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So, You Think You Can Teach? - Reflection Processes that Support Pre-Service Teachers' Readiness for Field Experiences

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Abstract

This paper discusses and examines the effectiveness of course assignments designed to promote reflection processes and critical thinking of pre-service teachers. Specifically, the study explores and identifies the range of students' level of reflectivity and critical examination of their own developing pedagogy, with foci on content knowledge, dispositions and teaching skills. In general, initial findings indicate students' levels of reflectivity ranged from "self" to "outside of self" to "beyond self" concerns or focus. Analysis further revealed that the students' existing epistemological beliefs possibly mediate their level of reflectivity by either inhibiting the reflective process (most evident with those focused on task, grade, time, procedures and some performance concerns), or supported the reflective thinking flow (most evident through focus on interest, identity, expectations, relevancy, development, personal and student impact concerns).

Keywords

reflection process, critical thinking, teaching readiness, self awareness

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Introduction

To effectively prepare pre-service teachers for field experiences, critical reflective thinking processes must be developed to a level of sophistication where application becomes integral to their pedagogy. Data sources, comprised of pre-service teachers' reflection products of their *content knowledge* (i.e., self-assessment of conceptual papers), *dispositions* (i.e., self-assessment of professional and teaching dispositions and examination of personal dispositions via autobiographies) and *teaching skills* (i.e., reflections of simulated teaching experiences), were collected over several semesters from two required Early Childhood – 6th Grade (EC-6) program courses (i.e., classroom management and multicultural education). These courses do not involve field experiences and are generally completed prior to field-based coursework, but are integral in preparing students' readiness in the reflection process expected in the field. The courses were created by the authors and over the course of several years have experienced ongoing curricular modifications to enhance student reflectivity; specifically, through targeted assignments. Through a qualitative self-study design (Loughran & Russell, 2002; Samaras, 2002; Samaras & Freese, 2006), these assignment data sources serve as the medium with which curricular decisions and course restructuring for developing student reflective thinking within these courses are based. In an effort to assess how the design of course assignments and activities encourage critical reflective thinking processes, data sources of students' reflection products were examined for: 1) level of reflectivity, 2) self-awareness of competence, 3) recognition of emerging new perceptions or shifts in their thinking, and 4) transformative actions taken as a result of 1, 2 and 3. Data were coded and analyzed through constant comparative methodology based on grounded theory to identify patterns and themes of student reflectivity in the courses (Glaser & Strauss, 1997; Lichtman, 2006) and critical ethnography for student identity claims (Carspecken, 1997).

These analyses processes are particularly salient approaches for generating prospective theories because of the close connection of data and teacher educators/researchers' reflective pedagogy (Berg, 2007).

Perspective

For the purpose of this self-study, the teacher educators/researchers couched course activities, discussions and assignments within a critically-reflective pedagogical frame (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1933; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Schön, 1987; Simpson, Jackson & Aycock, 2005; Wlodarsky, 2005) in an effort to elevate pre-service teachers' reflective thinking processes to Van Manen's (1977) third level of rationality - Critical Rationality. Critical Rationality is a meta-reflection process where awareness is generated where different means may result in myriad ends for different individuals. Most aspects and experiences of one's understanding of reality become examined as problematic. Self-criticism is crucial and reflective thinking involves awareness of the reciprocity of relationships within the society of which one is a part. Through a continuous honing process, Critical Rational thinkers develop reflective acuity by closely examining taken-for-granted assumptions. It is a rigorous and ongoing "seeking out" process in identifying evolving perspectives and values, which identify what supports and frames professional decision-making (Miller, 2002). For pre-service teachers to successfully impact public school learners' academic progress, Critical Rationality is the level from which they must operate; that is, the searching for and wanting to more sharply define pedagogical values and actions and ultimately the impact these values and actions have on public school learners' academic progress. Additionally, in order to execute social justice values, pre-service teachers need to possess the ability to scrutinize their own world views in order to understand and appreciate others' perspectives within today's expansive socio-cultural context (McDonald, 2012; Van Manen, 1995).

Confessional of Positional Subjectivity

Confessional is significant to the praxis of reflective pedagogy and inherent to self-study methodology. We as teacher educators hope to encourage and instill in pre-service teachers' reflective processes foundational to effective pedagogy, but to validate these processes they must be evident within our own practice. Although we hold assumptions that our extensive experiential knowledge is sufficient for scaffolding our pre-service teachers' reflective thinking processes, our own reflectivity must be constantly challenged. We acknowledge that as teacher educators we have not taught in elementary classrooms for years and are somewhat experientially removed from public school settings. In an ongoing reflective process, we continually question the validity of our guidance to novice teachers because our current stance as educators is historically and contextually different than what they experience. Through our own critical reflections (steeped in subjectivity of interpretation), we may romanticize, demonize, highlight or diminish experiences or perspectives that are embedded within our own orientations and positions of authority in teacher-student relationships. This stance of "authority" is problematic during data analysis as it presents a potential judgment filter which counters critical reflection processes as well as authenticity of findings. We therefore identify findings of this study as "tentative" since they are not static, involve ongoing pedagogical reflections and queries which emerge organically (through our experiences and analysis of experiences) and encompass only cursory coverage of an expansive, multi-dimensional subject matter to which we have limited data sources.

Additionally, we presume that we operate as Critical Rational thinkers, but that stance is determined through the very queries we choose to explore in our pedagogy and research. None of which are "objective" in nature. There lies the inherent dilemma within this study. We are saddled with the responsibility of preparing students to be effective, reflective teachers but must assign judgment to the level of their work (albeit, feedback and grades). Our own beliefs and standards for competency

influence our actions. The reflective process in self-study for us is rich, personally insightful and informative, but the objectiveness of this study gets muddled as our students' work serves as our own reflection points.

Challenges and Goals

The onslaught and intensification of standardization and testing in schools have infiltrated learning experiences which conflict with critical inquiry and reflective thinking. Many of our pre-service teachers come into higher education thwarted from experiencing the "value" of reflective practice in multiple ways. Reflective pedagogy is a scary notion with perceptually tenuous, irrelevant, impractical or unattainable concrete learning goals (Floden & Klinzing, 1990; Palmer, 2000). Reflective thinking requires one to think critically of themselves, which often causes disequilibrium or disrupts identity confidence (Schön, 1987, 1992). Also, the fear of perceived judgments inhibits the reflective process. It is a significant step for beginning reflective pedagogues to think of alternatives to how they can make instruction more productive, let alone reflect on the embedded beliefs that influence their actions, habits and behaviors.

Students enter the program with a range of epistemologies for reflective practice (ranging from technical and task-oriented to critical and political). Generally, many students (approximately 25%) demonstrate the lowest level of reflectivity and present superficial information, flat, nominal, objective type statements void of emotion or personal connection with a minimalist perspective. A significant percentage of students (approximately 65%) demonstrate a level of reflectivity above the lowest level. Their reflections often include grand statements or platitudes with little detail to support views or beliefs, rife with "Pollyanna-ism." The smallest percentage of students (approximately10%) demonstrate a higher level of reflectivity, one that aligns with Critical Rationality, presents rich reflective statements filled with details, deep discussion, in-depth personal examples, critical awareness and insight, and often interjected with self-selected queries. Unfortunately, most students, at the point of the

program in which they take the core courses of this study, do not operate from this high level of reflection.

Considering these constraints, creating awareness and readiness in prospective teachers for practicing reflective pedagogy involves several challenges for teacher educators. Pre-service teachers must experience activities which exemplify and validate the productiveness and effectiveness of reflective thinking and writing (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1994). These activities must also provide personal meaningfulness while raising critical consciousness of their own teaching competence (Chapman, 2004). They must also support teacher identity development, a tenuous precipice for which novice teachers often feel they are facing (Walkington, 2005). Additionally, meaningful experiences must support teaching efficacy where the fear of risk-taking and sense of ambiguity and complexities regarding classroom decision-making are diminished through the reflective process (Danielewicz, 2001; Mezirow, 2000).

Several course assignments that generate students reflecting on meaningful experiences with respect to their teaching readiness were selected for examination. The assignments involve reflecting on the following aspects of field readiness: content knowledge, dispositions and teaching skills. The content knowledge assignment involves students' self-assessment of their content knowledge as produced through a conceptual paper describing their prospective classroom design. Three assignments involve self-assessments of dispositions, but specific areas of dispositions: professional, teaching and personal. One is specific to self-assessment of students' existing professional dispositions in reference to a collaborative lesson plan course assignment.   A second specifies self-assessment of teaching dispositions based on a lesson simulation. A third assignment complements examination of personal dispositions through a historical view of the cultural self via an autobiography. Regarding teaching skills, the assignment selected for examination involves a two-step reflective process where students reflect on a simulated teaching experience and

then conduct a second reflection after viewing a video-tape of the lesson.

The teacher educators/researchers of this study have created assignments/activities to generate a high level of reflectivity in students' thinking and seek to examine the effectiveness of these processes in comprehensively preparing them for field experience as reflective pedagogues. Prompting reflective thinking can be most strongly generated through the "personal" and thus autobiographies serve that purpose. Autobiographies and other personal narratives are rich sources of data through which to examine the impact certain experiences play in people's lives (Bruner, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1994; Miller, 2002; Ulanoff & Gopalakrishnan, 2004). Scholars have used reflective narratives to examine teachers' lives (Weiler, 1988), gender (Pipher, 1994), the lives of gays and lesbians (Grace & Benson, 2000), perceptions of whiteness (Lea & Griggs, 2005), and religious perspectives (Schachter, 2002). While the methodology differs in each type of study, the way in which individuals make sense of their experiences and the importance given to this process is similar.

From a teacher education perspective, narratives (in particular, autobiographies and reflections) are useful for helping future teachers identify particular cultural scripts by which their lives are conducted (Lea, 2004; Strong-Wilson, 2006). Further, this helps learners 'see the unseen', that is, to help students think about ways of thinking and behaving that can go unnoticed. Future educators, who have the opportunity to engage in self-reflection through personal narratives, can make more cognizant decisions in an educational environment. Banks (1991) has supported the notion that autobiographies can help students tap into a 'sociocultural consciousness', that is, an awareness of how analyses about different cultural groups are generated. Chapman (2004) states "What we think are our own personal values, beliefs, and self-evident truths, and the justifications we hold for practicing the way we do are ideologically layered; these ideologies manifest in language, social habits and critical forms" (p. 96) Thus, illuminating life experiences can reveal

relationships with the ideological structures by which we are influenced and simultaneously shaped.

The reflection processes of the course assignments potentially single out events in students' lives that have triggered new reflective patterns. These new reflective patterns serve as spaces in which social beliefs and/or networks have changed or were altered from experiences or events. The autobiographical and reflection writing process provide opportunities for students to nurture reflectivity through recognition of previous "growth" events and relive or revisit situations that stimulated different thinking or have expanded their world views.

Data Sources

The university in which the study was conducted is identified as upper-level where no freshman through sophomore courses are offered. Our diverse student population generally transfer from local community colleges and many are first-generation college attendees. All students in the study were in their junior or senior year in the teacher education program. Throughout multiple semesters, several sections of each course were examined in this study. In the multicultural education course, students (n=64) wrote reflective autobiographies of their cultural identity, selecting defining moments that impact existing beliefs (Strong-Wilson, 2006). In the management course, which is an entry course that is a prerequisite for all methods courses, students (n=158) reflected on their teaching from two perspectives over time and self-assessed their professional dispositions when interacting with others, as well as how their teaching dispositions' can impact public school learners. Most students have not been required to reflect on social issues or their teaching knowledge prior to these courses.

Data sources from the two core program courses were utilized in this study and are described here.

Content Knowledge

For examining students' reflections on content knowledge, self-assessments of conceptual papers comprised the data source. In the classroom management course, students write conceptual papers on the following topics: 1) teaching ideology, 2) classroom arrangement, 3) classroom procedures, 4) management theories, 5) how to address behavioral issues, and 6) self-perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of content knowledge, pedagogical skills and dispositions regarding their future practice. Students are directed to provide rationales and detailed, in-depth discussion of their choices and plans for the operation of their classroom. Grading rubrics are presented with the guidelines for completing papers (for one example, see Appendix A – Classroom Description Assignment Guidelines). After all submissions, instructor feedback is provided through questions and queries about the content of the paper and notes of technical errors. No grade is assigned, but students are directed to use instructor input and the assignment rubric to self-assess their work in a reflection paper and assign a grade based on the information provided (See Appendix B – Self-Assessment Activity). They are not informed whether their self-assessment grade will be the final grade. The self-assessment reflective process is designed to incite critical perspectives in one's own thinking; therefore, potentially heighten the degree of reflectivity. Additionally, the self-assessment process is expected to cause a shift in students' thinking from a learner-perspective to a teacher-perspective in that they use the rubric and feedback to self-assess and assign a grade on the paper (i.e., they experience thinking like a teacher with objectively assigning a grade rather than just as a learner where one passively receives grades and rarely reflects on teacher feedback). Data analysis on students' self-assessment of course conceptual papers which demonstrate their content knowledge was conducted. Multiple archival sets of students' papers were analyzed to examine their degree of reflectivity through the self-assessment process.

Dispositions: Professional, Teaching and Personal

For examination of students' self-assessment of dispositions (*professional*, *teaching* and *personal*), data sources from both the classroom management and multicultural course were utilized. In the classroom management course, students co-write lesson plans with a small group of three to five peers. The groups are informed at the beginning of the semester and then at the end of this assignment collaborative process, they self-assess their *professional dispositions* and participation in the group work and anonymously assess their peers' professional dispositions and participation as well, (1-5 Likert scale) on the following characteristics: 1) Generated Input/Ideas, 2) Cooperative/Flexible, 3) Responsible/Dependable, 4) Kindness Towards Others, 5) Accepting of Others Input/Ideas, 6) Carried share of Workload, 7) Professionalism, 8) Positive Attitude, 9) Supportive, and 10) Productive. All peers' scores were averaged for a final grade for each participant. This grade equals 10% of their final grade, so there is a built-in accountability factor for contributing to the collaboratively-constructed lesson plan. Also, embedded in the process is the understanding that their self-assessment ultimately impacts, positively or negatively, their final grade and those of their peers. Students are also directed to provide a reflection of their self-assessment that presents details and rationales for the ratings. The results of the self-assessments generally run a continuum from harshly critical, fairly objective, to trumped-up over-ratings. Many rate themselves higher than peers on most characteristics. Additionally, there is the obvious limitation in data findings that subjective ratings are utilized over objective judgments. Data analysis involved several archival sets of students' peer and self-assessments on the collaborative group work characteristics. For the purpose of this study, reflections that provided details and rationales for their peer self-assigned ratings were the focus of analysis.

In the classroom management course, students also self-assess their prospective *teaching dispositions*. The disposition self-report follows a series of in-class reflective activities (See Appendix C – Reflective Activities), culminating in a formal "Strengths and Concerns" paper regarding perceptions of

personal strengths and perceived challenges during their first year teaching experience. This paper involves discussion of identifying teaching dispositional characteristics and rating their own strengths and weaknesses (e.g., flexibility). The students were provided with prompts for discussion (See Appendix D – Teaching Dispositions). Exposure to the process of self-assessing teaching characteristics is intended to raise consciousness of expected teaching competencies. Initial self-assessments are generally glorified. Subsequent field experiences rouse more humbling self-reviews as pre-service teachers become experientially familiar and internally conscious of the nature of the dispositions necessary for pedagogical proficiency. Data analysis involved several archival sets of student self-assessments of their dispositions and their reflective goal settings for dispositional growth.

In the multicultural education course, students write reflective autobiographies that are focused on reflection of their cultural identity in order to identify defining events in their lives and unearth individual life changing beliefs (See Appendix E – My Story). The reflection process identifies *personal dispositions* and potentially singles out events in students' lives that have triggered new reflective patterns. These new reflective patterns serve as spaces in which social beliefs and/or networks have changed or were altered from experiences or events. The autobiography reflection writing process provides an opportunity for students to nurture reflectivity through recognition of previous "growth" events and relive or revisit situations that stimulated different thinking or expanded their world views (For reference regarding course goals, see Appendix F – Course Objectives for the Diversity Course). Data analysis involved two archival sets of student autobiographies.

Teaching Skills

In the classroom management course, reflections of teaching acumen are presented in a two-fold process. Since this is not a field-based course, students teach a simulated lesson to a small group of three to four peers who role play as elementary

students. This is an initial teaching simulation that provides a safe, first-step of "teaching to others" experience. After the lesson is taught, the peers provide general feedback (e.g., best aspect of the lesson, suggested improvements, etc.) and the students use this data set and their own thoughts about the experience to write a reflection on their teaching (See Appendix G – Teaching Reflection Guidelines). Later, they view the video-tape of this lesson with the same small group of peers who provide more specific information (e.g., use of praise, wait time, etc.) and the students then write a second reflection where they address the feedback and how their thoughts about the teaching experience may have changed after *viewing* the video (See Appendix H – Video Reflection Guidelines). They are provided with open-ended questions to frame their reflections and to prod thinking beyond "what" they are doing in the lesson, to awareness of actual impact on learners and student engagement during the simulation. In reflecting on their original reflection, a meta-reflection process is implemented. Commonly, the initial reflection is a basic description of the lesson and focuses on actions they demonstrated in the teaching simulation. Their focus is their actions for a very subjective stance. The second reflection usually involves more in-depth thinking about the teaching process and discussion of engagement with learners. This second reflection generally demonstrates a focus shift from teacher action to student action and engagement where they objectively view the lesson from a more external, objective perspective. The limitation in this process is that it is a *simulation with peers*. Data analysis involved multiple sets of archival student reflections (with two reflections per student).

Methodology

Data Analysis

Qualitative research such as self-study methodology stems from ongoing reflective questions within a researcher's practice, rather than scripted hypotheses (Samaras, 2002). This study involved researchers' introspection and examination of their own pedagogical practices. Most data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

Lichtman, 2006) which is effective for capturing multiple aspects of individual perspectives and experiences. Some data were analyzed using critical ethnography methodology (Carspecken, 1997; Carspecken & Apple, 1992), specifically for distinguishing student identity claims in written responses. The inductive nature of constant comparative method and critical ethnography methodology allows for the researchers' insight, experience, speculation, discovery, and interpretation to contribute to the process of coding collected data. Initial data served for broadly determining the main issues/categories in simple codes, which were then added to, modified and tweaked with subsequent data in the establishment of more keenly defined patterns and themes. Peer debriefers were utilized for validating initial codes identified in the data.

"Tentative" Findings

In general, some initial findings have been identified on students' "levels of reflectivity" with respect to *content knowledge* (self-assessment of conceptual papers) and *teaching skills* (reflections on teaching in the management class). Reflections ranged across levels from egocentric "self" concerns/focus (i.e., tasks, grades, time, procedures, judgment of performance or ability and image) to "outside of self" concerns/focus (i.e., interest, general competency, teacher identity formation and expectations) to more global, holistic "beyond self" concerns/focus (i.e., relevancy of content to students, teaching competency, student development, meaningfulness for learner, learner engagement and impact on learner). Analysis of data further revealed that the students' concerns/focus, depending on the level, either inhibited the reflective process (most evident with those focused on task, grade, time, procedures and some performance concerns), or supported the reflective thinking flow (most evident through focus on interest, identity, expectations, relevancy, development, personal and student impact concerns). Students' existing epistemological beliefs possibly mediate the type of concerns that influence, filter or direct their thinking processes (Schommer, 1990), reflective predispositions, and learning

motivation. There appears to be a parallel with the level of reflectivity to the range of epistemological beliefs from naïve to sophisticated beliefs. Naïve beliefs generally were demonstrated through surface level approach to learning (i.e., rehearsal and regurgitation of information without evidence of personal connection or understanding) (Kardash & Howell, 2000). More sophisticated beliefs were evidenced through deeper level thinking (i.e., significant internalization of concepts through critical and reflective thoughts and ideas).

Content Knowledge

With respect to reflections on *content knowledge* regarding the classroom description in the management course (through the self-assessment process of their writing assignment), tentative findings revealed that students who presented evidence of significant effort or were the most critical of their work were proficient in providing examples, details, rationales and reasoning for their self-assessments. The critical aspect of their self-assessment did not necessarily indicate a parallel with a high level of reflectivity. These students may just possess high standards for their performance or expectations of mastery. Students who presented surface level comments or nominal evidence for their self-assessment were less critical or less rigorous in examining the quality of their work. It appeared that these students were either not conscious or aware of their competence level or the skills expected for the course assignment. Across all levels of self-critique, discussion of "grades" ("I deserve an A-") over "learning" ("It is great to get feedback on all of our work to help us for future assignments"), demonstrated the most significant range/degree of reflectivity, where the former involved surface level reflections and the latter more critical, introspective reflections. Interestingly, several students referenced "future-related" thinking regarding their next writing assignments and those students presented the most objective reflections of their work (not too lenient or dismissive self-assessments and not too rigorous or harsh).

Dispositions (Professional, Teaching and Personal)

Similar findings emerged regarding examination of the *professional dispositions* in the management course through self-ratings regarding collaborative work. Students who provided the most discussion through details, explanations, and reasoning presented the most critical assessments of self and of others, but it appeared that "criticalness" did not necessarily parallel reflective thinking and the ability to view from others' perspectives. Evidence of the highest level of reflection was presented through "global perspectives" in which students' objectively assessed themselves and their peers (or at least an objective attempt was made).

With respect to *teaching dispositions* as explored in the management course through reflections and self-ratings of teaching dispositional characteristics, most initial ratings were inflated and revealed a lack of awareness of what those characteristics involve in real settings (i.e., Pollyanna views). This demonstrates the learners' lack of experiential knowledge. The educators/researchers of this study understand that post-field experience reflections do indicate more realistic reexamination of teaching dispositions through subsequent ratings. Experiential knowledge through interactions in the field present the most effective catalyst for these new found realizations and awareness. The most interesting finding from the data analysis is that for most students, the characteristics of which they rated themselves the highest were the exact characteristics they noted in their reflections as goals to work on.

With respect to analysis on *personal dispositions* as reflected in the autobiographies, the themes that provided the deepest level of reflectivity tended to be life changing events or events that students perceived were out of their control; for example, experiences like death, a move in their childhood, a divorce, the unplanned birth of a child, and membership in a minority population. To be more specific, a deep level of reflectivity can be characterized as one in which the students name the event, identify the event as having a direct and meaningful effect on

their perception of themselves and others, and can distinguish how that perception played a role in their life experiences. Feelings that accompanied these events tended to be *loneliness*, *isolation* and *marginalization*. For an indeterminate amount of time, students reported that these feelings left them with a new appreciation and perspective on certain cultural attributes and beliefs that they held. Examples of student sharing of perspectives and experiences are provided below.

For example, *Laura*, a young (approximately between 20-25 years) Latina, recalled how frightened and powerless she felt when moving from Mexico to the U.S. and ending up in a classroom where she could not understand anything. She remembered, "I felt like an ant crushed by a big stone." She follows this by saying that as a teacher's aide "…I see that my students suffer as well as I did, but I want to make a difference in their education."

Marta, a first generation immigrant commented on the struggles she faced when coming to the US –

> I know the feeling of not speaking the language and to see how the culture is different and you are treated different. I know how it fills to translate in your head before you can actually say something in English back. I think I have an advantage because I went through those same problems and I can help better to deal with the problems that they might have…The experiences that I gain[ed] as a child in this country would help me be a better teacher. I would always think about all of my students from different parts of the world before making instructional decision[s]….I would want to learn from them just as they want to learn from me.

Candice, a young biracial student commented on the influence of her ethnic identity development –

> The fact that I come from a biracial background where one of the races is considered a minority is something that I

carry around with me all the time…I know that I am different from other people so who am I to judge anyone else on the same basis that I and my family have been judged…I look forward to continuing to grow as a person and looking at what my students can bring to my classroom to help to enrich the lives of their classmates and me.

Tanya, a young white student, recalled racist comments her grandparents used to make,

I fully believe they played a huge part in the development of my own cultural sensitivity. I made a decision that I would never make anyone else feel that kind of discomfort….I know I'm not perfect, but I think about how all of these things will impact in my future endeavors…It will be my job as an educator to really get to know my students.

These students identified the event, isolated the feelings experienced and verbalized how this would impact their behavior as a teacher.

Life changing events were typically negative. However, in some instances students mentioned voluntary activities that gave them more confidence and/or broadened their horizons in terms of meeting different people. *Tom*, a young white male, mentioned joining a swim team, stating that this provided "some of the best times of my life spent with all sorts of people from all over the country. We all had something in common with swimming regardless of our background." He stated that the traveling he did with the swim team showed him how geography affected the way in which people were different.

Stanley, another young white male, joined a band and talked about how music opened his world in terms of the places he went and the people he met. These experiences differed from those which were involuntary in terms of the notable absence of a connection to their future classroom experiences as a teacher.

Students make themselves vulnerable in very few autobiographies. Rarely did they describe an experience where they did something wrong, something they regretted, a situation where they lost 'face' (the image one projects to the world). This may be because of their relationship with the instructor (lack of trust or simply wanted to maintain the face they perceived for themselves) or perhaps because they did not reach that level of reflection where they were comfortable sharing or accepted perceived personal flaws. In one of the few instances, *Alison*, a young future elementary school teacher, talked about how she stopped being friends with someone because of rumors that were going around her school. After a long time apart, they reconnected at the beginning of a school year and the very next day this girl died. She shared these painful memories with regret and a lesson never forgotten about how she gave so much importance to what people said about her.

Mary, another student, talked honestly about how hurricane Katrina brought many African Americans to her school and how although she never thought she was racist, she found herself fighting feelings of resentment because of the gang issues that this particular group brought, and the school had to enforce new rules. These two students demonstrate a deep level of reflection given that they exposed themselves for critique or perhaps, their sense of self and their confidence was stronger than other students.

When asked to define a cultural identity, some students had the tendency to either describe their cultural heritage authenticated by big "C" types of items (e.g., We eat rice and beans, we always celebrate independence day) or described themselves by the values they hold (e.g. family oriented, honest, Christian). However, there was an overall mix of cultural views. Some students' views of culture were driven by stereotypes and provided a low level of reflection. *Lola* for example stated,

> Our elderly are respected…our most precious treasure…we have the Haitian people, with their great colorful clothes

and their amazing cooking, would set up stands on the
street corner and sell their great spicy food….the Thai with
their beautiful people were a big part of daily life.

However, most students seemed to appreciate the difficulty of
reducing cultural attributes to ethnicity/race/national origin.
Nancy, a young 'white' woman pointed out, "I have Hispanic,
Dakota Indian, Italian and Mongolian genetic markers. What am
I supposed to file that under?"

Overall, students seemed to hold varying levels of reflection in
some aspects of their lives. This variability however does not
necessarily mean that this thought process is transferable to
other aspects of reflectivity or to the reflection process once in
the field. For example, just because *Laura* recalled her lack of
English in the classroom as being like "… an ant crushed by a big
stone" doesn't mean that the empathy that she developed
towards English language learners will transfer to other groups
that are also oppressed. Furthermore, the idea that all types of
oppression are equal negates the unique events that some
groups experience (e.g., the type of oppression that poor African
Americans experience is not the same as that experienced by
poor whites). Educators must take care with the idea that
students could use their own oppression as license to say they
understand others' experiences. True reflection involves
acknowledgement that our experiences are unique and that
making assumptions about others can be reckless.

These narratives arouse wonder, "In what way will these
experiences and thought patterns influence their actions in the
classroom?" Will an already reflective thought pattern predict
how they will address situations pertaining to inequity or social
justice in the classroom? Once again, students with life changing
events seemed to have the most self-awareness as to how these
events have potentially influenced their future teaching.
Empathetic thinking and experiential knowledge guided many of
the reflections and these are valuable characteristics for novice
teachers. However, maintaining the habit of reflection and
empathy to 'see the unseen' remains a challenge.

Teaching Skills

With respect to reflecting on *teaching skills* in the management course through the simulated lesson, the following is an example of a student's transition in thinking from a surface level to a more critical level as evidenced in her first reflection of the simulated teaching experience.

> I tried very hard to follow perfectly with my lesson plan, and I believe if I would have gone up there with the goal to educate the classroom in sinking and floating instead of going perfectly with the lesson, I would have done a better job.

In this reflection the student shifts her focus from the "task" of teaching and going through the steps, to reflecting on the importance of student learning actually occurring and how she would implement this change. After viewing herself teach on the video, in her second reflection there is recognition of a shift in position-taking in viewing from others' perspectives and how this skill can be powerful in improving instructional skills. Another student shares "One of the most effective things about this is being able to see yourself from the outside. One can really notice what was wrong and right about the way they teach."

These examples are typical of shifts students experienced by viewing the lesson they taught. The initial teaching reflection presented a foundation that was easily recognized as limited, as experienced through the second reflection after viewing themselves teach. A sharper, perhaps more panoramic or holographic lens was created through which students could examine their actual performance and through which their reflective thinking would transform.

Researchers' Insights as a Result of this Study

Data analysis on students' "self-awareness of competence" based on teaching skills (reflections on teaching) and

dispositions (self-assessment of professional, teaching and personal dispositions through autobiographies) indicate critical self-assessments generate greater self-awareness and direct actions taken toward pedagogical improvement and expansive world views. In the simulation teaching experience, reflective thinking developed as a shift from self to other (from focus on procedures and tasks to focus on student learning). Learner reflections that focused on conditions "outside of themselves" to explain perceived inadequacies of their knowledge, dispositions or teaching, paralleled with stifled or passive efforts toward improved skills. Excuses or blame of external factors interfered with productive actions; specifically, regarding generation of effective teaching. Additionally, a "hardiness" of disposition (i.e., those who did not internalize failure as static) appears as a pattern with those responsive to "differentness of others" and flexibility in their thinking patterns.

The four analysis goals of this study included: 1) level of reflectivity, 2) self-awareness of competence, 3) recognition of emerging new perceptions or shifts in their thinking, and 4) transformative actions taken as a result of 1, 2 & 3. Analysis of the latter two, "recognition of new perceptions" and "transformative actions taken" involves **ALL** data sets; therefore, a more comprehensive analysis process is necessary and is in progress at this time.

Often, in self-study methodology, findings and implications of a study are not an end-all, but rather serve as focal points for ongoing research queries to address within future curricular changes.

Self–Study Reflection

Data revealed unexpected findings regarding one teacher educator/researcher's own teaching. When analyzing the *content knowledge* self-assessment of conceptual papers data, a direct parallel in the students' level of reflectivity to the level of the prompt presented by instructor feedback was discovered. For example, often only affirmations were provided to students

who presented sound conceptual reflections. No instructor queries were presented to ratchet up the level of critical analysis to which students could respond. The result – no increase in critical thinking; in fact, nominal discussion resulted. Additionally, where technical feedback was provided, students responded only on a technical level. Students responded identically to the level of the feedback or instructor prompt. To promote the highest level of critical reflection, a push is required; something that causes a sense of disequilibrium in students' thinking. Even the most brilliant, thought provoking initial prompts will not ensure continuance of students' reflective growth. The promotion of reflective thinking involves a painstaking, ongoing process for the instructor as well. Data analysis of this study reveal that provocative questions throughout assignments and activities (not just initial, but ongoing) are required for optimal critical, reflective thinking to become internalized as a learning process for the students.

Future Research

Data will be more fully analyzed for identification of individual pedagogical shifts (professional growth/development and teacher identity strengthening/formation) as a result of the reflective thinking development (evidenced through observed or self-reported actions and behaviors). Additionally, analysis must be extended for parallels of developing reflectivity to evolving epistemology from naïve to more sophisticated beliefs. With regard to the "My Story" assignment, the instructor has implemented changes in the assignment by adding more detailed questions in hopes to elicit deeper reflection as well as altered the format of the course leading up to the assignment to better prepare the students for writing their story. For example, each course activity leading up to the assignment contains guided group activities that help students share specific experiences (e.g. about gender, schooling, privilege, etc.) so that they can begin their reflection by communally building upon others' experiences as well as their own.

Unfortunately, we cannot make claims that we know if/when students' reflections result in actual growth of thinking or effective actions in the field. At this point, there is no solid footing, only new territory to explore and potential directions to guide our pedagogical and research journey. We learn from our students as we hope they learn from us. We are all part of discovering more enhanced reflective practices.

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APPENDIX A

Classroom Description Assignment Guidelines

For the purpose of this assignment and subsequent writings, you will assume that you will be teaching a diverse cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic student population (including the following cultural and ethnic backgrounds: African American, Asian, Caucasian, Indian, Latino, Native American, etc.). Based upon your current interests of the age level and content area you intend on teaching, you will identify and discuss the following: *grade level*, *subject matter, student population (regarding ability levels and/or special populations)*. You will need to choose a specific grade level for this assignment because subsequent assignments will be based on the information you commit to here. *(Be realistic about the students and classroom you'll have. All classrooms are diverse.)* Describe your future classroom. What will the classroom look like? What about furniture? Teaching materials? Investigate a couple of floor plans, (or copy those you've seen in your field experiences) and then see which one best fits the needs of *your* classroom. How does this arrangement facilitate your prospective instructional style and strategy? How have you considered/addressed traffic patterns? What about organization of materials for ease of access and use? Consider how you are developing a positive classroom environment. What elements convey warmth and security? How will you get to know your students and build relationships? Include a map/diagram of your ideal classroom, along with a *rationale* explaining the classroom design for what you chose.

General Guidelines for assessing this paper – *It is expected that you will use and reflect on any prior work, assignments, in-class activities and personal experiences when writing this paper. You **MUST CITE** from the **TEXT** (REQUIRED), you also need to cite from a **second source** (i.e., articles, in-class activities, other texts, websites, etc.) that validate or support the ideas you generate and share in this paper. In writing this paper, you are expected to follow the citation and reference list guidelines as well as the "technical writing expectations" presented in the*

Assignment Guidelines to support successful completion of this assignment.

Grading Rubric – 0 - 12 scale

Classroom Description & Set Up Rubric	Excellent	Acceptable	Not Met
• Clarity of writing • Organization & Format (including Reference Page) • Depth/thoroughness of discussion, including use of supportive details, specifics, explanations, rationales and reflective thinking/insight • Citations (2 sources or more, text required as one) **CORRECT** citation format is REQUIRED **Total Points – 1**	2 – 1.84	<1.84 – 1.4	<1.4
	2 – 1.84	<1.84 – 1.4	<1.4
	4 – 3.7	<3.7 – 2.8	<2.8
	4 – 4.7	<3.7 – 2.8	<2.8

APPENDIX B

Self-Assessment Activity

First you should know that EVERYONE in class is being asked to self-assess their work.

This "process" is important for assisting you in:

1) Developing your writing to produce your BEST work;
2) Scaffolding your understanding of what is expected in future assignments for this course and other courses in the teacher education program;
3) Understanding assessment from a teacher's perspective; and
4) Gaining greater insight that assignments are not necessarily just task, rather they are opportunities to develop professionally where one can get of experiences as much as they put into them

DIRECTIONS

Using the assignment guidelines information, assessment rubric, and instructor input provided directly on your paper, you are to self-assess your work. Assign a grade based on that information and present an explanation of why that grade was given.

APPENDIX C

Reflective Activities

In the Classroom Management course, the following activities are presented to stimulate reflective thinking. All activities can be referenced in their formal papers.

Guided Imagery - Through a guided imagery visualization process (prompt presented by instructor), students reflect on their experience as an elementary student. This is followed by stream of consciousness responses to several questions and discussion where volunteers share good and bad memories of their experiences.

Reflection Question - Students are asked to respond to the question "Would you rather be a big fish in a little pond or a little fish in a big pond? Why?" The responses review students' world views and perceptions of self and preferences for interacting with others.

Metaphorical Thinking - These activities were used to explore individual tacit beliefs, self-views and values that may be difficult in articulating, stimulate reflective flow and creative thinking and support "position-taking" skills in listening to and understanding others' views. One activity involved abstract drawings placed around the room. Students examine them and go to the one that best reflects their view of teaching or best resonates how they will define their future teaching practice. They share why they selected this object (some may select the same object for totally different reasons). There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

Jurisprudential Inquiry - This strategy employs critical inquiry discussions of values, beliefs and norms through a hypothetical situation with built-in divisive stances. They often invoke "Jerry Springer" type moments during discussions and conversely encourage "position-taking" thought processes in understanding others' perspectives.

The point of the lesson is to unearth and discuss individual beliefs and values within a democratic setting and to exemplify the impact that a teacher's own ideologies and values can have on instructional decisions. Students hear other's views with rationales and expands their understanding of differing viewpoints and perspectives, which supports development of reflective thinking.

Vignettes/Scenarios - Teaching issues are explored through situational vignettes and scenarios. Students discuss how they would various handle management issues that could occur in the classroom. They are provided with the following guiding prompts: 1) Identify possible reasons for the described problem, 2) Discuss what you would do in this situation, and 3) How could you have prevented it?

APPENDIX D

Teaching Dispositions

Prompting questions for reflection in the "Strengths and Concerns" paper:

What dispositional strength do you possess that will be implemented in your classroom during your first year of teaching? How will you employ this strength in your practice? What if it is ineffective, what will you do to address this challenge?

What dispositional challenge or concern do you believe may impact your teaching? What specific difficulties do you foresee? How will you address this challenge or concern?

Regarding your reflection on teaching dispositions, discuss your perceived readiness for your first year of teaching.

APPENDIX E

My Story

The description of the "My Story" assignment is as follows:

Create a narrative about your life. In it include events that have defined how you see yourself and how you see the world. What cultural attributes play a central role in your life (i.e. ethnicity/race, class, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, language, religion, etc.) How so?

As you write, use the following questions as a guide- be sure to address ALL of them. (Do not use a question/answer format- write in narrative form):

1. How do you define your cultural identity? Who are YOU?
2. Share two or more experiences that have made an impact on you. Think of experiences that may have changed the course of your life- describe and explain the circumstances and the consequences of the events.
3. How have your life experiences affected your relationships with and understanding of persons who are culturally different from you? How do you think this will influence your relationships with your future students? How do you think this will influence your instructional decisions?
4. Who in your life has had the greatest influence with respect to your personal growth? How and why did this person influence you in the way that s/he did? Please be specific.
5. Name and explain 3 or more core beliefs and/or values that guide your life. How did you come to acquire these beliefs? How are they exhibited in your day to day life? Be specific!
6. Share a time when you discovered that a belief you held was untrue. What was the belief and how did you come to realize that it was untrue? Be specific!

APPENDIX F

Course Objectives for the Diversity Course

Objectives: Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the concept of diversity;
2. Explore their cultural identity and how this will affect future teaching;
3. Review the current literature regarding demographic changes in the US and what effects they have on education, teaching methods, and teacher education;
4. Discuss the relationship of sociocultural factors to the teaching and learning processes;
5. Describe approaches, goals and philosophies of multicultural education.

APPENDIX G

Teaching Reflection Guidelines

After you teach the lesson, you will collect the peer feedback forms (See below), reflect on your experience and write the Teaching Reflection paper on what you have learned by answering the following questions:

1) What was effective about this lesson or your instruction?
2) What could be improved?
3) What did you learn about the process of teaching this lesson?
4) What did you learn about managing student learning? and
5) Discuss peer feedback that was insightful or helpful to your reflection on this teaching experience (see below the questions Peers will respond to).

Peer Response group members participating in your lesson will answer the following
Questions on the Peer Feedback Form:

What is/are the most effective aspect(s) of the lesson design or components? (i.e., what promoted the most student interest or learning?)

What is/are the most effective aspect(s) of lesson management? (i.e., what were the organizational strengths? For example - provided complete directions, presented effective transitional flow, solid preparation of materials, appropriately addressed student on-task/off-task behavior, etc.)

What suggestions or recommendations for improvement can you offer? (Must identify something)

APPENDIX H

Video Reflection Guidelines

After viewing the video tape of the lesson you taught, you will critically examine data collected by peers (i.e., use of praise, wait time, use of students' names and ideas, and level of questions asked) and your own thoughts to write a second reflection. This reflection is somewhat open-ended in nature in that you choose the focus of your discussion, but it must demonstrate personal meaningfulness.