to ‘talk back’ to instructors, to deliberate, and to even bargain (Robertson, 2008) will serve them well as teachers of record. Indeed, course committees are necessary to avoid a “top-down hierarchical decision-making structure” that encourages compliance rather than critique (Bucci, 2005, p. 130).

**Program Committees.** Program committees consist of instructors, students, and all relevant stakeholders in the education of prospective teachers. Program committees, like course committees, are made up of representatives, although any interested individuals should be able to attend meetings or otherwise access a record of events. Program committees serve as intermediary places where students learn more about the concerns of faculty, instructors, and school-based staff, the policy constraints that they may be under, and where all parties develop insight and empathy into the various positions recognized at the table. Inevitably these will be sites of disagreement, but Laguardia and Pearl (2005) explain that “they need not and, on important problems, should not reach consensus. A major goal of teaching is to nurture in students the idea that decisions are made by informed majorities” (p. 11). Work on committees with diverse groups will prepare teachers to make compromise and find solutions to pressing problems through deliberation.

**Practitioner Inquiry for Policy Change.** Teacher education coursework should prepare teachers for a political future. Prospective teachers should be not only be able to teach children how to address problems in the legal and social systems of the United States, they should know how to seek redress for problems themselves (Hess & Ganzler, 2007). To develop this participatory spirit in teachers, Heineke, Ryan, and Tocci (2015) explain that teacher education programs must stop “conceptualizing teachers as passive targets for reform efforts” (p. 392) and instead conceptualize them as actors capable of impacting educational policy. In tandem with field experiences, students in a democratic teacher education program should engage in cycles of inquiry and action research to hone an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Ligon, 2005; Pryor, 2005). Inquiry and action research, according to Rust and Meyers (2003), can inform policy “by showing how various initiatives fare in the everyday transactions of schooling. If they listen, policymakers can discern from these studies what obstacles must be overcome, and they can identify what issues must be addressed if all children are to succeed” (p. xviii). Thus, not only is inquiry an egalitarian approach to whose knowledge matters, it is participatory and action oriented. Indeed, it is what Dewey called “the pedagogical encouragement of freedom of thought” (Pryor, 2005, p. 69).

**Service Learning.** According to Boyle-Baise and McIntyre (2008), “Service learning allows pre-service teachers to work with and learn from local youth and adults in the process of doing something worthwhile. It can foster greater comfort with people unlike oneself” (p. 309). In this way, service learning supports the development of empathetic and global dispositions. However, service learning can also “cultivate the idea that teaching is public service and that teachers serve as educational leaders for an increasingly diverse public” (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008, p. 309). Service learning, then, not only helps prospective teachers become aware of community resources and more comfortable with diverse community members, it connects them to the public and increases an interest in the common good. Scaffolding these experiences and ensuring that service learning sites operate from a democratic lens is essential.

**University-Community-District Partnerships.** Michelli and Keiser (2005) remind us that “teacher education programs and programs in public schools must be renewed simultaneously” (p. xx). While teacher education programs can make isolated and discrete steps
towards becoming more democratic, it is essential that all stakeholders share a similar vision to developing democratic processes (Macaluso, 2005). The development of shared vision requires “intensive university and public school faculty collaboration regarding course development, teaching, [and] field placements” (Hillkirk, 1994, p. 92). Because the education of teachers takes place in colleges of education, liberal arts departments, surrounding communities, and K-12 schools, faculty “in education, the arts and sciences, and the public schools” should serve “as equal partners in the preparation of future educators and the renewal of current educators” (Michelli & Keiser, 2005, p. xx). Collaboration and “inter-group activity” must bring these people together (Ligon, 2005, p. 3). Pearl and Pryor (2005) explain, democracy, at the very least, is field based; is a partnership between higher education and elementary and secondary schools; is students, teachers, parents, and administrators involved in shared decision making; and is a determined and ceaseless commitment to equality (p. xxii).

Programs that seek out diverse perspectives and abide by the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination, then, model to prospective teachers the benefit of a multiplicity of voices in democratic decision-making.

**Cultivating Democratic Dispositions**

Cultivating democratic dispositions such as empathy, globalism, morality, and criticality requires that programs immerse prospective teachers in the liberal arts—specifically humanities, literature, history, and philosophy courses. These courses should be guided by a commitment to constructivist pedagogy as a means of both engaging in participatory processes and fostering active engagement with diverse perspectives.

**Liberal Arts Coursework.** According to Nussbaum (1997), a liberal arts education fosters Socratic self-examination, world citizenship, and a narrative imagination. Liston (2011) explains that citizens in a democracy need a challenging education that forces them to rethink their fundamental values and beliefs and engage in a critical examination of self. A study of literature, with the “ability to represent the specific circumstances and problems of people of many different sorts” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 86), could develop much needed empathy and globalism within teacher candidates. Indeed, literature encountered in the liberal arts tradition allows us to “see that circumstances shape not only people’s possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 88), thus inculcating in prospective teachers an appreciation for the importance of contextual factors in individual decision making and a responsibility to the common good. A liberal arts core also engages students in deliberative processes that will enable them to “develop the type of critical thinking and analytic skills necessary of problem-posing, critical inquiry, and reflective thinking, and acquire the skills necessary to help P-12 students succeed” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 233).

**Philosophy.** Coursework in philosophy is essential in a program dedicated to the processes of democracy (Cunningham, 2011). Without solid background in philosophy, the chance to reflect on those philosophies, and the opportunity to see them in action in both teacher education and field experiences, prospective teachers will be “practitioners with no clothes” who “unconsciously (thus uncritically) impose[ ] her or his philosophy onto the world” (Thomas & Weichel, 2011, p. 51). Thomas and Weichel (2011) warn that, “Classrooms guided by practitioners who have ignored a careful consideration of philosophy—of progressivism and critical pedagogy—slip into an authoritarian, and thus oppressive dynamic that contradicts democratic ideals by silencing students” (p. 52).
Programs that fail to guide students to an understanding of their philosophical beliefs thus do them—and their future students—a disservice by failing to empower them with the tools to understand and critique their own beliefs about teaching and learning.

**Constructivist Pedagogies.** Liberal arts coursework must make use of constructivist pedagogies. Constructivist learning theories assume that “learning is enriched via access to multiple perspectives, resources, and representations” (Land, Hannafin, & Oliver, 2012, p. 13), as learning is both social and mediated by context. Constructivist pedagogies, including simulations, problem-based learning, and deliberation, and have been found to increase preservice teachers’ ability to reflect (and, therefore, learn) in a way that didactic approaches do not (Sleeter, 2001). As a result, constructivist pedagogies focused on active engagement dominate the literature on democratic education (Kelly, 1994; Laguardia & Pearl, 2005; Parker, 1996; Sleeter, 2001). Indeed, Laguardia and Pearl (2005) argue that “learning how to work with others to arrive at decisions, … the willingness to listen and understand the arguments of others, the capacity to negotiate, [and] the willingness to work cooperatively” (p. 19) are all essential traits learned through constructivist practices that facilitate the growth of democratic dispositions.

**Conclusion**

If teacher education programs want to become more democratic, and indeed they should if for no other reason than the alternative is worse (Gutmann, 1990), we most certainly need models that can light the way. The model suggested here, culled from a philosophical framework of democratic education, transforms the student-teacher relationship in teacher education and reimagines the roles teachers play as the facilitators of learning. For example, neoliberal education reforms have urged teacher educators to focus on efficiency and standardization, yet democratic pedagogies require time for deliberation. Indeed, rather than embracing didactic pedagogy, democratic teacher education urges a dialogic process. Discussion is, of course, less efficient than authoritarian modes of teaching that pervade in the neoliberal environment. The democratic classroom and democratic teacher education program must plan for this loss of efficiency, but also must acknowledge the deep bonds and conceptual learning that deliberation engenders. Interactive dialogue encourages the teacher educator to construct knowledge with students rather than transmit knowledge via scripted lecture or presentation. Competition is reduced and consensus and collaboration are emphasized, particularly as students serve on boards and committees with teacher educators and community members. Teacher and student become equal partners on a common journey in the democratic teacher education program, and, while hierarchies do exist, the decision making process becomes more egalitarian and characterized by a commitment to care.

Still, the model presented here is not prescriptive, and the list of suggested democratic practices included is by no means comprehensive. Issues of recruitment, admissions, assessment, field placements, and progression and scaffolding within programs are not adequately discussed here and should also be at the forefront of teacher education renewal efforts. Moreover, the processes of democratic teacher education must be decided by those involved in deliberations, and democratic education will look different from site to site. Ultimately, though, a democratic teacher education program must develop specific practices in line with its goals and democratic philosophy. Teacher education programs hoping to move toward developing democratic processes must expect that every program’s path to democratic processes will look different based on the actors involved and the historical context of both the institution itself and surrounding community (Engestrom, 2001). The strategies, processes, and coursework presented here, then, should not be considered binding. True to the
democratic spirit, democratic strategies must be locally determined and context dependent.

Although democracy is often touted as the goal of educational endeavors, no generation has perfected such a model. Indeed, the Founders and many after them have fallen short, often conflating a belief in democracy as synonymous with capitalism. Thus, there is no history of large-scale democratic education, and an emphasis on economic interests over the public good continues to dominate educational decision-making, suggesting that education for public democracy is but one of democracy’s unfinished goals. Yet the promise of democracy remains, and, as Michael Apple (2000) reminds us, “the struggle for democracy in education does not only take place ‘out there.’ Those of us who are educators at colleges and universities need also to be held accountable for what we do with our own students and colleagues in the institutions in which we work” (12). It is the right and the duty of each generation to move closer to the promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all. Teacher education programs must be up to this challenge.

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Introduction

As someone who only attended large state universities, first for my teacher certification and bachelors degree, and then for both my masters and Ph.D., until working at one I had little knowledge of what a liberal arts college did and felt like until working at one. Now, in my third year of working in a liberal arts setting, I have come to believe that there is no better space for the work of critical, social justice oriented, urban teacher education. This paper is an account of this sense making, of how I came to understand the ways in which my pedagogical commitments in my teacher education classrooms could become programmatic aims that structure an entire teacher education program.

This paper is organized from the inside out. I begin with my own pedagogical commitments, briefly sketching elements of culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, and critical pedagogy as they have impacted my work in teacher education. I next work to demonstrate the connections between these commitments and the teacher education program we have just begun at our institution. I articulate the ways in which the explicit social justice and urban foci of our program emerge from engagement with critical literatures in teaching and teacher education. Finally, I argue that understanding teacher education as a liberal art offers us new insights and ways of envisaging further critical approaches to urban teacher education. It is my hope that these reflections and analyses will support others in their/our work to (re)theorize pedagogies of teacher education in order to work toward creating programs that work on the side of justice and equity for teachers, students, and communities.

My Pedagogical Commitments in Three Movements

Movement 1: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

My engagement with culturally relevant pedagogy has always been associated with Gloria Ladson-Billings, who first articulated the elements of culturally relevant pedagogy. In 1995, she wrote that culturally relevant pedagogy aims to “provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). While the term and concept have been developed further both by Ladson-Billings (1995; 2006) and others (see Osborne, 1996; Schmeichel, 2011; Milner, 2011; Casey, 2010; 2016a; 2016b) the foundations for culturally relevant pedagogy have remained consistent in the 20 or so years since first being articulated. For Ladson-Billings, there are three major elements for enacting a culturally relevant pedagogy: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

Academic achievement focuses on student learning, though it is important to note here that in recent years Ladson-Billings has worked to make clear that what she meant/means by academic achievement is not reducible to high stakes achievement test scores. Rather, academic achievement here takes on a “funds of knowledge” character, wherein all students are seen as possessing important insight(s) and knowledge of their own experiences and lived realities (see Moll, 1992; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Students thus build on and make connections between their own unique funds of knowledge and the academic material of the school. Cultural competence focuses on students honoring and recognizing their unique cultural practices and beliefs through their
engagement with school culture and curricula. Students should be able to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding in school, and be afforded opportunities to make connections between their culture and their experiences in school. Sociopolitical consciousness focuses on understanding the structural forces and conditions that function to determine life chances and opportunities. Students work toward understanding themselves and their experiences in context, in order to work against the status quo and affect a more just reality.

A decade after first articulating these elements, Ladson-Billings (2006) wrote about a moment in her own teacher education classroom that has resonated with me ever since. She tells a story of her teacher candidates asking to be told “how to do” multicultural education. Her students critiqued what they understood as being told “about” culturally relevant approaches to work in classrooms, but not being told explicitly what to do in such spaces. Ladson-Billings responded by saying,

Even if we could tell you how to do it, I would not want us to tell you how to do it... The reason I would not tell you what to do is that you would probably do it... Without any deep thought or critical analysis. You would do what I said regardless of the students in the classroom, their ages, their abilities, and their need for whatever it is I proposed. (p. 39)

While some readers might see this as a kind of intellectual escapism, I read this commitment as a powerful call for critical student-centered approaches to teacher education. The danger in teacher education is that we stop adapting to the immediate contexts in which we are faced, that we rely instead on tried and true, or “research-based” “best practices” as though we might offer candidates a fool-proof recipe that will “work” for them in (any of) their classrooms.

In my own teacher education classrooms I work to view each of my students as possessing a wealth of resources that they bring with them to their inquiry and study in my course(s). Karen Lowenstein, in her review of the literature on multicultural education and teacher education found that too often, teacher educators mobilize a deficit-steeped lens when considering the skills and dispositions that white teacher candidates bring with them to this work. Lowenstein (2009) demonstrates how research on white teacher candidates has created a dominant view of these candidates as “deficient learners about diversity” (p. 164). In order to resist such pitfalls, I aim to approach my work with teacher candidates from an asset-based perspective that recognizes that learning about white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalist exploitation, and the host of other oppressive systems that impact and determine our work in school settings is often fraught and difficult. Too often, we see socially just dispositions as either “present” or not – as though such dispositions cannot be learned or develop further over time.

This commitment to developing critical dispositions is precisely what Ladson-Billings means by sociopolitical consciousness. While we should be clear here that she is primarily working to articulate elements of culturally relevant pedagogy and the outcomes for P12 students of such a pedagogy, she is explicit that teachers must possess a sophisticated conception of their sociopolitical context(s) in order to support students in their own consciousness raising. I see my work in teacher education as supporting teacher candidates to name for themselves the sociopolitical factors that impact work in schools and classrooms. Reading connections between and amongst social systems, actors, curricula, and the myriad elements that make up classroom realities is a key component to working with and for students toward social justice. In my teacher education courses, we work to articulate many such “readings” of school and social space(s) as we work toward articulating our own conceptions of practicing culturally relevant pedagogy.
**Movement 2: Anti-Oppressive Education**

Anti-oppressive education comes from the work of Kevin Kumashiro (2000; 2008; 2009; 2010) and his work to “trouble” the “commonsense” of teacher education, educational policy, and approaches to multicultural education. Kumashiro (2009) understands all schools as always-already addressing issues of oppression. He writes that schools do this “often by reinforcing [oppression], or at least allowing it to continue playing out unchallenged, and often without realizing they are doing so” (p. XXXVI). Schools are caught in a notion of “commonsense” that rarely gets interrogated in teacher education, or anywhere else. Thus, following Kumashio, we must ask two sets of questions immediately of any “commonsense” position or pronouncement. First, we must ask “common for whom”? How are those already in power figured in neutral or non-political ways, and how do those positions contribute to maintaining our oppressive status quo? Second, we must ask about those moments when we are being beckoned to “use our common sense” in how such a position functions on the side of the status quo. We must ask ourselves how “commonsense” has been constructed, who benefits, and how calls to rely on commonsense most often require silencing marginal(ized) perspectives and voices.

Kumashiro understands anti-oppressive education as “forms of education that explicitly work against multiple forms of oppression” (p. XXXVII, *my emphasis*). Here we should take special note of the plural “forms” in the previous sentence. There are many different approaches to combatting oppression, and in such combat we must be constantly on guard against reinvigorating other forms of oppression. To this end Kumashiro tells us, “No practice is always anti-oppressive” (p. 3). When read alongside Kinchloe’s (2008) point that “There are as many brilliant forms of practice as there are brilliant practitioners,” we can better understand Kumashiro’s meaning (p. 116). There is no one “best way” to combat oppression in classrooms and schools, and in trying to create such a method, Kumashiro is clear that we would then be participating in exclusionary practices that function on the side of oppression. In order to remain conscious and vigilant of the risks of such slippages, Kumashiro encourages us to engage in the praxis of “troubling” knowledge. By this he means making knowledge problematic, complicating knowledge “to simultaneously use knowledge to see what different insights, identities, practices, and changes it makes possible... and [what] it closes off (pp. 8-9). Kumashiro thus encourages us to work “paradoxically” with knowledge.

For my own work with teacher candidates, Kumashiro’s understanding of oppression has helped me better understand the ways in which any choice of what to include in teacher education is simultaneously a choice of what not to include. Such choices, when made explicit and visible to students, can work to better situate the inherently political nature of any and all teaching and learning. This non-neutrality is central to work in my classrooms, as I make clear why we are taking up the texts and ideas we do, and offer additional ways in which we might further make sense of and understand our work in context. Working paradoxically with teacher candidates entails working in and with the finding that “We can never know exactly what students are learning” (p. 37). This unknowability is central to the partial nature of all work in classrooms.

In teacher education, particularly in those classes that are explicitly focused on multicultural approaches to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and so on, we often position our work as needing to accomplish everything possible to equip teacher candidates to work with any and all learners. In doing so, we undermine the always-ongoing work of becoming a teacher. Understanding this partiality, our work in teacher education classrooms shifts to working with teacher candidates to trouble their own histories and the knowledge(s) they bring with them to work in schools and classrooms. It means we must support them to make connections within
and across content, context(s), and the lived realities of those they are working with. To accomplish this, I aim to provide multiple perspectives on every issue we take up in class, and to build additional perspectives as we question the limits of any particular approach. Perspective taking is perhaps the central aim of my pedagogy with teacher candidates: I work to support candidates to be able to mobilize multiple and contradictory perspectives of any and all social conditions and experiences. This act, of taking on multiple perspectives simultaneously, is perhaps the single most important aspect of teaching with and for students in humanizing and anti-oppressive ways. To focus this work, I rely on a critical pedagogy of becoming that builds on Ladson-Billings and Kumashiro, coupled with the revolutionary praxis of Freirean critical pedagogy.

Movement 3: Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire’s (1998; 2000; 2006) critical pedagogy emerged out of an adult literacy paradigm that worked to support learners to “read the word to read the world”. Literacy for literacy’s sake is empty work; our “reading” must equip us with the tools to understand our social reality, our place within this reality, and the ways we can work to affect transformation on the side of justice. For Freire this entails a commitment to praxis: action and reflection in equal measure on the world in order to transform it. This social transformation stems from the conscientization of the oppressed: understanding the dialectical relation between the oppressors and the oppressed and working toward abolishing the conditions for oppression. Put more clearly, in order for there to be oppressed peoples, there must be those who actually do the oppressing. Thus, in order to abolish the existence of oppression, we must work to abolish the conditions for oppression. While Freire is clear that such work is not possible solely within the contexts of schools and classrooms, he is clear that without such work in educational spaces, transformation is impossible.

Perhaps the greatest impact Freire’s work has had on my pedagogy in teacher education spaces is his analysis and critique of the “banking method” of education. Banking education here should be read as a literal metaphor, wherein the teacher makes ‘deposits’ in the students, with an aim of reaping a return on the investment in the form of docile workers, test scores, and behavior. As Freire (2000) writes,

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry (p. 72).

Banking education falls in line with a Kumashiroan conception of “commonsense” in that it confirms traditional conceptions of what it means to teach and learn. Students are conditioned in banking education to conform to the expectations of teachers, to memorize as much as possible, and to store the deposits made in them as what it means to “learn.”

In my teacher education courses, we read these critiques early in the semester, and question how many experiences of ‘banking’ students have had in their educational experiences. In contrast to banking, in our courses we aim for a “problem-posing” pedagogy that blurs the distinctions between teacher and student. Democratizing the practice(s) of teaching and learning, teachers and students work together to better understand their worlds in context, using course content as a means to greater consciousness of the social conditions of their/our realities. The positionalities in the classroom shift from a teacher and students to student-teachers and teacher-students. Sharing power with candidates, modeling ways in which
we can resist and reject banking approaches in any and all classroom spaces, and working together toward a more humanizing reality for work in schools are all powerful animating concepts in my own teacher education pedagogy that I have “reinvented” from Freire (see Freire, 2006 and Casey, 2016b for more on ‘reinvention’ in this context).

Taken together, culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, and critical pedagogy offer multiple meanings and insights into what it means to organize teacher education coursework and pedagogy. I have attempted to summarize major elements of each of these approaches that have substantially impacted my own work in teacher education classrooms. While what I have provided here offers a shortened summary of each of these approaches, we can go further in our summarizing by offering the three major tenants that emerge from the comingling of these critical approaches to work with and for students:

1) All teaching and learning is always already political, and we must make every effort to be explicit in the choices we are making, why we are making them, and how these choices represent political actions on the part of teachers and students in order to democratize work in classroom settings.

2) We must work with knowledge paradoxically, resisting desires for “comforting” ways of thinking and knowing as we question the extent to which our desires function on the side of oppression.

3) Work in classrooms must center the learner, the funds of knowledge they bring with them to any and all work, and the powerful connections possible between academic content and work to transform our oppressive social reality.

In the following section I work to detail how these commitments have come to be the basis for our teacher education program.

**Becoming a Teacher Education Program**

When I first came to my current institution we had not had a teacher certification program in more than a decade. As a liberal arts college, we are committed to resisting overly instrumentalist “pre-professional” training as what constitutes an undergraduate education. Despite the lack of a formal teacher education program, for years more than 10% of our graduates went on to become teachers, most in alternative certification programs. My position was created to respond to the demands of students at our institution who wish to study education, as well as to the demands of our community for our college to do more to support work in local P12 public schools. Beginning in 2014, as the only full time tenure track professor in educational studies, I worked with colleagues first to build a major in Educational Studies, and then a teacher certification program for secondary educators.

Our major in Educational Studies is committed to maintaining the strengths of our liberal arts tradition and approach to undergraduate education. To this end, we created three interdisciplinary tracks for majors: Teaching and Learning, Community and Social Change, and Policy and Reform. The Teaching and Learning track is designed for those students who wish to work in formal educational settings. Community and Social change is designed for those students who know they want to work with young people, but not necessarily in formal P12 school settings. Those who desire to work with nonprofits, governmental agencies, and community groups are often most drawn to this track. The final track, Policy and Reform, focuses on significant coursework in policy contexts, and is designed for those who wish to pursue law, governmental policy, and work with foundations. After becoming a major in 2015, we now have 30
majors in the program (we are the fastest growing major on campus), spread across each of the three tracks.

After creating our interdisciplinary major, we set about designing a teacher education program that would build on the best of our institution, while incorporating critical commitments to humanizing socially just education in the urban context our college is situated in. In the remainder of this section I first detail the architecture of our teacher education program, paying special attention to the interdisciplinary approach we have taken to educating and preparing teachers. Next I discuss in detail our approach to methods courses, an approach we call “methods-centric field experiences”. Finally, I work to detail how the approaches detailed above have come to animate our programmatic vision and aims, as well as the pedagogies of our teacher education program.

**Program Architecture**

Students who wish to become teachers are in the first track of our major: Teaching and Learning. All students who are seeking licensure are double majors: one in their content area and one in Educational Studies: Teaching and Learning. We have partnered with 11 programs and departments across our college to offer secondary certification: Biology, Chemistry, Chinese, English, French, German, History, Latin, Mathematics, Russian, and Spanish. We designed our program to be rigorous on the side of content: all of our teacher candidates have undergraduate degrees in their content areas. Yet we also wanted to ensure that our candidates have a wealth of educational content as well, which led to our commitment to requiring a double major.

Within the program, candidates complete at least three field experiences: one in a middle school, one in a high school, and one in a secondary special education setting. Candidates are required to complete all content area exams before advancing to clinical practice. Our clinical practice is a semester long student teaching experience with two master teachers within the same school building. This student teaching begins on the first day of classes the semester after graduating from our college. We made this decision for three primary reasons: First, given the breadth of required foundational credits and courses, as well as maintaining the residential liberal arts experience our institution is founded on, we did not want students away from campus for their final spring semester. Second, we want our candidates to have experience on the first day of a new school year. Too often, teacher candidates student-teach in their final semester of undergraduate coursework and inherit all of the classroom norms and procedures from their mentor teachers, who established these a semester beforehand. Ensuring that our candidates are prepared for the first days of school requires that they be present on those first days. Third and finally, we are committed to aligning our program to the needs of our local public schools. Each January our local district hires approximately 250 teachers, to begin work halfway through the school year. We see our students stepping into these roles prepared and confident in their abilities as urban educators.

Our approach to Educational Studies centers on an interdisciplinary understanding of what teacher candidates ought to experience as a part of their undergraduate coursework. Our candidates take courses in Educational Foundations; Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Education; Principles of Curriculum and Instruction; and Critical Pedagogy. Additionally, they also take courses in Educational Psychology; Human Development; Statistical Analysis; Ethics; and History; as well as the 12 Foundations requirements of all majors in the college. We offer more than 62 elective
courses to complete the major (students select three), spanning the disciplines listed above in our certification areas, as well as courses in Political Science, Religious Studies, Theatre, Urban Studies, Geography, Psychology, and many others.

Methods Centric Field Experiences

Our program differs from many in how we approach our methods courses. Most typical teacher education programs offer a methods sequence. My own experience began with a broad “Methods of Teaching in Secondary Schools” that then narrowed to “Methods in Social Studies Education” and finally “Methods in History Education”. We have designed our program in a markedly different direction, for two leading reasons. The first is a problem of numbers. As a residential liberal arts college with around 2000 students, the possibilities for both staffing and filling a methods sequence similar to the one I experienced is logistically impossible. There are not enough instructors, nor students, for such a program to work in our institution.

The second reason is far more pedagogically rich: we believe that the best way to learn to work in classrooms is to work in actual classrooms. We have thus designed our program in a marked different direction, for two leading reasons. The first is a problem of numbers. As a residential liberal arts college with around 2000 students, the possibilities for both staffing and filling a methods sequence similar to the one I experienced is logistically impossible. There are not enough instructors, nor students, for such a program to work in our institution.

The second reason is far more pedagogically rich: we believe that the best way to learn to work in classrooms is to work in actual classrooms. We have thus designed an approach to teaching methods we call “methods-centric field experiences”. In a methods-centric field experience, candidates are paired with a master teacher in our local school district. Partnering with teachers, we host orientations and workshops with all clinical educators who work with our students. In these workshops, we detail our program commitments to social justice, powerful student-centered pedagogies, and the work of mentoring teacher candidates. This final piece is worth commenting on in greater detail.

In our program, exemplary local educators become our “methods instructors.” Rather than furthering the theory-practice gulf that animates so much of the experience(s) of teacher education -- wherein methods courses are deemed overly “theoretical” or too abstract for practical application in the actual classrooms that candidates are working in -- we instead use the secondary classroom the candidates are in as the source material for their methods experiences. Mentor teachers are instructed on ways of involving teacher candidates in an iterative process that sees them take on greater responsibility as they progress through the semester and through their program. After spending several course sessions observing the classroom, candidates then shift to facilitating small group work, designing elements of lessons, assisting with assessment, reviewing with students, attending IEP and parent conference meetings, and a host of other activities. Central to this work is the commitment on the part of our mentor teachers to make explicit the methodological choices they are making and why they are making them.

We require short (5-15 minute) discussions between teacher candidates and mentor teachers every time our candidates are present in a classroom. These discussions are structured as follows: The mentor teacher explains the standards and student learning objectives for the lesson(s); the mentor teacher discusses how they came to choose the lesson(s) and activities they are taking up, as well as other options they considered; mentor teachers discuss accommodations and modifications they are making for particular learners, and why they are making those decisions; and finally, the candidates are then asked to follow up with questions of their own based on observations, other experiences, and their growing pedagogical content knowledge. We ask much more from our mentor teachers than any other teacher education program that works in our local district, however, we are
committed to honoring the labor of our mentor teachers, and we compensate not only those working with student teachers, but all mentor teachers working with one or more of our students each semester. Honoring teachers’ work, partnering to support teacher candidates, and responding to immediate and felt district needs are the animating commitments behind our methods-centric field placements. While we are still in the early stages of our program, the mentor teachers we are partnering with this semester have expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to mentor teacher candidates, and for the ways in which the requirement of discussing their methodological choices has helped them be more reflective of their practice. These teachers are working to explain the how and why of what they are doing, in ways that are often erased or ignored in traditional methods courses. We believe that this approach offers a critical intervention in dispelling the theory-practice divide, and in ensuring the relevance of the methods our teacher candidates’ experience.

Locating Ladson-Billings, Kumashiro, and Freire in Our Program

To begin, the most immediate way we have imbedded the approaches of culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, and critical pedagogy into our program is through the content of our courses. We read each of these authors in Foundations of Education, the first course in our Educational Studies program required of all majors and minors. What might not be clear from what I have sketched above is how we avoided the problem of the “token” multicultural education course. As many studies have demonstrated (see Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992; Gay & Howard, 2000; Sleeter, 2001), too often teacher education programs have a single course on multicultural education. In contrast, every Educational Studies course in our program has an explicitly culturally relevant multicultural emphasis. From the first semester in Foundations of Education, to senior year in our Senior Seminar on Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Literacy, and everywhere in between, our students approach the study of teaching and learning from an explicitly urban social justice lens.

Additionally, all of the elective courses in our program focus on various approaches to understanding culture, identity, and difference. This interdisciplinarity crystalizes around a common theme of centering whiteness, Christianity, and middle class ways of being as the “norm” of social experience. The academic coursework candidates complete in our program provides them with sophisticated critical lenses to understand the contexts of communities, schools, and classrooms. Yet we seek to take these experiences even farther, by living out a Freirean ideal of praxis.

In all of our courses, we seek to model the kinds of relations we desire for impactful work in urban schools. While the practices themselves vary across different contexts, we seek to align the underlying emphases around central components that become shared pedagogical commitments. First among these is a funds of knowledge approach to all learners. In our local school district nearly 30% of all residents live at or near the poverty line, and nearly 50% of those under 18 live in poverty (Delavega, 2015). Despite these incredible hardships, we work with candidates, teachers, and P12 students to build practices of resilience, and to understand that work in classrooms and schools can combat these terribly oppressive conditions. Our city, despite centuries of disinvestment and white supremacy, remains a remarkably vibrant and determined community that believes in our youth as social change agents.
Further, our candidates are required to articulate their commitments to working in culturally relevant ways at a number of points within the program. To be accepted to the licensure program, students must write an essay describing their commitments to work in and for urban schools and communities. To advance to student teaching, another written essay is required that asks them to connect their course work to their experiences in local schools, and how their practice in classrooms can counter oppressive social practices and outcomes. In their field experience classrooms, our candidates are explicitly assessed on their ability to work in culturally relevant ways with all students. Thus, our program collapses the theory-practice divide by embedding both in a framework of cultural relevance and social justice that connects college-level coursework, field experiences, and clinical practice.

Teacher Education And/In the Liberal Arts: Conclusions and Future Directions

Michael S. Roth (2014) writes of the liberal arts, “Liberal education… refers to the combination of the philosophical and rhetorical traditions of how one learns as a whole person” (pp. 3-4, my emphasis). A liberal arts approach means that we privilege experiential learning for the sake of intellectual, personal, and emotional growth. It further means that we not limit ourselves to a narrow purview of “job training” as the purpose of an undergraduate education. In the conclusion of this article, I argue that such a stance should become more central to the ways we understand teacher education.

A common thread that has been implicitly mobilized throughout this article is the notion of resisting dogmatic “best” ways of practicing teacher education and classroom pedagogies more broadly. For so many teachers, their teacher education programs actually work to stifle their curiosity and intellectual desires for close and meaningful work with others. Many leave their teacher education experiences desperate for more instruction on “classroom management,” and believe that they do not possess the skills to build their own classroom materials, lessons, and activities (Casey, Lozenski, & McManimon, 2013). These are of course the very same students that Ladson-Billings addressed in her teacher education course: those who want to know how to “do it”. Ladson-Billings concludes her chapter with a discussion of how we might get away from the question of “what to do” and instead offers a different reflective move. She asks us to question “who we are being” with and for students in our classrooms. Rather than questioning how we might “do” culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, or critical pedagogy, we can thus shift to a more ontological project: of being and becoming. Thus, we should ask ourselves how and if we are being culturally relevant, anti-oppressive, and critical. Rather than limiting this work to a set of specific actions or strategies, the possibilities abound for the innumerable ways a teacher might enact pedagogies of social justice.

Part of creating and maintaining these possibilities requires us to broaden “commonsense” notions of what “counts” as teacher education coursework. A liberal arts approach to such work enables more space for what is at the heart of teaching: an always-unfinished project of learning. It is an old adage to say that teachers are “life-long learners”, yet we rarely take such a pronouncement seriously in teacher education. With increasing neoliberal accountability and scrutiny (see Casey, 2013, 2016b; Sleeter, 2008; Kumashiro 2010), coupled with “value-added” metrics used to understand the work of teachers and teaching, we risk losing the potentiality of teaching as a vocation. That is, when we
demand rigid and “research-based” practices for all teacher candidates, we are closing off possibilities and opportunities for more approaches, more ways of working in classrooms, and more ways of practicing forms of education that work to collapse hierarchies, spread power, and grow justice. Freire (2000) writes, “Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p. 84, emphasis in original). Teacher education, then, in order to be aligned with commitments to humanization and praxis, must understand itself not as an end point, not as where teacher candidates demonstrate “mastery” and then advance to another stage in some sort of educational progression. Rather, we must see teacher education as a practice of becoming, and one of partiality.

No program is capable of preparing candidates for every possible context, culture, and event they might experience as teachers. To pretend that this is possible is to further the dominance of commonsense that says there is a particular way teaching and learning ought to occur. Study of the liberal arts which embraces a wide range of interdisciplinary approaches and lenses with which to understand realities, is ultimately what critical approaches to teacher education demand. We need greater engagement with the possibilities of teacher education in a liberal arts setting. We further need greater engagement with the design of new teacher education programs that do not fall prey to the instrumentalized view that sees teaching primarily as a set of “techniques” that one can follow to guarantee particular outcomes. I have worked to demonstrate how critical commitments to humanizing education with and for diverse learners necessitates serious and careful study, practice, and reflection. I encourage my comrades in teacher education programs to explore ways they might imbed more liberal arts approaches to working with the whole learner they encounter, to resist banking strategies of “best practices”, and to orient their programs as always-unfinished, always-searching, and always and already in the praxis of becoming.

References


Introduction

Teacher Education programs across Canada are in the process of transforming in response to the diverse demands expected of current and future teachers in the ‘network information age’ promoted by digital technology information (Action Canada, 2013; C21 Canada, 2012; Khalideen, 2015; Magnusson, 2015; Schleicher, 2012; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Educators, ministries of education, and curriculum developers have sought alternative responses to needs of today’s learners through creating curriculum that thoughtfully addresses new technologies, globalization, and rapid change in an era where neoliberalism is having an increased influence on education (Hargreaves, 2003). In this paper, our grounding of transformative teacher education in curriculum theory is an attempt to strengthen the bridges between curriculum theory, teaching practice and the experience of be(come)ing in liminal spaces. We navigate the complexities of coming to know/perform/understand/feel what it means to be a ‘teacher’ as we engage each other in on-going reflective dialogues. We ask, then, how does ‘curriculum’ speak to and inform what and how teachers need to know and to learn? A disconnect has existed between curriculum scholars and teacher education scholars, evident in many educational research organizations, conferences, and publications (Richardson, Cherkowski & Schnellert, 2015; Stewart Rose, Phaisarnsittikarn, Broad, Baxan, James, & Wilton, 2015). The curriculum theorizing that has offered deep understandings of the complexities of teacher education have often been eschewed by practitioners; policy and procedure discussions of teacher education programming have rarely engaged theoretical consideration, instead bowing to the demands of the field.

As we have grappled with the intersections of our roles as curriculum theorists and teacher educators, we have been guided by three simple, yet deeply meaningful questions originally posed by Canadian curriculum scholar, Cynthia Chambers (1999): Who are we?, Where are we?, and Who are they? We have been working to transform our teacher education program with these curricular questions in mind.

In our work with pre-service teachers, we understand they are entering into an educational reality that is distinct from the past yet difficult to predict. Knowing this, we have grounded this paper in the liminal space created by what we see as an emerging yet tenuous paradigm shift. In this paradigm shift, the relationship between teacher education and curriculum theory is one of symbiosis where our
collective efforts towards transforming education will be of benefit not only to each other but more importantly to the self, the other and the natural world. To meet the challenges of transforming teacher education, we have shared the development of a specific teacher education program, *Transforming University of Victoria Teacher Education Programme* (TRUVic), drawing on the articulated experiences of numerous students and instructors, as well as participant observations that have taken place over five years.

**Our Transforming University of Victoria (TRUVic) Teacher Education Project**

The Transforming UVic (TRUVic) teacher education project grew out of a desire to better integrate two conventional learning spaces in teacher education programs — the university and the school — and to create an embodied understandings of curriculum theory with the principles of 21st century teaching and learning. Our use of the verb *transforming* is premised on the belief that learning and understanding are more about transformation of mind and spirit than the accumulations of superficial facts and figures (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000). In line with Khalideen (2015), Magnussen (2015), Schleicher (2012) and Trilling and Fadel (2009), we not only agree on the need for an expansion of the traditional notions of knowledge construction but more importantly, we feel compelled to act on those shared beliefs. Kegan (2000) suggested that through the process of engaging in transformative learning we don’t simply add to what we already know, but we profoundly alter how we come to know. Our reply to Chambers’ questions has been developed in part as a response to feedback from many teachers, secondary teacher education students and university instructors over the past several years; from their responses and our own experiences we have sought to redefine conceptions of education, teaching, learning and what it means to contribute to a learning community.

Five key features of our TRUVic teacher education program include: 1) creating a non-competitive environment, using alternative assessment and cross-curricular approaches and regular sharing; 2) focusing on teacher identity development, connecting past to current and future experiences and understandings, 3) involving practicing teachers as teacher educators in the program; 4) integrating courses within the program, enabling instructors to collaborate with each other to provide a common focus, support, and in some instances shared assignments and activities; and 5) establishing a cohort model that enables the development of deep relationships among the pre-service teachers but also with instructors, new ideas, school students and classroom teachers. Though for the purposes of this paper, we list these features to promote understanding, in reality they are interconnected and in process; the relationship between them is more like a complex learning system. We will discuss the nature of such a system later in this paper.

**The structure of TRUVic.** The pre-service teachers participate in weekly opportunities to immerse themselves into school/classroom life, through working in a high school one day a week from the beginning of their program. From the first week, pre-service teachers visit participant high schools where they are mentored by experienced teachers, working alongside a range of educators from a variety of education contexts. Through these weekly visits, they are exposed to diverse pedagogical approaches, including innovative use of technology, assessment practices, and collaborative/constructivist approaches to learning and teaching. As prospective teachers, they also engage with curriculum documents and visit a range of teaching and learning contexts. This has provided an essential window into thinking about how to integrate curricula with a depth of understanding about learning, meeting diverse needs, and student engagement as well as recognizing and exploring the tensions and contradictions they observe within school,
between school and their university courses, as well as with the broader community. They have been supported in reflecting authentically on their learning experiences, both on campus and in the school, having storied their complex experiences through reflexive inquiry and sharing with others.

1) Alternative assessment:
TRUVic’s cohort model has enabled authentic learning relationships among the students, supporting them in discovering that they can be each other’s best resources and helping them to let go of their initial desire for a blueprint guide to becoming a teacher. A community of learners that supports each other in authentic ways can occur only when its members are not competing with each other for grades and individual recognition. As a result, an alternative form of assessment, contract grading, has been used in order to mitigate students’ concerns about taking risks and to eliminate the need to hierarchically rank the students. This approach to a more authentic and collaborative assessment enables pre-service students and their mentors to considerWHO ARE WE?andWHO ARE THEY?through a lens of connection rather than separation. Through contract grading, TRUVic students have committed to developing as professionals in their teacher education program as opposed to being students focussed on grades. All students achieved a B+ level for completing the formal requirements of the courses. Those who wish to attain a higher grade have negotiated further or extended projects that have enhanced the learning of the cohort as well as their own and are in keeping with three Indigenous principles for learning that underpin the TRUVic approach. These projects have taken the form of resource development, development of handbooks for potential fieldtrips, and workshop presentations for their peers. Such re-framing of conventional notions of assessment and evaluation has enabled TRUVic students to share ideas, give each other feedback, and work together on projects, aware that they were not judged against each other or ranked in the class. Doing so has engaged them in a collaborative learning system, maintained through their bonding as a cohort, rather than a sorting system.

2) Developing teacher identity:
To ‘walk the talk’ of the importance of curriculum theory, we invited our pre-service teachers to narrate their experiences through autobiographical or autoethnographic explorations into their own lives, responding to the questionWHO ARE WE?. Through narratives delivered as a short (90 second) video entitled“Who am I?”they reflect upon past experiences, their values and beliefs which they then share with their colleagues. This allows them to begin exploring their assumptions and the uniqueness of their own powerful ‘teacher becoming’ stories; the sharing of these with their cohort to foster a sense of community that can support them all to become reflexive in their on-going practice. Pre-service teachers’ autobiographical writing “invites those who would teach to recover the world within which they came to be knowing subjects; it invites them to recover their own intentionality, and requires them to articulate and make explicit the relations which all take for granted” (Grumet, 1989, p. 15). The shared aspect of the pre-service teachers’ videos creates strong positive relationships to form in the cohort, recognizing both the commonalities of their experiences and the differences.

3) Teachers as teacher educators: A key aspect of the TRUVic program has been integration of practicing teachers into the teacher education program as instructors as opposed to being relegated to the role of guest lecturers in university classes. Additionally, the integration of school teachers – those who organize the weekly school visits - as instructors has also shifted the feeling of pre-service teachers being visitors in the school; rather, they become an integral member of the school. This approach has allowed us to interweave curriculum theory/understandings in embodied ways and respond to the questionWHO ARE THEY?in meaningful experiential ways. The involvement of school teachers as teacher educators has served
to break down the age-old division between university and school, instead interweaving the practice-focused with the theory-focused in reflexive experiences and dialogue. The case study assignment required of the pre-service teachers helps them to focus on one particular high school student, ideally one who seems dissimilar from them. This assignment helps pre-service teachers understand the needs, interests and abilities of the adolescents they will soon be teaching. A close-up lens, focusing on one individual, enables the pre-service teachers to analyze their prior romanticized construction of students and teachers, beginning to see them in all the complexity that comprises schools and classrooms. Through the integration of these new learning spaces that are neither in school nor in university classrooms, but rather in dialogic relational spaces in-between, pre-service teachers and instructors connect with students through conversations, observations, reflections, and collaborations that lead to more complex understandings of the needs of learners.

4) Integration of courses: Through the TRUVic program, coursework is integrally linked with school-based experience. Several courses meld into one holistic experience that has instructors working collaboratively across spaces and places within both the university and local secondary schools. Modeling a team-teaching approach, TRUVic instructors connect regularly about next steps, directions, and outcomes. A new curriculum implemented by the British Columbia Ministry of Education has acknowledged the need for interdisciplinarity, in line with the complex needs of today’s society and workplaces, as well as a stronger focus on learning of ‘competencies’ rather than solely ‘content’. Integration of courses and assignments enables a broader scope for understanding today’s educational needs. Considering the question Where are we? this program has explicitly considered context and students’ learning needs as central to the teacher education project. To that end, community meetings with the pre-service teachers, and instructors are held to gather feedback and input into what has been working for students and what has not. Where possible in their schedules, instructors have also attended each other’s classes in order to support and inform how future classes are designed, building on theoretical discussions, practical queries and extensive observations.

5) Cohort model building professional relationships: In reconceptualising location, purpose, relationality, and assessment in our TRUVic teacher education program, multiple spaces have been provided for thinking about teacher education and the pre-service teachers’ place in both global and local contexts. As Doyle and Carter (2003) commented, “as teacher educators we try to inculcate too much too early” (p.135). We have used dialogic relational pedagogies (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011) to enable narratives to emerge, to give language to experiences, and to explore fundamental educational dilemmas regularly encountered in the schools, on campus, and in the liminal spaces between. Throughout the 16-month teacher education program, pre-service teachers work collaboratively, get to know each other more deeply, share experiences, provide moral and educational support, and find spaces to also play together. The strong connections enable more risk-taking, reflection, and challenging of both their own assumptions and those underpinning the educational system itself. Over the past five years this program has been offered, we have noted this as the most significant aspect of their pre-service experiences, and these connections are maintained long after the conclusion of the program. Through this program we have created a new and complex institutional form in an effort to interweave storied curriculum in time and space that has been juxtaposed with frenetic classroom life so as to enable deep thinking, meaning-making and relationship-building.
Collaborative Self Study as a Liminal Space

Reflected in Chambers’ first question *Who are we?* we approached this research using collaborative self-study as a methodology for “studying professional practice settings” (Laboskey, 2004, p. 817), attempting to understand the question for ourselves as well as for our pre-service teachers. Our approach to the research informing this paper was focused on understanding the facilitation of transformative teacher education. Aligned with a conceptual framework featuring complexity, relationality and Indigenous knowing as well as Deleuze and Parnet’s (1997) notion of be(come)ing, our methodological approach is intricately connected within a synergistic relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education. Our understanding of teaching in general and ourselves as teachers developed through the interplay between each other, between ourselves and students and between ourselves and our reflection on the actions taken and words spoken. We have qualitatively engaged each other in ongoing reflective dialogues; asking, telling, challenging, listening. Through ongoing conversation, negotiation, and adaptation, we have collectively engaged in dialogic relationally-oriented pedagogy (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011) with each other and with our pre-service teachers to further our shared exploration and discovery of a living curriculum for teacher education. In our ongoing dialogues we have recognized validity as a rhizomatic construct in line with a postmodern view of knowledge.

Rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks and the complexity of problematics where any concept, when pulled, is recognized as “connected to a mass of tangled ideas, uprooted, as it were, from the epistemological field” (Pefanis, 1991, p. 22). Rather than a linear progress, rhizomatics is a journey among intersections, nodes, and regionalizations through a multi-centered complexity. As a metaphor, rhizomes work against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and open thought up to creative constructions. They are “on the ground,” immanent, with appeal not to transcendental values but to “their content of ‘possibilities’, liberty or creativity.” (Lather, 1993, p. 680)

Viewing teacher education as rhizomatic has supported our belief in the interrelated nature of teacher education and curriculum theory as well as in viewing education as a complex learning system. Moving beyond the immediateness of the ‘we’ expressed in our methodology, the relational nature of our pedagogical approach also pushes us to consider the ‘we’ in reference to our positions as teacher educators and curriculum scholars.

Complexity Thinking Informing Transformational Teacher Education

Learning to teach in the 21st century has become more complex than ever – contextual factors such as culture, gender, language and ability have become aspects of diversity that increasingly complicate the realities in classrooms, schools, and communities. As Phelan (2011) suggested, “teacher education deserves a more complicated conversation that can extend current discussions to concerns about subjectivity, society and historical moments” (p. 213). She posited that the educational field should draw on curriculum theory for a scholarly foundation for teacher education. Complicated conversations have, however, stalled in the face of disparate and conflicting perspectives. Identifying education as a learning system informed by complexity thinking has offered an alternative conception to the notion of ‘complicated’. The TRUVic program we have been developing attempts to address more than the gaps that have traditionally existed in teacher education programs, to create a new conception of teacher education that interweaves complex knowledges together. In our teacher education program we have attempted to re-imagine how courses and programs are conceptualized and connected, how learning is shared and how
knowledge, not just ‘professional’, but embedded knowledge in authentic contexts of teaching and learning, is understood, shaped and re-applied. Complexity theory, as a theory of change and emergence, has underpinned our thinking about teacher education.

Complex thinking represents the concept of learning as a ‘system’, in which multiple elements have been interrelated in intricate multifaceted networks, where learning has been emergent, continually adapting, and self-organizing. In developing our TRUVic program, we have recognized the importance of a context that enabled or challenged existing practices and beliefs as well as a context that introduces to pre-service teachers the complexity of learners and learning environments. Davis and Sumara (2012) identified the need for “occasioning the emergence of complex phenomena – that is, not just identifying them, not just better understanding what makes them go, but more deliberate efforts to trigger them into being, to support their development, and to sustain their existence” (p. 31). The pre-service teachers’ cohorts are gradually introduced to complex environments and become more able to understand ways in which they can operate and live within these complex classroom and school spaces.

Interwoven with complexity theory are three key facets. The first are critical Indigenous pedagogy (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008) and Indigenous learning principles (Sanford, Williams, Hopper, & McGregor, 2013) that value the “transformative power of Indigenous, subjugated knowledges” (p. 2) and “value the pedagogical practices that produce these knowledges” (Semali & Kinchloe, 1999, p.15). The second facet is relational questioning and understanding that focuses on “relationships between knowers and the known” (p. 409) that include social learning contexts as well as individuals’ connections between new and prior knowledge/beliefs (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008). Such a relational focus has been premised on the belief that teachers are curriculum makers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). The first two facets highlight Deleuze’s belief in the multiplicity of becoming while the third facet, liminality, relates to the milieu or context. Teachers continue to grapple with the artificial separateness of curriculum theory and the pragmatics of learning to teach; teacher educators grapple with the privileging of school classrooms as ‘real’ sites of learning versus the university’s more distanced position. Despite the struggles forged in liminal spaces, those same spaces have often been sites of transformation where the pre-service teacher has oscillated between what was, what is and what could be (Meyer & Land, 2005). We have used liminal spaces to provide our pre-service teachers with sites for growth – of understanding, confidence, and wisdom - as well as spaces to challenge existing norms, practices, and expectations.

Relational interactions, developing between ideas/texts, ourselves and students has been by their nature complex and interwoven. Relationality in teacher education has called us to consider the needs of the other before our own needs, a concept in tension with more neo-liberal, individualistic hierarchies of knowing and being. This theoretical understanding of relational accountability has been deeply informed by Indigenous wisdom, grounded in a tradition where understanding has been about relationships with other people and ideas in interconnected ways (Tanaka, Stanger, Tse & Farish, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Both curriculum studies and teacher education discourses have been enriched by connection to Indigenous principles of knowing and learning.

Further, Chambers’ (1999) curriculum questions were grounded in relational epistemology and pedagogy where learning and in turn curriculum is a lived experience between, and shared by, a teacher and a student (Riley-Taylor, 2002). Such relational understanding has been derived from an emotional and intuitive place that allowed us to make sense of “interpretations, perceptions, and beliefs” (Branson, 2010, p. 91) that have often been born
in those liminal spaces earlier referred to. Ideologically, relationality has required individuals to become weavers of a fabric “fashioned by transforming divisive incompatibilities into creative tensions” (Allan & Evans, 2006, p. 9). The resulting tapestry has become our lived curriculum, woven by many individuals with threads of textures and colours unique to the perspectives and experiences of the weavers yet whose meaning has highlighted that we are always in relationship with one another (Giles, 2011). The contribution to curriculum theory is that we have moved beyond simply adding to what we already know about teacher education to profoundly alter how we know (Kegan, 2000).

Curriculum Theory and Teacher Education Interweaving

Conceptually, our efforts in grounding transformative education in the symbiotic relationship between teacher education and curriculum theory stem from the belief that the bridges that sometimes divide curriculum theory and teacher education are, while traversable, disputed territory. In considering, Where are we?, the bridge between teacher education and curriculum theory is grounded in figurative location. We have asserted that these two interrelated areas, both vital for engaging meaningfully in educational issues and changes, need to be reconnected in new spaces that invite all participants (e.g., including faculty members, practicing teachers, policy makers, secondary school students, and pre-service teachers) to co-construct new ways of supporting students to engage in the complexities of their lives. Our representation of the symbiotic relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education as a transformative space allows for the greater exploration of the experience of be(come)ing. Deleuze and Parnet (1987) suggested that be(come)ing is represented by multiplicities that are “neither unities nor totalities” (p. vii). The relations formed therein cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts. In our view, the relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education as well as the process of learning to teach are a holistic multiplicity (Semetsky, 2006). As teacher educators, we often shy away from binaries to represent relationships in education. The notion of be(come)ing as represented in this paper is one that dwells in both-and rather than either-or. The arising milieu from that both-and relationship dwells in liminal spaces.

To further illustrate our intent in bridging curriculum theory and teacher education, we have described a teacher education program attempting to flourish in these liminal spaces, as we redefine the goals and locations of pre-service teachers’ learning. From the inception and delivery of the TRUVic program, we have navigated the complexities of coming to know/perform/understand/feel what it has meant to be a ‘teacher’. Such a process is akin to Pinar’s (2004) notion of currere, where we study the relationship between “academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction” (p. 35). The continued exploration of Chambers’ question, Where are we? has led us to situate this research in a liminal space.

Pinar and Grumet (1976) suggested than an individual’s “lived experience as it is socially located, politically positioned, and discursively formed” is the basis for curriculum as currere. This view represented curriculum as more fluid than definite. Though historically some have viewed curriculum through two questions, what should be taught and how it should be taught (Egan, 2003), the boundaries implied by these two questions are limited by the technical or semantic while at the same time leading more to argument than answer. Should curriculum subsume instruction? Should a student of curriculum also be a student of instruction? What learning experiences are valid within curriculum? Do we need a map to illustrate what, when and how to achieve goals set out by curriculum (Egan, 2003)? Questions like these and the acknowledgement of
the mutability of curriculum contribute to the challenges of understanding teacher education in light of curriculum theory and vice versa.

Notions of liminal spaces are situated ‘betwixt and between’ social structures such as those found in education (Burns, 2012). Liminal spaces have been worlds of possibility, where ideas and relations flourish and conditions have created space to “challenge and disrupt established norms” (Cook Sather & Alter, 2011, p. 39). Meyer and Land (2005) suggested that for individuals who find certain aspects of learning troublesome, like the pre-service teachers we work with who have grappled with the tensions between the importance of theory and practice, the learning spaces have been akin to states of liminality. The resulting uncertainty presented has been conceptualized as one of imaginative potential or creative tension. Liminal spaces have favoured a praxis of uncertainty, not knowing and the possibility of new beginnings that have advanced complexity and affect as central features in forming understanding of what it means to teach (Meyer & Land, 2005).

Drawing from Indigenous epistemological principles, relationality and liminality, we have shaped the TRUVic Secondary Education teacher education program to engage pre-service teachers responsibly in their own learning and make them relationally accountable (Wilson, 2008) by: 1) considering the learning of their peers before their own; 2) creating work that will benefit seven generations to come; and 3) finding their own passion through the program experiences that will energize their learning community. These principles bring Chambers’ (1999) curriculum questions Who are they?, Who are we? and Where are we? into new light and connect to Grumet’s (1989) beliefs that pre-service teachers “need to learn to support each other in this work; their capacity to influence curriculum, to influence the climate of their schools, and to learn from each other, and to share responsibility for children will rest on their ability to work together” (p.160). In order to be responsible for the other, pre-service teachers need to recognize themselves as learners and relational beings. Working in cohorts, providing collaborative rather than competitive spaces, and offering space in which complicated conversations can be generated enable a transformative teacher education program and better prepared novice teachers. Greene (1977) encouraged teacher educators to enable “individuals to reflect upon their lived lives and the lives they lead in common with one another, not merely professionals-to-be, but as human beings participating in a shared reality” (p. 54-5). Grumet (1989) suggested that curriculum theory “seeks to restore the contemplative moment in which we interrupt our taken-for-granted understandings of our work and ask again the basic questions that practical activity silences” (p. 13) and offers “places where individual theories about education may be contradicted by the specificity of experience” (p.13).

Speaking again to the question Where are we?, we have looked to complex systems because they exhibit emergence, adaptability, and self-organization. Lysaker and Furuness’ (2011) notion of dialogic relationally-oriented pedagogy has offered a way to address the complexity of teacher education and link discourses of curriculum theory with more pragmatically-oriented discourses of teacher education. Through dialogue, educational systems can create a system of relationship and negotiated meaning between ourselves, texts, and students where understanding emerges, adapts, and self-organizes in meaningful and instructive ways. In order for a complex system to emerge there must be,

enough diversity in its make-up to allow it the ability to adapt to demands of the environment, but there must also be enough redundancy (commonality) between members to maintain coherence (shared understandings) and the ability to adapt to stress from participation in the environment. Knowledge and skills emerge in co-mingling of roles associated

...
with the intents of the system as members of the system interact with each other. (Hopper, Sanford, K., & Starr, L.J., 2015, p. 12).

The TRUVic program has been developed to acknowledge and value both diversity and redundancy. The relational interaction between curriculum theory and teacher education discourses that we have identified have become necessary for a meaningful, engaging, and transformative teacher education program to emerge.

**Curriculum theory and teacher education: Reframing the relationship**

Curriculum theory has been defined by Pinar (2004) as involving an exploration of educational experience, “especially (but not only) as that experience is encoded in the school curriculum” (p. 20). Giraldo (2008) further commented that curriculum theory has been “intended to help us to understand and explain the educational significance of the relationships among the curriculum, the individual, society, and history, using multiple lenses and perspectives as well as providing spaces for comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis.” (p. 172). She pointed out that “in teacher education literature, little attention has been given to the relevance that curriculum theory has in the preparation of pre-service teachers” (p. 171). Doll (2002) suggested that curriculum should be shifted from being used as a noun (the courses, plans, methods of instruction and evaluation) to being considered as a system of relationship, as a way of negotiation between ourselves, the text, and the students. Importantly, Giraldo (2008) reminded us that curriculum is far more than texts and textbooks:

.... it is about truly understanding and contextualizing our educational, social, and personal experiences, their past, present, and future and what has been said about them as well as what we would say about them afterwards;

although education programs and teaching experiences are not the only components of pre-service teachers’ exposure to curriculum theory, they are critical in offering possibilities for constructing personal curriculum theories/narratives. (p. 172)

If we are to move away from understanding teacher education as a set of skills and strategies connected to disparate disciplinary areas, and to gain deeper understandings of not only what, but how and why we have been engaging with our students, ourselves, and diverse texts in complex ways, we cannot afford the separation between curriculum theory and teacher education program development as currently practiced.

As Phelan (2011) has noted, curriculum theory was historically thought of as “conceptual and focused on understanding” (p. 213); she distinguished this from curriculum development which was “characterized as empirical and prescriptive” (p. 213). Anderson (2015) highlighted the tension between views that teacher education is responsible for exposing pre-service teachers to all of the subjects they will be required to teach and the view that curriculum theory is the site where pre-service teachers “investigate the curriculum’s rationale” (p. 116). The divide between curriculum theory and teacher education, to our minds, created an incomplete and inadequate way to think about teacher education — on the one hand, theorizing based on interdisciplinary conversation drawn from aesthetic, historical, and political sensibilities; on the other hand, thinking based on the need for control and structure, identifying with behaviourism and cognitive reasoning. The divide has deepened, with these two ways of thinking not engaging with the other, to the detriment of the needs of prospective teachers.

Pre-service teachers generally come to teacher education programs expecting to learn practical skills and strategies, including classroom management (organization and discipline), lesson planning, and evaluation. In our experience, they
do not imagine themselves delving reflexively into issues of power, knowledge construction, or equity, as informed by the fields of sociology, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis, or linguistics. Rather than embracing the complexity of the teacher’s role, they have been reduced to classroom managers, responsible for maintaining order, consistency, and results. Teacher education programs, then, have been divided between ‘practical’ courses and experiences and ‘foundational’ courses, with no opportunity in fragmented programs to make connections between the two. And at the end of the day, both have been dismissed by pre-service teachers anxious to be ‘successful’ in the classroom as they have learned from the ‘experience’ of their practicum, drawing on the wisdom of successful classroom teachers. This has led to transposition of education rather than transformation of education (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996) where change has been superficial and minimal.

However, we realize that this is no longer tenable in our complex and rapidly changing world. The TRUVic program offers ways to integrate, to “make connections among widely and wildly disparate phenomena and experiences” (Davis & Sumara, 2012, p. 34), to create a “flexibly associative curriculum for teachers, not a rigidly logical one” (p. 34).

Phelan (2011) then asked, “In what ways might teacher education acknowledge the basic condition of human existence and in so doing deepen teachers’ appreciation of the incalculability of action and the extent of responsibility?” (p. 215). She has spoken to the need for considering the fundamental purposes of education, about ways we have connected to one another and to the earth, about considering our place in the world, that is, the long-term ecological implications of education rather than short-term career-focused implications alone. She challenged teacher educators to meet their responsibilities as “morally informed and committed actors in education” (p. 218) by extending the emphasis on the complexity of teachers’ work, by attending to language, connections between social and educational worlds, and to involve themselves in the public and political discourses surrounding education. In doing so, we have reframed where we place our attention in teacher education, and considered what is important and how our future teachers can deepen their knowledge of the world and their place in it. Rather than identifying the predominantly hegemonic patriarchal Eurocentric constructs of management, planning, and evaluation as key components of teacher education, how might we refocus on more dialogic, feminist and Indigenous constructs of relationality, location, place, and space?

Garrett and Segall (2013) suggested that in grappling with difficult knowledge such as issues of race, oppression, gender, equity and positionality embedded in education, we have required more complex approaches to teaching and learning. Such approaches have drawn on more than teacher educators playing the role of knowledge provider. A deeper, more complex approach to education has required that we all be more attentive to students’ struggles, open to their confusion and acts of defending their self. Our approach needs to be complex, relational and arguably, humble.

**Concluding Thoughts**

At the outset of this paper we presented our dilemma, how do we understand curriculum that lies neither in written tomes nor in experience, but somewhere in between? Often as teacher educators, we have had to negotiate the complexities of feeling, knowing, performing and understanding what it has meant to be a ‘teacher’. These complexities, if not addressed, threaten the fragile formation of a transformative paradigm of education. We have recognized the tensions between curriculum theory and teacher education while advocating for the breaking down of the imaginary walls that seem to separate the two. How we prepare pre-service teachers for their work in schools requires a substantial shift because we cannot facilitate the development of the type of responsive, relational...
educators demanded of 21st century leading and learning without a deep and meaningful relationship with curriculum theory. We have described the TRU Vic program and offered complexity theory as a framework for understanding not only the messiness of teaching and learning but also to illustrate a symbiotic relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education built upon negotiated and instructive meaning.

By using a catalytic affiliation model (Sanford & McGregor, 2013), we have recognized the power of affiliation among educators and diverse educational discourses, in collaborative spaces that catalyze change. In reframing where we have placed our attention in teacher education programs, we have shifted our focus to relationality and location (space and place), creating new/third spaces in which an amalgamation of curriculum theory discourses and teacher educational discourses can intertwine in rich meaningful ways, enabling transformation of educational thinking and practice. Learning in our teacher education program is not just relegated to classroom spaces in either university or school locations, but is also found in relationships to community as we have explored alternative spaces and places. Field trips to Indigenous territories, collaboration with a local museum, visits to the community garden, invitations to community educators—all of these work in liminal spaces to prepare future teachers to thrive in increasingly complex educational environments.

From our standpoint as teacher educators, we understand why some have gravitated towards a positivist focus on skill and knowledge acquisition. Simply put, constructing and evaluating a high quality lesson plan has been seen as easier than delving into the complexities that come from the multifaceted process of learning to think, know, feel, and act, like a teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2008). Yet, if we are to meaningfully become part of a transformation in education, we need a united front formed by teacher education and curriculum theory that promotes passion and engagement. In posing the simple question, “what is education for?”, environmental educator David Orr (2004) responded by calling for more “peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane” (p. 4). These sentiments were echoed by Chambers and seen in the Indigenous learning principles we shared earlier. Similarly, Cajete (2009) identified three challenges in modern education: How do we learn to take care of the planet? How do we learn to live together? And, how do we care for our souls? These have been weighty questions to consider but ones that we must address as a community of scholars committed to the needs of our learners.

As the authors of this paper, we cannot deny our positioning as teacher educators yet we also believe ourselves to be curriculum scholars. In that duel role, we have advocated throughout this paper for a synergism between curriculum theory and teacher education and demonstrated a model that is attempting to create more robust and clear connections between teacher education and curriculum theory so as to support pre-service teachers as they enter an increasingly complex world and profession. Grounding that relationship, we offered Indigenous principles and complexity, relational questioning and understanding and liminality that promote learning as characteristics providing a unifying foundation for the preparation of teachers entering into a transformed space. We close with the powerful words of Greene (1995) in the hope that her words inspire and invigorate a continuing conversation and relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education:

All we can do is speak with others as passionately and eloquently as we can; all we can do is to look into each other’s eyes and urge each other on to new beginnings. Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple
conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. They ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility. (p. 43)

References


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Toward Theorizing a Phenomenological Teacher Education Pedagogy to Develop Reflective Teachers

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The ability to develop and use reflection is critical to becoming a teacher (e.g., Schön, 1987; Vagle, Monette, Thiel & Wester-Neal, in press; Wester-Neal, 2014; Zeichner & Liston, 2011). As Schön (1987, p. 4) cautioned, “the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures;” instead, they surface as “messy, indeterminate situations” in need of reflection. Teacher candidates often learn to reflect on such problems in the context of teacher education programs in colleges and universities (Conklin, 2012; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Zeichner, 2010). Currently, the field of college and university-based teacher education is immersed in an ongoing national discussion about the quality of new teachers and their preparation (e.g., American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2012, 2013; Cochrans-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006).

One thread of this conversation focuses on how teacher education programs can better assist teacher candidates as they learn to understand and attend to multiple issues while learning to teach (e.g., Cochrans-Smith et al., 2012; Conklin, Hawley, Powell & Ritter, 2010). Although some have argued that good teaching transcends age groups or subjects, many scholars argue that new pedagogies to help teacher candidates cultivate their reflective skills are rooted in localized particularities—an area ripe for exploring new applications of theory and the possible links between theory and practice (Reyes & Netcoh, 2015; Vagle, 2015). Using illustrative data from two teacher education courses, the purpose of this article is to detail how practices from phenomenology can assist in the development of reflective teachers and begin theorizing a phenomenological teacher education pedagogy.

Grounding in Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as it is used here, is the study of that which “manifests itself to us” (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008, p. 32). Phenomenology involves “going to the things” under study so they can come forward and reveal themselves through lived experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 32). Merleau-Ponty (2004) provided a way to understand lived experiences through the example of color. He explained that a color, such as red, is not a chunk of “absolutely hard, indivisible being,” but “red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 250). Each lived experience of the color red is unique, interconnected, and “literally is not the same as it appears in other instances,” acting instead as “a punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, [and] certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 250). Through the lived experience of a particular red, the larger phenomenon of the color red can come forward, reveal itself, and be understood.

In phenomenology, a “central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings” that focus on “a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 6). Lived experience, “with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity,” is accorded “primacy over the known,” which shifts focus away from objects and others (Wertz, 2005, p. 175). The relationship between subjects and objects becomes paramount and works to reduce othering by interconnecting subjects and objects through a concept called intentionality. A useful
way to describe intentionality comes from Merleau-Ponty (1981), who explained that “from my body intentional threads run out toward” all objects (p. 130). Through intentionality, invisible threads connect all subjects and objects together in lived experience. Grounded in the concepts of lived experience and intentionality, two key ideas from phenomenology were foundational in developing this teacher education pedagogy: attitude shifting and bridling.

**Attitude Shifting and Bridling**

This first key idea—attitude shifting, or the move from the natural to the phenomenological attitude—accounts for the histories that teacher candidates bring with them to teacher education programs. In a phenomenological sense, teacher candidates often possess a “natural attitude” before beginning a university-based teacher education program. Husserl (1999, p. 60) explained that this attitude involves “living naturally, objectivating, feeling, [and] judging” without reflecting on how or why things are the way they are. The natural attitude involves living “straightforwardly toward the world, whose existence we assume” and lacks a critical lens (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). Teacher education can challenge teacher candidates to step away from the natural attitude and take a reflective, phenomenological look at the process of developing as a teacher and their work in schools.

Through bridling, all people are “embedded in meaning,” and there is “no ‘uncontaminated’ place from which to start” (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 125). Teacher candidates, through the practice of bridling, are asked to work with and through their personal contexts. In this sense, bridling helps teacher candidates shift from a natural attitude with its everyday, unquestioned approach to the world. Instead, they move toward a phenomenological attitude, which involves reflection and openness to exploring multiple possibilities for meaning.

Incorporating these ideas, one main question guided this work: How can phenomenological practices be used in teacher education to encourage reflection as teacher candidates work through the messy, often problematic, situations that arise in teaching? In the following sections, answers to that question are discussed using illustrative data from two middle grades teacher education methods courses.

**Methods of Inquiry**

To develop and study this phenomenological pedagogy, I used an iterative process to collect and synthesize ideas from phenomenology that I could use to promote reflective practice. I studied and reflected on ideas from phenomenological sources that included: Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1981); *Reflective Lifeworld Research* (Dahlberg et al., 2008); certain essays by Husserl (1913/1962; 1927; 1999); Sokolowski’s (2000) *Introduction to Phenomenology*; selections from Gadamer (2004) and Heidegger (1996); parts of Vagle’s (2011; 2016) work on post-intentional phenomenology; and *The Phenomenology Reader* (2002), edited by Moran and Mooney. These works, my notes and plans from teaching, and conversations with other teacher educators helped build the theoretical framework behind this phenomenological pedagogy. I used this pedagogy while teaching two recent undergraduate-level middle grades teacher education courses.
Before using this pedagogy, I obtained IRB permission to study this process and acquired students’ consent to use their words and work. Illustrative data included all course materials: plans, notes, emails, conversations, written assignments, and related documents from teaching. The readings, discussions, activities in and out of class, and assessments were carefully designed to help teacher candidates grow as reflective practitioners. For most assignments, I did the same work as the teacher candidates, going through my own bridling process and working to move myself from the natural to the phenomenological attitude as a teacher educator.

**Practicing Attitude Shifting and Bridling**

Through this pedagogy, work from these two courses allowed the teacher candidates to begin transitioning from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude and practice bridling. In the following sections, I discuss how this occurred by detailing the readings, activities, and projects that the teacher candidates and I completed together.

**Through Readings and Related Activities**

Each fall, I began the course with readings from Jones’s (2006) book, *Girls, Social Class, and Literacy*. Focusing on the first three chapters of the book, I asked teacher candidates to explore the idea that people can hold different personal assumptions about what is normal. We began to move from the natural attitude toward the phenomenological through three activities. First, the teacher candidates and I explored and bridled our pre-conceived ideas about how a “normal” family behaves and interacts with the world. A visual representation activity in which we used both drawings and words, much like in a graphic novel, was designed to elicit accounts of normalcy in our families and homes while growing up. The teacher candidates and I depicted rules and expectations, routines for homework and getting to school, time spent with family and friends, sports and extracurricular activities, and our favorite subjects and teachers.

Next, we discussed the activity and examined similarities and differences between our lives, beginning in small groups and then sharing as a whole class. Some students revealed their experiences growing up in strict households in which nothing lower than an “A” grade was acceptable. Others were busy with sports and volunteer work, so grades were not the focus. Repeatedly, students characterized their upbringings as “comfortable” and “middle class” with parents who, even when divorced, were “supportive” and “involved.” Several students, however, shared their struggles. One student, Mario (this, and all subsequent names, are pseudonyms), shared that he was expected to support himself after high school, which he knew even as a middle school student. He chose to attend State University because he received a full scholarship. Although his family helped financially at times, he had to work to pay for “all of [his] wants and most of [his] needs.” Another student, Jackie, lived at home and commuted to campus. She needed advanced notice if a computer was required in class because she shared one laptop with other family members.

Finally, we connected the activity to our work as teachers by exploring how we might recognize and bridle our personal ideas of normalcy when working with students who had different ideas and experiences. The teacher candidates had already undertaken a semester of field work in diverse settings, and they shared how their students’ experiences and the culture of their placement schools were often dissimilar to theirs during adolescence. The teacher candidates wrote journals to explore their ideas about normalcy and how they addressed differing ideas in their placements. Many of them shared their uncertainties about how to handle the contrast between what they encountered in their placements and their own histories. As Marcy explained:

When I found out that I was going to be teaching at Central Middle School, I was excited
but I was also really nervous. I expected it to be pretty rough, without a lot of resources and with clearly underprivileged students...Many students spend a lot of time in the [public] library [which is across the street from their middle school]. I never knew anyone who hung out at the library after school when I was younger, but we did not have one very close to my school. Another factor is that we always had a way home after school and had homes where we wanted to spend time. Many of the kids at Central Middle walk to the library after school because they either do not have an easy way to get home or they do not want to be at home. One of my students told me that often it was more fun to go to the library and hang out with her friends than to go home and be alone.

Marcy recognized the difference between what was normal for her students and what had been normal for her in middle school. Much like other teacher candidates, she felt unsure about how to handle these differences. Through reflection, Marcy started moving from the natural attitude to phenomenological attitude by noticing this contrast and beginning to consider how to incorporate it into her teaching.

Through this pedagogy, Marcy was able to develop her thinking over time. She, like other teacher candidates, learned to examine her natural attitude and use reflection to bridle her preconceptions. Later in the semester, Marcy bridled her expectations in another journal entry:

As a teacher going into the school, I cannot assume that all of the students will be coming from government housing and broken families, which is what I was picturing before. I also cannot assume that all of the students have a great place to go home to after they leave my classroom. Many of them will be hanging around right by the school until they have to go home. We [teachers] can get to know the students better by seeing them outside of school and in places in the community. Teachers can maybe even partner with the library on the activities and clubs that are available to students who are not going home. This school and community is very different than what I grew up with, so I do not understand how everything works and how people relate to each other and work together, but I am excited about finding those things out.

Marcy found a way to connect her work as a teacher to students’ lives by pulling back on her initial concerns and using the library as a resource. Through bridling, she reflected and thought through new ways to engage and motivate students by looking at the world through a lens that centered on her students’ ideas of normalcy—not hers. She moved to the phenomenological attitude by adopting an open stance and expressing excitement about using her knowledge of her students as she taught.

Marcy’s experience was comparable to that of other teacher candidates. Another student, J. T., noticed a similar contrast in backgrounds. In one of his initial journal entries, he remarked on the differences between his life as a middle schooler and those of his students:

[What’s normal] among my students seems to be a lot different than my normal when I was in middle school. My normal was sports and a family with a mom and dad, while a lot of these students live in single parent households (as observed in parent-teacher conferences), and I have seen several students wear the same clothing multiple times. Many students obviously come from lower-income households.

J. T. seemed to make assumptions and feel wary of these differences and what they might mean—both for his students and his teaching. As the semester progressed, he developed his skill at moving from the natural to the phenomenological attitude and bridling.

J. T. began to see value in bridling his opinions about these differences. In a journal later in the semester, he wrote:

I believe that all of the students in my class have potential no matter where they come
In working to pull back on his initial beliefs about his placement school and the students, J. T. began shifting from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude to see his students in a new way. Through attitude shifting and bridling, J. T. thought he could “reach [his] students in the best way possible” by being more open to their ideas of normalcy.

Other readings and activities provided further practice in attitude shifting and bridling. For example, we read one of Moll et al.’s (1992) articles and shared our personal funds of knowledge—that is, knowledge from the world outside of school that can be useful in academic contexts (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Afterwards, we bridled our personal assumptions of normalcy by expanding the possibilities for what could serve as a fund of knowledge. Using this new understanding, teacher candidates examined content-area standards to find potential funds of knowledge from students’ home lives to use in their field placements. Jackie’s placement, for example, was in a rural area. She thought that parents who owned or worked on farms might serve as a fund of knowledge about how biological traits are passed on, which was one of the seventh grade science standards. In another example, we compared and contrasted our own schooling—our apprenticeships of observation (Lortie, 1975)—to the well-equipped and the disadvantaged schools described in a selection from Kozol’s (1992) Savage Inequalities. We reflected about how bridling our school experiences and critically examining our apprenticeships of observation could be a useful practice to develop as middle grades teachers, and we discussed how those experiences might shape us as teachers.

Through “Puzzles of Practice”

In each course, the teacher candidates and I generated our own short case studies, which we called “puzzles of practice,” from our middle grades teaching and learning experiences. In these case studies, we wrote about puzzling experiences—teaching situations that made us wonder and want to revisit what we did and could have done alternatively. We reflected on at least one puzzle of practice in every class session, first discussing our initial reactions and assumptions about the case. One student, Samarah, wrote about her confusion and discomfort in a situation in her sixth grade social studies placement:

During one practicum experience, the presidential election was in full swing, and the students were completing class work about the candidates. My cooperating teacher gave each student a sheet with two columns. One column contained liberal viewpoints and the other column was against it. The students were supposed to read through the issues and determine which candidate they would vote for depending on their viewpoint. One of the issues listed on the sheet was gay marriage. One column agreed that it should be legal, while the other column was against it. I overheard the paraprofessional speaking to one of the students, helping him through this particular issue. He did not really have an opinion on the issue, but then...
the parapro asked him if he would vote for someone that allowed “faggots” to marry. The student went along and agreed with her that he was against that issue.

Each teacher candidate read Samarah’s puzzle. After reading, together we delved into how to bridle our initial thoughts and presuppositions, what we could challenge and question about the case after bridding, and ways this process connected to our work as teachers. First, Samarah explained her revulsion in hearing an adult say “faggots,” a word she found inappropriate and offensive, while working with a student. In discussing this initial reaction, we reached a consensus that her immediate response was still appropriate; we would not pull back on the idea that some words and phrases were unsuitable for the classroom because they carried a message of intolerance or hate. Then we continued to discuss Samarah’s reaction. She told us how she felt frozen in the moment when she heard this remark from the paraprofessional; she was stunned and unsure about how to speak up or deal with the issue. Complicating the moment, she did not want to overstep her authority as a student teacher in someone else’s classroom. We talked about what each of us might have done, reimagined possibilities for resolution or closure, and fleshed out how we might use this type of case-based discussion with students or fellow teachers to explore multiple aspects of a difficult issue.

Through Community Study Projects

In both courses, teacher candidates undertook a community study project where they conducted short ethnographic studies in the local areas where they would be placed for their field experiences. The written component of this project required students to describe their efforts to learn about the community, explain how they used bridding during the study to move away from the natural attitude and open up to new perspectives from the community, and reflect on how different ideas of normalcy could impact their teaching. This work occurred in a small city known for its wide income disparities, which meant some project-related experiences fit with teacher candidates’ definitions of normal while others did not (United States Census Bureau, 2011).

One student, Allan, wrote in his essay that “seeing and engaging with a community and its locals can totally reframe one’s preconceived ideas about it.” At first glance, he thought his placement school was located in “a lively college town” with an “impoverished minority community” embedded within it. Coming from a wealthy exurban area, he thought there would be “a stark disconnect between the people” from his hometown and the people he met through the community study. After completing the project, however, he made a different conclusion:

Challenging the assumptions that often accompany a poor community by going into the local stores, talking with business employees and shoppers, walking around the neighborhoods, and riding public transit allows me to see through a different lens—one that humanizes children and their parents…[In doing so, teachers, can] reconsider the roles that schools play. Schools are no longer strictly a place to learn—they are a place to socialize, a place to eat, a place to feel better, a place to play, a place to escape. During this study, I realized that it is impossible to truly understand a community without considering the families that make it up.

By remaining open to community perspectives, Allan reflected on the different ideas of normal he encountered and linked the community to his teaching. He explained: “It is important for teachers not to give up on students or jump to conclusions about their work ethic or intelligence” based on their socioeconomic status. By bridding his initial beliefs, Allan learned that teachers could provide a “safe place” for students to learn by using the curriculum to draw out students’ strengths.

Findings from Using This Pedagogy

In reflecting on and studying the work of these two courses, I found that this pedagogy,
through its focus on attitude shifting and bridling, helped these teacher candidates develop their reflective skills. Each of us came to these courses with our own ideas about teaching and the world; the readings, activities, and assignments asked each one of us to reexamine these ideas through reflection. Many teacher candidates were surprised, for example, to learn about different ways of reading and relating to the world after discussing the work of Jones (2006) and Kozol (1992) before undertaking the community study. Instead of taking their beliefs as the only normal possibility, the teacher candidates practiced reflection, which allowed them to move away from the everyday, unexamined, natural attitude and try out the critical, questioning, phenomenological attitude. Readings, discussions, activities, and projects provided opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect on themselves and their surroundings while connecting the move to the phenomenological attitude to their work as teachers.

Similarly, bridling enabled the teacher candidates to develop reflective practices. During class discussions, teacher candidates bridled their preconceived ideas. They were often easily able to identify what they felt was normal and share their beliefs with the class, but at the beginning of each course, they seemed to have more difficulty pulling back on negative reactions to other beliefs and alternate versions of normal. As they gained more practice with bridling, the teacher candidates typically became more adept in identifying their negative reactions and considering the value of different ideas. They had further practice with bridling through written course assignments, such as journals and the essay component of the community study. In the community study paper, for example, teacher candidates bridled their pre-understandings of the community and explored those ideas in relation to what they learned after they experienced it firsthand. This assignment gave teacher candidates a space to practice reflecting on themselves and the communities in which they were going to teach.

**Why This Pedagogy Matters and What it Means**

The ways in which teacher candidates learn to teach are continually changing (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2011; Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2005). University-based teacher education has been shown to help teacher candidates learn to frame and handle the many, ever-changing issues of teaching through the use of reflection, but it needs innovation to remain current and relevant (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Schön, 1987; Vagle, Monette, Thiel, & Wester-Neal, in press). This phenomenological pedagogy for teacher education provides an innovative means for developing teacher candidates’ skills as reflective practitioners. The phenomenological practices described here helped teacher candidates unpack and open up their assumptions and beliefs about themselves, their students, and their work as teachers. This pedagogy challenges teacher candidates to develop their reflective skills through shifting their attitudes and bridling their presuppositions. Through these phenomenological practices, teacher candidates were empowered to reflect on their teaching practices and connect their reflection to their work with students.

In beginning to theorize this pedagogy, there are implications for practice in teacher education. First, while I have outlined how this pedagogy worked in the context of two teacher educations courses, I offer it as a theory in and for practice, not a blueprint to be replicated. The phenomenological practices of attitude shifting and bridling might look and work differently in different contexts because of their phenomenological basis in lived experience. As others take up this theory and expand upon it, any differences—especially in the lived experiences of those involved—will likely lead to expected and welcome variation. My work with this pedagogy is meant to be a starting point for further exploration. In using and modifying this pedagogy, teacher educators can encourage the development of new teachers who are prepared
to effect educational change while addressing new, and at times uncomfortable, situations.

Second, in moving forward, the educational landscape is continually evolving. In response to inevitable changes, this pedagogy is designed to be adapted to meet the shifting needs of teacher educators and teacher candidates. Attitude shifting and bridling are flexible tools. With critical use and future study, they can be used to help teacher candidates expand their learning, reduce othering, and explore teaching in ways that have yet to be imagined. Most significantly, this pedagogy promotes the development of reflective teachers who are prepared to create meaningful educational experiences for their students.

References


Theorized Pedagogies: Revising Clinical Practices to Foster Dispositions of Reflection in Teach For America Novice Teachers

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Introduction

In the era of teacher performance systems and standardization of preservice teacher assessments such as edTPA, we, as teacher educators are working to consider our practices carefully, ensuring that the tenets and engagements of our teacher development programs are such that they not only prepare them for externally evaluated structures for certification, but also, and much more importantly, support the growth of reflective, responsive educators developing deep understandings of the learners and communities they serve and the content and curriculum they create alongside of students.

As faculty in our 44 credit hour alternative certification program in an urban research university in the southeast, we have collaborated with Teach For America (TFA) to support, develop, and/or certify 179 novice teachers working in urban classrooms in our community. Through this collaboration we serve provisionally certified beginning teachers who have made a two year commitment to serving students in our community and have had minimal opportunity to develop in their understandings of learning and teaching, child development, and the building of classroom communities, and have been placed in their own classrooms (PK-5th grade) after five weeks of summer training through TFA. Therefore, our MAT program has been designed specifically to support novice teachers who are leading classrooms while they are learning to teach (Meyers, Fisher, Alicea, & Bloxson, 2014). We are faced with three essential warrants: (a) to promote resilient beginning teachers of record; and (c) to maintain the integrity of our research based teacher education program and its alignment with the articulated values of our faculty (Peck, Gallucci, and Sloan, 2010).

We, the three researchers engaged in this longitudinal inquiry, are two faculty members and one doctoral student. One of the faculty members is the coordinator of the program and also a course instructor and field-based coach. She has facilitated the implementation of program changes based on inquiry findings. Like many other teacher educators, the end of each academic year is a time in which we engage in systematic self-study as we analyze course and program outcomes in order to take stock and plan for upcoming semesters. The series of inquiries into our practices and the opportunities we offered our candidates which were intended to foster a disposition of reflection and introspection led us to some challenging revelations and opportunities to think differently about our practices, and theirs. This account pulls back the multiple and iterative inquiries conducted over five years and the frameworks and new directions in our work that grew from these understandings.

To support these novice teachers, we prominently position reflective practices as a tool for self-directed learning and intentional decision making. We found ourselves increasingly curious about the times in which our courses and engagements call for “reflection,” yet close scrutiny of the data revealed that our structures were not as transformative as we had hoped and at times served to reify problematic biases and practices, in effect de-professionalizing teachers (Meyers, Fisher & Alicea, 2012).
We acknowledge that reflection on practice is nothing new. Dewey, in 1933 and 1944, posited that reflection on teacher practices and actions emancipate us from routine and impulsive reactions to events. Others have considered the times when teachers reflect (before, during, or after an instructional event), the context of reflection (with whom it occurs and where these conversations take place), and the type (content) of these reflective practices (Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Mays, 2009; Nieto, 2005; Schön, 1987; Valli, 1997; van Manen, 1995; Webb, 2001).

We could not help but notice the reticence of some of our candidates to even engage in these practices. The reflective practices we ask these novice teachers to engage in have been altered significantly across time in response to an analysis of candidates’ participation (frequency, intention) in reflection, valuation of reflection, and pedagogical and personal/philosophical shifts indicated through these reflections. We wanted to explore the range of practices and structures within our teacher development program which intend to foster a disposition of reflection and which we hoped would precipitate innovation and change within teacher practices and beliefs. These changes are the key focus of this paper and will be described below.

Method

Through these multiple and iterative inquiries, we have analyzed the reflective practices we have employed in our program across time. We have come to see a number of pedagogical implications for our own work and structures in support of professionalizing reflective practices. The initial research question (Inquiry One) and the three additional recursively emerging research questions (Inquiries Two through Four), the participants for each iterative inquiry, the data collected and analyzed, and the implications and implementations based on those findings are discussed within each inquiry. See Appendix A, Table 1 Overview of Inquiries for description of each inquiry conducted.

We made significant shifts in our program during each inquiry in response to the emerging needs of our candidates. Each inquiry articulates the structures of support we created based on the data from novice teachers with a variety of experiences with, predilections toward, and opinions on written reflective practices. These inquiries have informed our practice in powerful ways. These lessons might also serve to inform the larger conversations about reflection-in/on-action (Schön, 1987). To that end we offer the questions, data, and subsequent shifts in our practice across the five years of this program as we have consistently and iteratively altered these structures for reflection in response to the lessons we have learned.

The research questions guiding these multiple inquiries included: (a) What if people are not reflecting (is it the format/the feedback/the practice)?; (b) What is happening when novice teachers reflect a great deal but are demonstrating very minimal growth in their practice?; (c) What value do novice teachers find in this practice across time?; and (d) How might we promote opportunities for teachers to articulate, revise, and weigh their daily decisions against the positions that they claim for themselves as emancipatory educators working for social justice within their classroom context? These wonderings caused us to examine the practices in our program, to alter these practices based on the lessons we have learned, and to consider the ways in which the structures we offered for reflection were taken up (or not) by these novice teachers.

In this manuscript, we have intentionally made evident the iterative processes we have engaged in as researching practitioners, engaging in systematic inquiry into our pedagogies and collaborations with students reflectively and actively shifting our practice in response to those findings. The symbiotic and simultaneous process of research examining the effect of one’s own pedagogy and recursively examining the effects of intentional responses to those findings is critical if we are to take seriously our roles as teacher.
educators and researchers. In many ways the iterative methods of this inquiry ARE the purposes and responses to authentic problems of practice and needs of our students. This type of marriage enables methods of inquiry, purposes for instruction, and the outcomes of our pedagogical choices each to be illuminated, examined, and improved. In actuality, we see this manuscript as a manifestation of the same reflective and responsive practices we asked each novice teacher we supported to engage in over time. We have made and continue to make this commitment to intentionally study our practice as we believe that is a critical role for teacher educators in theorizing, making sense of, and engaging more systematically and coherently in the type of pedagogy and support of novice and preservice teachers which responds authentically to the non-neutral context of learning and teaching both in public schools and in the university.

Within this manuscript, we consider each question of our iterative inquiry in turn, share the data which informed our decision making, and describe the responsive structures for reflection that we implemented in light of these discoveries. This method, and the writing up of this manuscript, intends to make evident our recursive practice of reflection as teacher educators which has significantly reshaped our practice alongside of notice teachers.

Inquiry I: Lessons from Infrequent Reflectors

In initial stages of analysis, we analyzed the number of opportunities candidates took up to reflect, considering the first query that grew from our collaborations with the novices we served, “What if people are not reflecting?”

Inquiry I Procedure

We calculated the frequency with which CMs took up reflective opportunities (daily, weekly, and monthly opportunities to engage in written reflection upon both hopeful and challenging moments within each instructional day), considering the percentage of frequency and the opportunities taken up for reflection out of the possible opportunities for reflecting across the year (between 0%-99% of reflective opportunities taken up by CMs; mean= 65.3). This was not considering the depth and content, but merely the choice to take up these experiences (which, while not graded, were not positioned as an optional endeavor).

Consideration of the least frequent reflector enrolled in our program who never took up opportunities to engage in written reflections throughout the program and another candidate who was extremely reticent to participate helped us make sense of some alterative practices and possibilities.

Overview of Participants and Data Collected

The 45 TFA corps members (CMs) highlighted in this manuscript were drawn primarily from our first year of program implementation (2009-10) and the subsequent changes in structures that we have put into place as we have considered them more deeply and longitudinally. Each inquiry addresses a particular research query and description of the participants, data, analysis, findings, and implications/implementations are located within the description of each study. Illustrative cases throughout each inquiry highlight the tensions experienced, the values ascribed, and the challenges encountered with the implementation of a program that intended to foster a disposition of introspection and professionalization for novice teachers.
practices of CMs, a systematic analysis of the frequency of each participant confirmed this assumption. Frequency counts indicated a significant variation in commitment to these reflective practices.

Inquiry I Participants and Findings

In order to understand the reasons that two of our most infrequent reflectors rarely took up opportunities to reflect, we analyzed the retrospective statements of Patrick (who did not take up any of the opportunities for daily, weekly, and monthly reflections across the program) and Carrie (who was at the upper end of our lowest quarter of reflectors at 40%) to develop an understanding of their stance toward these practices and the ways that they thought they could be improved.

Patrick, a first year teacher in a second grade classroom who did not complete his certification successfully did not reflect at all during the academic year in the recommended formats making it impossible to analyze the growing edges (areas of ideology or practice that needed specific attention or consideration) he acknowledged, goals he set, or actions he took to enact those goals. The lack of reflective data limits our ability to identify shifts in pedagogy, practice, or professionalism over time. In his retrospective reflection where he was required to speak of his experience with programmatic reflective practices, Patrick wrote about the “challenge that comes with an educator’s attempt to be critical of themselves.” Patrick continued saying that “while constant reflection is important, the authenticity of the moments of our day is not easily translated to words and the apparent irrationality of our actions often escapes the pages.” While Patrick demonstrated a great deal of critical thinking and acting in most of his coursework and conversations with colleagues and faculty, the practice of recording reflections never became one in which Patrick invested his time or his energies.

In the classroom, Patrick had difficulty building community and developing a repertoire of effective management strategies throughout the year. When we met with Patrick at the beginning of his second year, he was hopeful that the year would go much more smoothly, but also acknowledged that teaching was not his long term vocational goal and that he would likely be leaving the classroom at the end of his two year commitment to TFA.

Carrie, a second year teacher was at the top end of the least frequent quarter of our reflectors, taking up 40% of the opportunities offered to her to reflect upon her practice. In these reflections, Carrie identified herself as struggling with her practice and the multiple roles she was working to fill, a struggle noted by her coach and her instructors. Carrie’s reflections were characterized by generalized critiques of education writ large, rather than the focused day by day reflections upon teaching, learning, and relating that could have informed her practice and growth. Her reflections which consistently avoided discussion of her daily classroom experience rarely focused on specific issues or goals and actions she could take. Across the year there were only three instances when she noted things about her practice or her students that she needed to work to understand and only eight times she acknowledged specific areas for improvement.

It seems, through her reflections, that Carrie was unsure of ways to impact her own learning and growth, wondered if teaching really was the vocation for her, and rarely took the opportunities to look back and look ahead, not submitting either the midpoint or endpoint retrospective reflection when she had the opportunity to consider her longitudinal growth and next steps. In fact, in looking across her reflections, it is difficult to determine teaching strategies or methods she did employ, since there was little mention of such throughout the year. While Carrie’s reflections are often philosophical positing about the plight of education, they are rarely helpful in supporting her own learning and teaching through specific incidences and conscientious reflecting upon daily classroom
events, as was the purpose of this engagement. In her retrospective discussion of reflection, Carrie explained her tensions with these practices when reflecting on them retrospectively, saying,

I find it difficult to feel my way through my practice through writing about it. Talking about my experiences and learning from other teachers and listening to their perspectives helps me more than writing about my day-to-day experiences and then analyzing them. Of course it helps for documentation purposes and keeping up with the data on my students’ progress but as far as writing about my feelings towards my practice, I see less value in those experiences.

It is notable that Carrie viewed her practice through an emotional lens, describing it thusly,

If it is nothing else, my practice is uncertain. It is uncertain because I never know what they will come up with next, how the new student’s presence will affect my classroom environment or what new educational program/materials the system will give us to incorporate into the other zillion we already must utilize. All of these things leave me thinking is teaching really a profession that you can master or do the years just make you learn to cope with the madness?

Carrie’s difficulty making sense of (a) her profession and her practice and (b) the range of requirements and expectations of her role often left her feeling less than effectual. She rarely found ways to be responsive rather than reactive to the challenges inherent in teaching.

Considering Patrick and Carrie together, we cannot help but wonder if engaging in the practice of more strategic, constant, and thoughtful reflection upon daily classroom events would have enabled them to make sense of their practice, set achievable goals, and work toward incremental improvements in their day-to-day instruction and interactions. Without capacity to seek out trends over time and to act methodically and systematically to improve practice, these teachers often found their pedagogical and interpersonal actions to be “irrational” and lacking in congruence and intentionality.

**Additional lessons from infrequent reflectors and their coaches**

While Carrie and Patrick were examples of teachers who did not choose to engage in programmatic practice of reflection and who also struggled to make sense of their practice across time, there were other novice teachers who infrequently engaged in the formal reflection in the program. It was important to consider CMs who conversely did not take up reflective practices in this framework with consistency but did demonstrate more intentional and informed practice across the year. This caused us to further consider the types of engagements throughout the rest of their coursework which indicated direct connections between CMs’ increasing understandings of pedagogy and practice and the things they were discussing and implementing in their other coursework (analysis that we are currently conducting). We found this to be evidenced most frequently in CMs’ whose coaches were minimally connected to the program. Coaches who were also instructors of CMs in content-based coursework were more likely to see direct connections and instances where reflective practices documented new and shared understandings gained through readings and course-based discussions/engagements. One candidate, a first-grade teacher in her second year of teaching, who reflected deeply in her coursework with key program faculty yet only took up 26% of the opportunities for reflection in the coaching course stated that, “Good feedback is needed so that teachers can make changes. [It] is not just positive or complimentary in nature, but constructive and developmental.”
It should be noted; however, that this candidate had coaches (Chris and Marissa, see Appendix B, Table 2) with some of the lowest participation rates in reflective practices. However, she specifically appropriated the practice of reflection in our coaching course to focus on her weekly growth and implementation, a structure that she deemed most helpful to her and to her practice. See Appendix B, Table 2: Participation by Coach and Frequency of Reflection.

In considering these infrequent reflectors we began to wonder if the type of feedback that our seven different coaches offered through this reflective practice framework was not one that encouraged engagement for all of our developing teachers. The feedback coaches did offer in that structure was often anecdotal and responding to the experiences the teachers recounted and was not focused specifically on the development of reflective practices. Trends began to emerge across coaches (See Appendix B, Table 2). It was evident that some coaches had more frequent reflectors as their coachees than others. In fact, we found that some of our most seasoned faculty had the least reflective students. It is of note that the coach with the highest percent of students reflecting frequently was also a primary instructor for the program, the program coordinator who had created the reflective practices protocol, and who offered extensive weekly feedback and support. This causes us to wonder specifically about the value that each coach ascribed to reflective practices since there was significant variation between coaches in the implementation of this model and the time they devoted to this highly responsive process.

Examining the frequency trends across CMs in our program across coaches for reflective engagement and investment (See Appendix B, Table 2), we feel that it is critical to explore the role of coaches and the feedback that they offer reflectors and the ways that these novice teachers are scaffolded toward crafting increasingly meaningful and self-reflexive practices. Our current research initiatives are considering the types, quality, and frequency of coaching feedback in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of reflection and the meaning made from it by novice teachers and their university-based coaches. In addition to the role and investment of coaches in the practice, we found that the reflective frameworks themselves sometimes limited or failed to meet the needs of students, causing contestation and consternation. Specifically, the written aspect of the reflective practices employed privileged those who found and made meaning through writing down their experiences rather than individuals who would prefer a daily oral recording or a peer conducted reflection.

**Implementations and Implications from Inquiry I**

In response to these lessons, we implemented several practices (a) supporting coaches in the mediation of reflective practices, (b) creating a growth based rubric to scaffold increasingly meaningful and analytical reflective practices, (c) considering new forms for reflective practices.

**Supporting coaches in the mediation of reflective practices.**

First, we wondered about the role of mediated support in the context of these reflections. The role of the coach as a supporter of these practices became clear when we analyzed frequency of involvement in the practice across coach. In subsequent years, we have worked closely with coaches to foster a shared understanding of purpose and practice of reflection and the critical role of these practices in our development of novice teachers. We have made efforts to create a program-wide stance in relation to these practices.

**Creating a growth based rubric to scaffold increasingly meaningful and analytic reflections.**

Additionally, we began to frame reflection as a month-long engagement and (together with TFA leadership) created a rubric based on research on reflective practice and the TFA
Teaching As Leadership Framework (2010). See Appendix B, Figure 1: Reflection Rubric

Through the creation of this practice we began to support CMs as they became increasingly reflective, considering aspects of these reflections such as clarity and relevance, determining whether CMs moved beyond description of the events (Davis, 2006) to an analysis informed by multiple viewpoints, and utilized interconnectedness (considering classroom events in light of theories of learning, teaching, and development embedded in our courses). Additionally, we encouraged CMs to engage in self-evaluation of their teaching practices, and demonstrate their engagement in continual and meaningful learning experiences that directly transformed their teaching practices. Our structures of support not only began to deal with the content of the events of CMs day by day practices, but specifically offered support as they became more intentionally introspective and analytical of these events.

Considering new forms and modes for reflective practices.

Third, in response to the articulated position of these two very infrequent reflectors, we began to consider different venues for reflection. For example, in our current semester, individual CMs have articulated and negotiated their own modes of reflection with their coaches. Currently, the range of frameworks that CMs utilize for these reflections span from video blog entries with classroom clips and videos embedded to document the growth of teacher and students alike, to digital audio recordings of daily practices, to a more journal like approach where the coachee is literally writing a narrative account with classroom vignettes, to a reflective practice which draws heavily and is structured upon the language and inquiries of the PreK students in the classroom. This negotiation of meaningful introspective practices has not only offered a more engaging opportunity for candidate reflection that honors their voice, priorities, and preferred modes, but also has fostered a type of practice that we believe (as articulated by our current CMs) can/will be sustained by CMs beyond their matriculation from our program.

Inquiry II: Lessons from Frequent Reflectors Who Struggled to Teach

Of course, the question of frequency of reflection clearly fails to consider what CMs actually did within their reflective practices and specifically whether these were spaces of meaningful self-study and active self-improvement. When faculty carefully examined the participants indicated in the highest frequency of reflectors, several key questions arose, particularly considering that three of our most struggling teachers were in that highest category. To come to an understanding of what these struggling CMs did within the reflective practices they took up, and specifically in order to understand what they were focusing on as a point of need or growth across the year, we undertook an analysis of the content of their reflections. Specifically, we asked: What is happening when novice teachers reflect a great deal but are demonstrating very minimal growth in their practice?

Inquiry II Participants and Findings

As we undertook this analysis of the content of their reflections, we discovered that Greg, Paul, and Barry were compliant throughout the year, reflecting 90%, 94%, and 99% respectively. However, they rarely set goals, discussed making steps toward meeting those goals, and then indicating how those steps impacted the climate/learning in their classroom (See Appendix B, Table 2). We came to define this practice as Reflection INTO Action (Meyers, Fisher & Alicea, 2012) and the connection between absence of enactment and minimal teacher growth across the academic year. See Appendix D, Figure 2: Components of Theory into Practice.

Out of 170 reflections, Barry acknowledged 41 times that he should make efforts to improve an aspect of his craft and community (often related to classroom culture and management), expressed only 7 of those times that he took action, and only three times across indicated the...
impact of these intentional actions. It is evident that while he stated general needs for self-improvement, he noted very few steps toward ameliorating a need, and very rarely relayed the impact of those actions. Greg, throughout his 181 reflections, noted 28 times when he needed to take some action. Out of those, six times he explained that he did in fact act upon those articulated needs and each of those times he discussed the impact of those actions. Paul, throughout his 156 reflections very rarely (8 times) indicated anything he should do or consider to improve his practice. While he did take up half of those articulated needs, he only mentioned once any impact of those actions. This data indicated that these frequent reflectors did not view this reflective space as an opportunity to be analytical, to set goals, or to intentionally develop strategies for self-growth or increased responsivity to daily classroom events.

Additionally, we wondered if their reflections, frequent though they were, were focused on things that they could control or things that were not within their locus of control. Through line by line analysis of the content and language of these reflections, we found that frequently the language that they used was passive and often failed to indicate the ways in which they were agents in the shaping of the classroom context and learning community. There were times in which Greg indicated that “students were given a punishment” and Paul stated that “Second grade acts as if they’ve never been to class.” These specific teachers very infrequently positioned themselves as shaping or participating in the events that they were documenting. We began to feel that this reflective framework was counterproductive for these teachers as it provided a space for teachers to reify negative assumptions about students and did not force them to consider the roles that THEY were playing in the struggles of their classrooms. These reflective structures allowed these novice teachers to leave their actions and reactions relatively unexplored. This passive writing and the lack of intentional goal setting was highly problematic.

Examining the reflective practices of these individuals who engaged consistently in reflective practices throughout the year complicated the assumption that reflecting more necessarily led to an increased understanding of practice or a transformed developmental trajectory marked by stated goals which novice teachers took action upon. We noted that the very structure of our reflective frameworks did not explicitly call for the processes we came to describe as reflection into action. The weekly and monthly practice of identifying what they saw in their reflections, analyzing them in the “so what” framework, and then stating the “now what” that they would do did not seem to be an explicit enough structure to ensure that CMs (a) set specific, manageable, and incremental goals; (b) took action upon those goals, and (c) noted and analyzed progress toward those goals.

Implementations and Implications from Inquiry II

From these lessons we began to ask ourselves what structures needed to be in place to ensure that novice teachers were setting and working toward incremental goals across time and indicating their progress toward those goals. We created new structures which shifted our practice in two substantive ways (a) requiring a month in review chart that expressly supported enactment and goal setting, and (b) implementing a practice of celebrating successes and synthesizing growth across the month.

Requiring a monthly review chart that expressly supported enactment and goal setting. We began requiring CMs to complete a Month in Review Chart create (and record) specific goals based on their highs and lows and to indicate actions taken, results of the action, and the next steps that they would take. They also had to indicate the impact they believed this goal would have (high or low) and the difficulty of implementation (easy/challenging) so as to be able to prioritize well high impact
actions and ones that would be easy to implement while working on a more long term plan for those which were more challenging to implement with a possibility for high impact and determining not to focus on low impact/high challenge goals. See Appendix D, Figure 3: Month in Review Chart for Goal Setting.

Implementing a monthly practice of celebrating successes and synthesizing growth. We created and implemented a celebrations chart in which CMs indicated monthly significant aspects of their practice that had developed across each month. Lastly, each month CMs crafted a short monthly synthesis citing and supporting their narratives with evidence in relation to the following questions: (a) What growth and development are evident in my pedagogical, instructional, and relational practices this month? (b) What growth and development are evidenced through examination of student learning data (both qualitative and observational and quantitative tracker based data) across the month? (c) What actions and next steps should I take? And (d) What assistance and support would benefit my progress toward meeting these goals? Through the implementation of these practices we noted a significant shift in the connection of CMs’ day by day reflective practices and the goals they set and worked to enact throughout the coming weeks/months.

Before this implementation; however, which fostered a shift in practice over time, it was little wonder that some CMs seemed to view this as an engagement that they participated in in order to meet program requirements rather than as a learning tool for themselves. Though the two CMs we profile in this category were consistently reflecting across the year, they storied themselves as converted reflectors who were initially very openly reluctant to reflective practices in the fall semester but began to ascribe significant meaning to their reflective practices and became increasingly committed to and appreciative of the practice over time.

Inquiry III Participants and Findings
An exploration of individuals in the frequent reflector category made evident that some CMs shifted in the meaning they ascribed to reflection throughout the year. These shifts were often not a shift in frequency, but rather a shift in the value
they found and purposes they brought to (and took from) their reflective practices. The perspectives of Katherine and Tonya offer insights into these shifts in valuation and engagement.

Katherine, a second year teacher in a first grade classroom, was consistently reflective throughout the year, reflecting 86% of the times possible. One of her common frustrations was the difficulty of fitting everything she hoped to accomplish in to the academic day, and the requirements of our program were indeed additional strains upon her time. In December, Katherine considered the investment she was making in her own practice by taking daily time to reflect in writing. She explained that even though “it takes a lot of time to sit down and journal and do our reflections…. I have found the benefit behind having something written down that you can reflect on and see and know, instead of relying on sometimes-faulty memories and blurred accounts…. It’s not just to do, but because it will really help us inform our practice and change up our teaching habits.” (December STC reflection)

Throughout the year, Katherine continued to engage in thoughtful and consistent reflection and often pointed out specific, tangible, and immediate ways that her reflections transformed her instruction, her interactions, and her contributions to the classroom community. She explained,

I wholeheartedly believe that teachers won’t become better, more proficient or more professional if they do not take the time to ask questions about themselves, their students and even their philosophies. I think it’s imperative to be done on a daily basis and I believe for the most part, teachers who are invested in the classroom, do this internally and almost instinctively.

As a teacher, inquiry and reflection are the keys to improving your teaching practice and enhancing your instruction. It’s amazing to me how much even in just this short amount of time I have grown as an educator. Looking back at some of my student work collected during the DRC process and at some of the lesson plans I’ve created, I’ve noticed big changes in not only the planning, the lessons and the external factors; I’ve noticed huge changes internally—my thought process, my beliefs and my purpose.

At the end of the year, Katherine noted that her reflections “really showed change within me internally. This change was soon manifested and demonstrated externally in my classroom and interactions with students.” (Endpoint retrospective self-reflection).

Two years after the completion of her program when we asked her about these constructs in our member checking/follow up questionnaire, Katherine, informed us emphatically that she was still a teacher and was “not planning on becoming anything else!” She stated, “It was so exciting to read over the attached document containing my reflections from nearly 2 years ago and how "profound" they were for me at the time.” When we asked her to tell us about the meaning she did or did not gain from reflective practices during her certification program and to speak to us about the purpose of the engagement she said,

The purpose of the engagement, while at times tedious and laborious, was indeed beneficial and worthwhile. Initially, as a second-year teacher learning to balance the numerous responsibilities of being an educator, I was turned off by the addition of "more work" added to the end of my already event-filled and task-filled day. It seemed to be pointless to sit and write about things when I had a million other things to do. However, as it shows in my writing at the time, I eventually began to benefit greatly from taking the time to write out my feelings, thoughts, and questions. Especially knowing that
someone else would be reading it; this greatly increased my accountability. Additionally, I began to really ask myself internally the questions I was writing or actually typing on the screen to turn in. I began to truly wonder how my beliefs and practices were changing and transforming before my eyes. It’s about taking the time to not rush from one event or place to another, but instead stopping for a moment to take in where you are and see how you’ve grown and what changes you need to make to be a great educator for children.

When we asked her to speak about the role of reflection in her current role/life stage, she exclaimed “I am constantly reflecting! It’s a part of life!”

Tonya, a second year teacher working in a second grade classroom explained that she was initially “very reluctant” to engage in this daily reflective practice at the beginning of the program. She reflected 85% of the time. Her beginning reflections were mostly brief and without consideration of possible next steps or ways to address issues she identified. Across the academic year, most of Tonya’s highs dealt with instruction and productivity. Her highs indicate the value she placed on things in her classroom running smoothly. It seems as if her focus was more on her teaching, rather than on what her students were doing during those teaching moments. Her reflections during most of the first semester focus on her enjoyment of her lessons but focus little on student interest, engagement, or enjoyment. After reading more about the journaling processes and exploring the journal entries of other practicing teachers, she had what she considered an epiphany. She stated, I have so often found that my actions and beliefs during the difficult moments of working with my students often conflict with my overall beliefs about children, learning, and human nature… [Through reading Campano and Streib I began to wonder] if I wrote down my positive beliefs about my students would it make it easier for me to maintain these positive expectations during difficult moments? This idea also reminded me of another teacher’s reflection that teaching is one of most human professions there is. This was a theme in all of the journals. There is no definite right or wrong in teaching. This is what makes it so difficult yet great.

In November and December, Tonya began to recognize the need to instill a positive classroom climate and build relationships, and began to use her reflective practices as a space for these types of reflections.

I am beginning to see more benefit as I make this process more my own. Getting into the routine of updating my journal daily with my highs and lows is now becoming more natural to me. I am beginning to learn from myself and what I write in my reflections, and I feel this is the whole point. I also became more motivated to be more faithful in my reflecting after reading about teacher journaling in December. I really saw so much benefit in this practice. While I know that I will never be the teacher who keeps as detailed of a journal as those featured in the articles (well probably won’t be), I feel I can get into a habit that works for me.

At the end of the year, Tonya explained,

Reflecting everyday helped center me on what my purpose was in the classroom. It helped me be nicer. It helped me see the whole picture. Instead of just seeing a child who misbehaves, I saw a child who was frustrated or hurting in some way. Instead of seeing a child who could not do this or that, I saw a child who had not been given individual instruction. I don’t think that reflecting helped me see growth, but more helped me remember what I was trying to do. For me the most beneficial reflections
were the daily reflections and the weekly goal setting reflections. I liked the daily reflections because they helped me pinpoint aspects of my practice that were really happening at that time. I was able to analyze my thinking and how this influenced what I was doing in my classroom. It gave me an opportunity to quickly correct any thinking I did not particularly want to bring into the practice. I also enjoy using these daily reflections to create a list of goals I want to work on for the next week. Lastly my overall thinking about teaching and my students has changed. I now see my job as an educator as even more important. I now think I play a vital role in giving children the opportunities they deserve. Before starting this program I thought I didn’t have much of an influence, since I teach second grade. I now know the impact I can have on my students because I have the knowledge to give them what I know they need.

Two years later when we sent Tonya the member checking and questionnaire, Tonya indicated that she was in her 4th year of teaching and working in a third grade classroom. She plans to teach for the next 6-10 years and to work toward a PhD in order to someday “be in the role of a researcher/scholar/activist in urban education.” Tonya wrote that she is currently “not as consistent in [her] reflections as [she] would like to be.” However, although she did go on to say that, “I find great value in taking the time to actually write while reflecting instead of just thinking,” she has not permanently adopted “the habit [which] would greatly enhance my teaching and my attitudes towards life in general.” She revealed that the focus of her reflections has remained consistent with her practice two years previously when a student in the certification program, saying, “they are again focused only on instructional practices and not on my relationships … thinking about this makes me feel bad, as I value my relationships with my students so much.”

**Implementations and Implications of Inquiry III**

As researchers and teacher educators who highly value the act of reflection, it was easy for us to take for granted that novice teachers would see the benefit of such self-study. However, after only a couple of weeks, it became evident by CM comments that many felt it was “just another thing” to do in their already overcrowded schedules. In response we had CMs read the perspectives of practicing teachers and the empowerment they found through the act of journaling and critically considering their practice and growth over time initiated a significant shift in the attitudes and dispositions toward reflection of many CMs. As these novice teachers began to (re)consider the potentiality of this engagement and to think more deeply about the trends that they noticed in their own writing, several of them (such as Katherine and Tonya) literally converted to practitioners who believed in and utilized the act of written reflection as a space where they could consider and revisit their lived experience, their instruction, and their interaction with students. Honoring and understanding the perspectives of reflectors themselves toward the very act of reflection is a critical consideration if we are to support their work to become increasingly self-aware, self-evaluative, and self-mediated in their learning and professional development. At this point in our program, these readings about the power and purpose of reflection are the very first engagement. We bring in CMs from previous years to speak about the practice and purpose of reflection and work to be sure that CMs view this as a practical and purposeful engagement that has powerful implications for their own professional development.

**Inquiry IV: Lessons Learned about Reflections Which Promote Ideological Congruence**

Tonya helped us think about times in which our reflections reveal to us incongruences between what we value and
what we do. We were particularly struck by the honesty and the call to action of these words she shared with us,

I have so often found that my actions and beliefs during the difficult moments of working with my students often conflict with my overall beliefs about children, learning, and human nature… I do not believe children should be yelled at, however there have been times in my classroom where I have lost my temper and have overreacted to my students’ behavior.

The sensation of knowing your current actions conflict with your overall beliefs is utterly human and this is captured in the journals in a way that seems to help teachers better deal with similar situations in the future.

The disorientation and dissonance she described between her actions and her stated beliefs is no stranger to any of us and is one we wanted to actively support teachers in guarding against.

Simultaneously, we began to note that with our new structures and an increased rate of enactment, while in theory a good step toward promoting teacher change, some of the steps that novice teachers were enacting were neither responsive nor developmentally appropriate. For example, if a novice teacher found consistently that a student was not completing his work in class but rather was visiting with friends during work time and resolved (and implemented) a punitive system, or if teachers were concerned about growth in children’s reading levels and so instituted a public tracker to indicate the progress of some (and the lack of progress of others) these still could be considered indications of enactment, regardless of the fact that they were not necessarily actions worthy of these teachers or their students. In effect, there were goals and actions taken that were antithetical to the stances of our program and of these teachers who, as part of TFA, were necessarily articulating commitments to educational equity. In response to that realization, we began our fourth inquiry into this practice, examining the question: How might we promote opportunities for teachers to articulate, revise, and weigh their daily decisions against the positions that they claim for themselves as emancipatory educators working for social justice within their classroom context?

In response to this question and specifically in collaboration with the novice teachers we serve, we instituted the practice of an evolving Position Statement, one which would be revisited and revised monthly as a part of the reflective practices and in light of the events and learning of the preceding weeks. Our syllabi defines a Position Statement as a process that “demands that one take a stance; articulate it (possibly for an uninformed audience); defend it with evidence, citations, and examples; and [formulate] possible actions.” The syllabus further states,

This is your position regarding what is necessary for creating an equitable and accessible classroom community focusing on that which is within your locus of control, so all students in your care can/will thrive…Consider carefully what you think learning and teaching ARE, are FOR, and LOOK/SOUND like based on your philosophy and beliefs…On a monthly basis, you will discuss your professional reflective practices with your POSITION statement in mind and annotate, amend, grapple, and set specific goals for YOU that are increasingly congruent with your continuously crystalized beliefs… This is a problem-posing document in which you will not just be stating what you believe (implying the possibility for passivity) but rather positioning yourself in ways to take a stand and specific actions.

**Inquiry IV Participants and Findings**

Our 2012-2013 CMs drafted their position statements at the beginning of the year and have revisited and revised it monthly. CMs and faculty alike have found this to be a powerful documentation and touchstone in our practice
together. One second year fourth grade teacher reflected on this process in an email to her coach, saying,

The evolving position statement is something I think has really transformed how I think about my teaching. I have loved being able to put my ideals and beliefs to research and documentation. I also like how frequently I am having to think about what I believe to be true. My position statement is far from complete and thorough, but I have really enjoyed having that experience so far this year.

Another second year teacher working specifically with English Learners stated the following in his retrospective reflection at the end of his third semester in our program,

I now feel so much more confident as to the practices that I put into play in my classroom. This is not to say that I have everything figured out—by no means is that the case because there are still many ways that I could grow as a teacher; however, I currently have a much stronger sense of who I am as a teacher and who I am for my students... I am proud to say that a lot of the points [included in the initial draft of the Position Statement] are not just hopes but, in fact, realities in my classroom today... It is actually astounding to me how accurate the language of those points is—I drafted them mostly on faith that they would materialize and now they seem to be actual descriptions of my classroom.

**Implementations and Implications from Inquiry IV**

This addition to our reflective protocol has supported novice teachers in their work toward congruence and embodiment of the type of ideals and pedagogies that they espouse. This has been a particularly powerful inclusion in our practice together and has helped make for teachers a more explicit link between the daily events in their classrooms and their larger beliefs and positionality related to student learning, equity, and responsivity in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

While our reflective practices have shifted significantly across our five year implementation of our program, we still have much to consider. Specifically, we need to continue to (a) develop support structures for coaches so that they may foster this introspective disposition and empower teachers as change agents in their classrooms and communities; and (b) explore possibilities for CMs to appropriate and create their own reflective structures so that technology and accessibility can be capitalized upon, making the practice of reflection not only thoughtful, but also sustainable in a format that can facilitate teacher growth. This means that we must continue to consider formats and structures for reflection that are not print based where novice teachers may meaningfully note challenges and growing edges in order to direct their own learning. Our program is certain to continue to evolve across time as we strive to meet our complex mission of promoting resilient beginning teachers who compassionately and creatively serve the learners of our urban community.

Across these five years, we have engaged in the sometimes unsettling practices of transforming ourselves and our program through systematically re-searching and revising our practices. We have become simultaneously more pragmatic and responsive, facilitating our own growth and the development of novice teachers while clarifying and coming closer into alignment with our values and beliefs.

**References**


teachers: Seeing what matters. Teaching and Teacher Education, 22, 281-301
### Appendix A

#### Table 1: Overview of the Inquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry/Question</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Analytical Process</th>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry 1: What if people are not reflecting (is it the form/frequency of the practice)?</td>
<td>All candidates in 2000-10 Careful examination of Patrick (who did not take up any of the opportunities for daily, weekly, and monthly reflections across the program but discusses the practice and his needs in the retrospective reflection) and Carrie (who was at the upper end of our lowest quarter of reflectors at 40%)</td>
<td>Written daily, weekly, monthly reflections. Comments from illustrative cases about meaning of reflection from mid-point and end point retrospective wherein candidates wrote about and critiqued aspects of their program and practice which had been salient and considered what structures had supported (or failed to support) their development and why. Writing on reflective practices, self-study, and teaching growth from Cannavari (2005) and Stenhouse (1993), retrospective self-reflections when they wrote about their experiences of beliefs about these practices. Analyzed context of each of these most frequent reflections day by day. Reflections to determine topic, locus of control, and to explore the concept of reflection into action (goal setting, actions taken, outcome noted). Also considered what they said the practice of reflection meant and was for in the reflective teaching.</td>
<td>Consider coaches’ role in mediating and supporting reflective practices. Need to examine the types, quality, and frequency of coaching feedback.</td>
<td>Supported coaches in understanding practice and offering feedback. Created growth based rubric for scaffolding analytical practices. Considered and created new modes for recording and sharing reflections with teachers.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquiry II: What is happening when novice teachers reflect a great deal but are demonstrating very minimal growth in their practice?</td>
<td>Purposeful selection: Four candidates (Gina, Greg, Paul, and Barry) who reflected more than 80% of the time. Three of the most frequent reflectors (Paul, Paul, and Barry) had many of the same pedagogical and behavioral struggles in April that they began with in August and were identified as minimal growth in practice by their coach in spite of very frequent reflection.</td>
<td>Failed to support their development and why. Writing on reflective practices, self-study, and teaching growth from Cannavari (2005) and Stenhouse (1993), retrospective self-reflections when they wrote about their experiences of beliefs about these practices. Analyzed context of each of these most frequent reflections day by day. Reflections to determine topic, locus of control, and to explore the concept of reflection into action (goal setting, actions taken, outcome noted). Also considered what they said the practice of reflection meant and was for in the reflective teaching.</td>
<td>Need to consider context of reflections and support the concept of reflection into action (goal setting, actions taken, outcome noted).</td>
<td>Implemented a month in review chart to support enactment and goal setting. Implemented a monthly practice of reflecting on the process of achieving success and synthesizing growth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry III: What values do novice teachers find in this practice across time?</td>
<td>Two converted reflectors (Katherine and Tonya) who indicated that they had experienced a substantive shift in their appreciation for and engagement in the act of reflection across time.</td>
<td>All data from Inquiry One and Two and a focus group two years after program completion in order to understand the impact of these practices and their beliefs about them longitudinally.</td>
<td>Analyzed their participation in reflections, the content of these reflections, and the change in their discussion of these engagements across time. Particularly attending to pivotal moments and shifts in understanding.</td>
<td>We found that as teacher educators who high-value reflection, we had initially taken for granted that CIUs would similarly highly value and find propositional values in the practice of reflective practice. Needed to keep them grounded in the practice of reflective practice and needed to help them understand why it wasn’t just ‘another thing to do,’ but rather a practice that could truly support their teaching.</td>
<td>Begin each cohort with readings about the purpose and practice of reflection in self-growth. Brings in candidates from previous years to make this practice and the purpose of it, evident to new students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry IV: How might we promote opportunities for teachers to articulate, revise, and weigh their daily decisions against the positions that they claim for themselves as emancipatory educators working for social justice within their classroom context?</td>
<td>Data from Tonya about the challenge of congruence. We also draw from two unsolicited comments from our current candidates (Zo and Zee) as they contacted us to discuss the merits of a structure, the Position Statement, which we incorporated into their reflective practices in their second year of the program.</td>
<td>Position statements and candidate comments about challenges for congruence between beliefs and actions.</td>
<td>Currently analyzing the first year of these iterative position statements for further consideration.</td>
<td>We too are finding that self-analysis is important to ensure that we are taking on the positions and practices that improve the learning opportunities of teacher candidates in our programs.</td>
<td>We must continue to engage alongside of our candidates in iterative and consistent self-study and self-improvement to build a program that meets the needs of these beginning teachers and the children within our community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Participation by Coach and Frequency of Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach</th>
<th># of candidates per coach</th>
<th>In frequent Reflector: 0-69% of the time</th>
<th>Frequent Reflector: 70-99% of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=3 100% (41, 52, 53)</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris/Marissa</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=7 64% (26, 28, 40, 48, 56, 54, 67)</td>
<td>n=4 67% (78, 83, 88, 90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>n=14</td>
<td>n=8 57% (20, 38, 44, 51, 53, 54, 66, 69)</td>
<td>n=6 43% (72, 74, 75, 87, 90, 96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=1 33% (48)</td>
<td>n=2 67% (79, 83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lourdes</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=2 33% (34, 40)</td>
<td>n=4 67% (86, 91, 96, 99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette/Mary</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=1 73% (60)</td>
<td>n=3 75% (77, 83, 94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=4 100% (76, 86, 96, 98)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C

#### Figure 1: Reflection Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity</th>
<th>Progressing</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Advancing</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language is concise and flows throughout; concepts are either outlined or are presented incorrectly.</td>
<td>There are frequent lapses in clarity and accuracy.</td>
<td>Improved clarity and accuracy occur occasionally.</td>
<td>Minor errors in clarity and accuracy.</td>
<td>The language is clear and concise. The readers could create a mental picture of the situation being described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>One of the reflections is irrelevant to student and/or course learning goals.</td>
<td>The learning experience being reflected upon is somewhat meaningful and relevant to student and course learning goals.</td>
<td>The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to student and course learning goals.</td>
<td>The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to student and course learning goals. Supports understanding of relevance and evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Reflective statements are beyond descriptions of the learning experience.</td>
<td>The reflection includes a critical analysis of the learning experience.</td>
<td>The reflection demonstrates an understanding of the experience, but analysis lacks depth. Student attempts to analyze experience from more than one perspective (personal, professional, political, philosophical).</td>
<td>The reflection goes beyond simple description of the experience. A summary of how the experience contributed to understanding self, others, and/or course concepts; Student analysis is reflective of varied perspectives (personal, professional, political, philosophical).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnections</td>
<td>No attempt to demonstrate connections between the learning experience and previous learning, readings, or experiences.</td>
<td>Limited connections between the learning experience and previous learning, readings, or personal goals.</td>
<td>Some connections between the learning experience and previous learning, readings, or personal goals.</td>
<td>Many connections between the learning experience and previous learning, readings, or personal goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Evaluation of teaching practices</td>
<td>Shows a lack of attempt to reflect on teaching practice.</td>
<td>Demonstrates some ability to consider behavior, thinking, or actions.</td>
<td>Demonstrates some ability to consider behaviors, thinking, or actions.</td>
<td>Demonstrates ability to question behaviors, thinking, or actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in critical and meaningful learning experiences that directly transform teaching practice</td>
<td>No attempt to discuss transformation of practice is present.</td>
<td>Reflection includes an attempt to discuss transformation of practice.</td>
<td>Reflection includes frequent discussions of transformation of practice.</td>
<td>Critically evaluates and utilizes relevant information from learning experiences and literature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The rubric categorizes reflections into Clarity, Relevance, Analysis, Interconnections, Self-Evaluation of Teaching Practices, and Engagement in Critical and Meaningful Learning Experiences.
### Figure 2: Components of Theory into Practice

- **Possibility/Need Recognized**
  - Teachers recognized a need for focused improvement in their classroom instruction, management, behavior, or relationships.

- **Action Taken**
  - Teachers made some shift in practice in order to meet the needs they expressed.

- **Results of Action Noted**
  - Teachers reported success from an action they took.

### Figure 3: Month in Review Chart for Goal Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Priority Level</th>
<th>WHAT?</th>
<th>SO WHAT ... ...is the plan? ...happened?</th>
<th>NOW WHAT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High/Low Impact/Easy/Challenging to Treat (H/L/E/C/E/L/C)</td>
<td>Goal stated</td>
<td>Actions taken (information gathered, steps implemented)</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Affective or Effective? A Black Female Professor’s Critical Refection on Teaching Effectiveness of Multicultural Courses

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Multicultural education prepares pre-service teachers to embrace and affirm the unique cultural diversity present in all classrooms. By the year 2020, U.S. public schools will be comprised primarily of students of color (Ball, 2009). Growing religious diversity and evolving perspectives on sexuality and gender association accompany the changing racial demographics. In response to increasingly diverse learning environments, many colleges of education require at least one mandatory course in multicultural education. At least one-third of states require teacher candidates to study some aspect of cultural diversity in their core preparation and to have a teaching practicum in a culturally diverse setting (NASDTEC, 2008). Furthermore, many accreditation agencies require colleges of education to embed equity, diversity, and social content into their core curriculum (Heafner, McIntyre, & Spooner, 2014). When cultural diversity is integrated throughout the teacher education experiences, pre-service teachers are more likely to develop culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy (Young, 2016a). One growing concern is the lack of qualified instructors to inform multicultural educational practices.

Many colleges of education lack professors with specific expertise in multicultural education (Gorski, 2016). This is problematic because often the solution to this lack of personnel is to assign the diversity courses to the next most qualified person. On some college campuses this is might be a Bilingual Education or English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, and on other campuses it is common practice to assign these courses to a person of color who may or may not have the doctoral coursework or necessary background knowledge to fully address the objectives of these courses. Simply being a person of color is insufficient as a proxy for formal credentials in this subject matter. This creates three concerns for colleges of education.

First, when all diversity courses are housed under a Bilingual/ESL umbrella, language becomes synonymous with diversity. Second, when we assume that a person of color must have at least the experiential knowledge necessary to teach diversity education courses, we then redefine multicultural and diversity education as race courses. Finally, the lack of qualified professors teaching multicultural and diversity education courses taints student perceptions of the importance of diversity and equity, which is most apparent in course evaluations. This conundrum is counterproductive for the field of multicultural education and more importantly for the development of dynamic classroom teachers. The purpose of this article is to reflect on my experiences teaching a mandatory multicultural education course in a Predominantly White institution (PWI) in the south, including how I think about and approach the course and how students respond. My intention is to provide suggestions for current instructors and colleges of education, in order to improve the perceptions of diversity and equity courses for pre-service teachers.

Background

One goal of a multicultural course is to promote a shift in student perspectives away from colorblind ideologies and toward culturally responsive teaching practices. This shift is not instant, rather it requires the student to complete a process that does not take place by happenstance. These courses call for us to
challenge our live experiences and perspectives, and often run counter to longstanding traditional beliefs. In order for pre-service teachers to learn to value diversity, they must understand that everyone has biases, that rather than hiding biases behind a cloak of colorblindness, acknowledging our own biases is important. Five dimensions of multicultural education guide most multicultural education courses, as they are present in many popular multicultural textbooks (Vavrus, 2002). According to Banks (2015), multicultural instruction should be guided by the following dimensions: (1) content integration, (2) equity pedagogy, (3) knowledge construction and transformation, (4) empowering school culture and social structure, and (5) prejudice reduction. The five dimensions of multicultural education are explicitly written into my syllabus and actively executed across the course assignments and readings. In the sections that follow, I explain how my course is structured to facilitate student learning based on each of these five dimensions.

Content Integration
Content integration concerns the extent to which examples and content from different cultures are included in the curriculum. I strive to embed multiple perspectives and opinions from various cultural groups and individual students in my course. This is most apparent in the weekly lectures, which provide concrete examples of the most salient topics for the week. For example, one of the early topics in the course is White Privilege, which happens to be one the most difficult topics for many students. Through content integration, I bring in additional perspectives that are less threatening, such as gender privilege, religious privilege, and heterosexual privilege. When the topic of White Privilege is compared to other forms of privilege, students sometimes begin to deconstruct this concept and move on with the assurance that we all have different levels of privilege that should be acknowledged as social capital and that we can leverage to assist other groups.

Knowledge Construction
The knowledge-construction process describes how teachers can help students understand how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence how knowledge is constructed. Within my course, knowledge construction is addressed weekly through class discussions. According to Young & Young (2015), every student possesses unique cultural funds of knowledge. Students use these funds of knowledge in this course to reflect and respond to a weekly writing prompt. The writing prompt requires student interpretation through their personal lens of an issue related to multicultural education. During the week on religious diversity, for example, the students assume the role of coach of a basketball team and then discuss how they would respond to the parents of the star athlete who has to miss the championship game because the family will attend a religious function. This discussion is always a fascinating one and responses are frequently contingent on the personal background and/or biases of the students.

For example, pre-service teachers majoring in kinesiology generally have strong opinions regarding the lack of applicability of multicultural content to their discipline. Specifically, some believe that multicultural content should be reserved for content areas such as literacy and social studies. Ironically, many of these students minor in social studies and literacy. Within the coursework, specific topics related to kinesiology and culture are presented including an anecdote of a Muslim student in a physical education course who needs accommodations with religious requirements for dress and cultural customs in the context of an assessment obstacle course with different stations (i.e., climbing a vertical rope, running laps in the indoor track). Students’ opinions about accommodations differ based on student religious orientation and students’ various interpretations of religious doctrine. Students who are slated to teach core content areas and are in non-coaching positions offer yet another set of opinions. This activity and others
like it help the students to comprehend how the knowledge-construction process is related to student backgrounds and experiences.

**Prejudice Reduction**

The dimension of prejudice reduction focuses on the characteristics of bias and on the teaching methods and materials that can modify them. One very difficult reality that students face in a multicultural education course is the realization that we all have biases. To address this dimension, I create heterogeneous groups of students and ask each group to identify one cultural group that their group members do not generally relate to. This unknown group is the focus of a Cultural Awareness Project (CAP). Using information students provide in a self-biography assignment at the beginning of the semester, I strategically arrange the CAP groups to ensure diverse representation within the group (e.g., by gender, majors, race, interests, previous geographic setting, and more). The CAP allows students to immerse themselves in a culture as participant observers and to reflect on the experiences in a group video reflection, which is later disseminated to the entire class. In the past, students have explored group experience from a range of categories including religious/spiritual organizations, LGBTIQ, social class, and much more. One experience came from students who met with day laborers one Monday morning. The students were amazed to learn that many of the men had families, spoke English, and drove cars. Students had previously believed the day laborers were “illegal immigrants that probably have a rap sheet, otherwise, they would get a real job”. One of the students in this group made the connection that there is a strong possibility that she could one day teach one of the gentlemen’s children, which was an important shift in prejudice reduction.

**Equity Pedagogy**

According to Banks (2015), equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify instruction to facilitate the achievement of students who are diverse in terms of race, culture, gender, and social class. This dimension is reflected most in the use of multiple assessments and presentation formats in my course. Students receive direct and indirect instruction, and complete assessments in a variety of formats. Differentiation is a key component of both teaching and learning in the course: It is demonstrated in lesson exemplars and assessed in the students’ execution of a content specific differentiation plan. This differentiation plan requires the student to apply a 5+1 model of differentiation, which involves modifying instruction to address: (1) ability, (2) subculture, (3) learning style, (4) language, (5) race/gender, and (6) technology. Each pre-service teacher is required to reflect on how they plan to adapt the procedure, product, or process of their instruction to address the six elements in the 5+1 model of differentiation.

**An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure**

This dimension is situated in the cultural and structural elements of the school and school system. In the school system, this dimension refers to attending to differences in sports participation, disproportionality in achievement, and cross-racial interactions between students and teachers. In the weekly lab activities, students are encouraged to apply the learning from the lectures, quizzes, and discussions to examine the elements of traditional schooling that can marginalize traditionally underrepresented students in public schools. These tasks are applications and extensions of the content for each week that require critical reflection. Students explore current issues and longstanding concerns for K-12 educators and begin to work through their own experiences and perceptions in order to inform their personal future classroom interactions.

Together these five dimensions undergird my multicultural teaching philosophy and practice. Becoming a culturally responsive educator is a process that is transformative and requires social reconstruction. Some students disagree with the process and/or the content, and some disengage...
from the course completely. This content
desertion is evident in the many studies
documenting student ratings in diversity and
equity related courses (Dunn, Dotson, Ford, &
Roberts, 2014; Pittman, 2012; Smith, 2009). In
the following section, these trends are briefly
examined and explained in further detail.

**Current Trends in Teaching Evaluations**

To prepare the next generation of in-service
teachers to affirm all learners requires skilled and
informed approaches to multicultural education
based on theory, best practice, and expertise of
those in the field. Pre-service teachers need
empirically grounded instructional practices
situated in the social realities of prejudice,
stereotypes, and racism (Chu, 2011). However,
many multicultural education scholars, like
myself, are sometimes encouraged to stand clear
of these courses while on a tenure track due to
the consistently lower student evaluations of
teaching associated with these courses. Student
evaluations of teaching are traditionally lower for
courses that promote equity, inclusion, and
diversity (Ross & Edwards, 2016). Numerous
scholars provide different rationales to explain
this phenomenon. One explanation for these
struggles is that White students have limited
experiences with African American faculty and
are not comfortable. When the professors’
instructional styles diverge from the practices of
White professors, the discomfort is exacerbated
(Butte, 1997). Some scholars posit that
professors of color who teach race and culture
related content are more apt to have significantly
lower teaching evaluations because many students
reject the messages of the course and thus voice
their opinions on the course content and method
by rating the instructor lower on the student
evaluation instrument (Boatright-Horowitz and
Soeung, 2009; Young, 2016).

Trends suggest that scores are more negative
for faculty of color in general, especially for Black
women. The struggles of African American
professors teaching multicultural courses in
predominate White institutions are well
documented in the post-secondary educational
literature (Bradley, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1996;
McGowan, 2000; Young, 2016b). Several
researchers suggest that because women are
expected to be caring they are judged more
critically if they seem to violate this expectation
by having higher expectations, grading harshly, or
“not accepting student excuses” (Baslow, Phelan,
& Capotosto, 2006; Sprague & Massoni, 2005).
Given this trend, it is important that instructors
begin to reflect on their personal student ratings
and develop plans of action to redress these
trends.

One professional consideration is the use of
“Pedagogy of Discomfort” as a reflective and
pedagogy of discomfort is an approach based on
the notion that “discomforting feelings are
important in challenging dominant beliefs, social
habits and normative practices that sustain social
inequities and they create openings for individual
and social transformation” (p. 1). Using this type
of pedagogy as a reflective lens, an instructor can
constructively interpret their student comments
and ratings based on the level of pedagogy of
discomfort incorporated in the course.

**Summary of Student Open-ended Responses**

In this section of the paper, I offer as examples
student open-ended responses from a set of
course evaluations. This summary is presented in
three parts. First student open-ended responses
related to course content are presented and
analyzed; then open-ended responses related to
the structure of the course are provided; finally,
student open-ended responses related to the
instructor are presented for reflection. Tables 1
and 2 (See Appendix A) present samples of both the
positive and negative open-ended student
responses related to course content and course
structure, respectively. Looking across these
responses to the evaluation of my teaching, one
can observe that when the students do not accept
the content as valid, it can be increasingly
difficult to gain the favor of the students on the
course evaluations. This is seen in lower course evaluation scores, and more specifically in content of student comments. As one student comments “Do we really need this class? I mean we focus on students who are gay, Black, Muslim, etc…why?” (SETE™, Spring 2015). Alternatively, some students indicate that the course was relevant and interesting as presented in Table 1 (Appendix A). A similar pattern was present in the comments related to course structure. Some students indicated that the activities were busy work, while other felt the structure was ideal.

Table 3 (See Appendix B), depicts a dichotomy in responses about the instructor. While one week of the course is spent exploring White privilege in depth, one student wrote, “this whole class is about white privilege”. Given the historically negative responses related to this week’s content only seminal works in the field of multicultural education are presented as a means to present the clearest and most reputable examples, including the short reading of Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. Through the negative comments I am repeatedly accused of executing bias in my grading. Several comments insinuate concerns that I am unapproachable. In the positive comments, students’ suggest that I am competent and help the students to actively engage in many difficult, yet relevant topics.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this article was to reflect on my course evaluations in order to provide suggestions for faculty and departmental leaders in colleges of education. In this discussion I provide my interpretation of the data based on the pedagogy of discomfort. Student responses are interpreted based on the level of discomfort they experienced with the course content and expectations. The data presented early suggest that most student course responses were either extremely negative or extremely positive. The dichotomy of student responses represents a theme that is relatively consistent across each of the categories of responses. The negative open-ended responses reflect students’ affective perceptions--moods, feelings, or attitudes related to the course content and instructor. The positive comments reflect effective results and outcome-based considerations of the coursework.

Examples, of affective and effective student language are underlined in Tables 1, 2, (Appendix A) and 3 (Appendix B). This distinction is important because it points to underlying issues that must be overcome before students can accept the content presented in the course. The discomfort students experience in this course is abnormal for many students. Although many students suffer from testing and mathematics anxiety, which also cause discomfort, they are more acceptable as universal or normal types of discomfort (Young & Young, 2016). The discomfort experienced in mandatory diversity courses is an internalized discomfort that is not commonplace in other education courses, thus students equate it to poor pedagogical practice, poor instruction, or poor choices in curricular materials.

Many of my colleagues have suggested eliminating course content that is historically controversial, but this is problematic and unethical as a multicultural education scholar. Multicultural educational scholars are obligated to prepare pre-service teachers to teach in all learning environments. Thus, it is unethical to omit controversial topics in an effort to earn higher teaching evaluations at the expense of the needs of vulnerable populations of learners. As seen throughout the student comments, White privilege remains a point of contention for many students. This topic is so polarizing that entire articles have been written to guide the presentation of this content. In Boatright-Horowitz and Soeung’s (2009) work, *Teaching White Privilege to White Students Can Mean Saying Good-bye to Positive Student Evaluations*, the authors describe the popular notion among multicultural education scholars of color that discussions of White privilege can lead students to completely disassociate with the content of the course and
with the instructor and then rate the course and instruct lower on student evaluation scores. As a multicultural education scholar I have the same obligation to teach all pertinent content for teacher preparation, just as we would expect from a colleague in science or mathematics. Just as the mathematics methods instructor does not avoid teaching fractions because pre-service teachers do not like fractions, I continue unapologetically to teach all pertinent aspects of multicultural education because to do so for the good of my pre-service teachers and the students they will serve. My hope is that by exposing pre-service teachers to multiple perspectives that challenge their beliefs, they can better ascertain the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy.

This information is important for current and future scholars interested in teaching diversity, equity, and social justice courses because these evaluation trends are relatively consistent (Basow, Codos, Martin, 2013; Dancy & Jean-Marie, 2014). This is especially true if the instructor seeks to apply a transformative or social reconstructionist approach to multicultural education. After reflecting on my student teaching evaluations and conferring with senior scholars in the field, I offer these suggestions for faculty teaching mandatory diversity courses and departmental leadership.

Suggestions for Faculty

**State learning objectives early and often.** Learning objectives should be presented regularly in all courses. However, in multicultural education courses it is especially important that students have a clear and coherent understanding of the goals and objectives for each activity or assignment. Many activities require students to question their beliefs or values, which is difficult to comprehend, especially if the objective is not clearly articulated before the task is assigned. At a minimum, learning objectives should be placed on the syllabus and on all assignment handouts.

**Have students participate in a summative self-evaluation of learning.** Reflective practice is a cornerstone of teaching and learning. This can be accomplished by simple “What I learned statements” submitted anonymously. This has summative assessment value and also helps to provide additional evidence of teaching effectiveness. For instance, one student comment characterized the discussions as “busy work” in the table presented earlier. However, if the majority of students provide alternative perceptions of the discussions, then the negative comment has less credibility.

**Bring in experts and other scholars physically and virtually.** Although your expertise is necessary, external perspectives help to deflect some of the aggression by exposing students to other perspectives. Sometimes students become enthralled with certain content and forget that you as the instructor did not create many of the structures and concepts they find problematic. When students are exposed to guest speakers, they are reminded that this is established course content and validated by research, rather than personal agenda items you chose to promote your point of view.

**Receive at least two peer teaching evaluations each year.** Peer evaluation carry significant weight in colleges of education, particularly when conducted by trusted colleagues. Solicited faculty who serve as allies can observe and review your diversity course teaching, which is important for you as an instructor, but this also exposes faculty to multicultural education content, which can promote the inclusion of the content in other areas.

**Consider teaching at least one non-diversity course each academic year.** Student evaluations matter, thus it is important to establish positive baseline scores. With the non-diversity courses I teach, my average scores are in the highly effective range, and sometimes a perfect score. These scores can help to explain this phenomenon and inform faculty who are uninformed or indifferent to trends in this area.
Suggestions for Departmental Leadership
Familiarize yourself and others regarding the trends in Multicultural Education teaching evaluations. Maintaining the integrity of the course content should be the primary goal of departmental leadership, while also creating an environment conducive to student learning. If departmental leaders are familiar with seminal, as well as emerging literature they can interpret the meaning of the course evaluations in light of the research.

Provide alternative evaluation avenues for Multicultural Education faculty. Many colleges and universities have recognized that instructors that promote social justice receive lower teaching evaluations traditionally, and in response have created alternative scales to reflect these trends. An alternative suggestion would be to allow faculty to submit alternative forms of teaching effectiveness to refute negative student scores and to substantiate strengths. One such example would be the creation of a teaching portfolio or sample teaching demonstration video.

Continuously affirm and support Multicultural Education faculty. One common misconception is that faculty are unaffected by student perceptions, but in my experience I have been verbally abused in some student comments. Thus, it is imperative that department leadership review harsh, violent, and derogatory remarks and have the removed, and provide faculty consultation. Furthermore, when these incidents are revealed, it is important that faculty are affirmed and assured that the remarks will not be tolerated.

Conclusion
Some argue that the discrepancies inherent in my scores negate the educative merit of the student responses. As a multicultural educator, I want students to take up the course material and recognize its value because I want my students to be culturally responsive teachers of K-12 students. Thus, I would be remiss not to want to change the many negative course perceptions in an effort to yield positive student outcomes in the field. To accomplish this goal it is imperative that multicultural instructors utilize their student evaluations to make changes in the pedagogy, instruction, and content when appropriate. This will require some compromises for the greater good, but the learning goals and course objectives should dictate how these changes are implemented.

Changing student perceptions of multicultural education coursework and of faculty of color requires a concerted effort shared by faculty and departmental leadership to maintain the integrity of the course content, while making it accessible and acceptable to a wider population of pre-service teachers. As culturally responsive practices continue to permeate core content areas in colleges of education, more students will begin to feel less of the negative affect of multicultural education, in order to recognize the effect. In conclusion, my hope is that my philosophy of multicultural education combined with my transparency in sharing course evaluations helps to inform teaching, learning, and evaluation practices for others who teach in colleges of education.

References


Appendix A

Table 1: Comparison of open student responses related to Course Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Comments</th>
<th>Positive Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The content was relevant and subject matter interesting, I just don’t <strong>enjoy</strong> it as much as other topics.</td>
<td>Great subject matter. Very much needed for anyone pursuing a teaching <strong>career</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her <strong>favorite</strong> two words are “white Privilege” and over 2/3 of the instruction for the course is dedicated to pointing out perceived “privilege” that Caucasians <strong>enjoy</strong>.</td>
<td>Course is extremely <strong>relevant</strong> and <strong>beneficial</strong> for any student becoming a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do we really <strong>need</strong> this class? I mean we focus on students who are gay, black, Muslim, etc… <strong>why</strong>?</td>
<td>Content taught in the course is <strong>highly relevant</strong> and instructors own ideas on the subject are interesting and applicable to future scenarios.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The book was <strong>appalling</strong> and offensive. It turned everything into a matter of race. Please see the race chapter, introduction.</td>
<td>This course asks the “hard to answer” questions of multicultural education by creating a forum for future educators to <strong>brainstorm</strong>. It’s so <strong>interesting</strong>!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Comparison of open student responses related to Course Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The course structure… was somewhat acceptable. I am not a big fan of project-based learning.</td>
<td>Her lesson format includes class discussions and group formation every class. This makes for an enjoyable 3 hour class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the work was busy work. Why should I reply to someone who said “ohh gooo[d] job, blah, blah, blah”</td>
<td>The course has a good structure for the subject [using] direct instruction followed by a lab of indirect instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that it is really odd to teach education classes online that are supposed to teach us how to connect with students face to face.</td>
<td>I loved that the structure of the course was clear and weekly announcements were defantly helpful in reminding me to do my work each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure was perfect. Online courses should ALWAYS be as meticulously laid out as this one was.</td>
<td>The structure was perfect. Online courses should ALWAYS be as meticulously laid out as this one was.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Table 3: Comparison of open-ended student responses related to the instructor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a straight A student... and none of my past professors have been so academically <strong>incompetent</strong>.</td>
<td>Dr. Young was a great professor. Probably the best professor I've ever had. I have <strong>learned</strong> more in this class than any other education course I've taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor comes across as <strong>racist</strong> and <strong>prejudiced</strong>, always preaching that whites are privileged.</td>
<td>Subject matter was very <strong>relevant</strong> to the course. Dr. Young knows her stuff, not one can deny her that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matter-of-fact and not particularly <strong>warm</strong>, but she made sure we had what we needed to meet her expectations.</td>
<td>...the class put a lot of <strong>responsibility</strong> on the student rather than just showing up, learn material, and take a test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her grading is fair, but just a bit too <strong>rough</strong>, A's should not be reserved for exemplary work.</td>
<td>Dr. Young does a very good job in discussing potentially controversial topics. She also discusses <strong>relevant</strong> moments of her own teaching experience that allow her students to glimpse what teaching will be like in the <strong>real world</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...Dr. Young picks favorites racially. Of the white students enrolled in her class, whether [past] or present, they found themselves jumping through hoops to get average grades. However, of the black, Hispanic, Indian, and Asian students, they commented on how it was easy to fly through the module with perfect or near-perfect grades.</td>
<td>Instructor was a very understanding and appreciative of every student and their issues and understand the topics very <strong>deeply</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was very <strong>blunt</strong> and <strong>dry</strong>.</td>
<td>Instructor was accommodating and fair. Best online course I've taken at UNT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>