### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Call for Manuscripts – Spring 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>In This Edition</td>
<td>Jim Parsons and Bonnie Stelmach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Carol’s Portrait: The Lasting Effects of Early Career Mentoring</td>
<td>Kathleen M. Cowin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Barriers to Post-Secondary Enrollment for Former Foster Youth</td>
<td>Brenda Morton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>The Common Core of a Toothache: Envisioning a Pedagogy of Renewal and Contemplation</td>
<td>David Lee Keiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Living the Flourish Question: Positivity as an Orientation for the Preparation of Teacher Candidates</td>
<td>Sabre Cherkowski and Keith Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Enhancing AI High School Student Success: A Work in Progress</td>
<td>Mapuana C.K. Antonio, Mary Schilling, Sylvia Oliver, and Jennifer E. LeBeau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Personal, Cultural, and Educational Implications of Language Loss/Transformation: A Canadian Context</td>
<td>John W. Friesen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>Language as Social Context and Literacy Development of Students from Diverse Backgrounds</td>
<td>Abir R. El Shaban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>Standardized Testing: An Overview for Pre-Service Teachers</td>
<td>Kurtis Hewson and John Foulsem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Using Technology to Promote In-Service Teacher Education and Enhance Professional Capital</td>
<td>J. Edward Frick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>House of Cards: An edTPA Orientation Activity</td>
<td>Naomi Jeffery Petersen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>Schoology-Supported Classroom Management: A Curriculum Review</td>
<td>Shampa Biswas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Northwest Association of Teacher Educators

NWATE (Northwest Association of Teacher Education) represents a network of educators engaged in discussions and collaboration about teacher education in the Northwest region, with members in Alberta, Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Saskatchewan, Washington, and Oregon.

This association is an ideal opportunity to get involved with other educators concerned with similar issues in our field. This includes in-service and preservice teachers, field supervisors, teacher preparation educators, undergraduate and graduate education students.

@nwate1
http://nwate.com

Northwest Journal of Teacher Education, formerly the Northwest Passage, is published twice a year in the spring and fall by the Northwest Association of Teachers Educators. The journal is published to stimulate lively discussions, contribute to timely educational practice and provide a forum for scholarly writing.

### Copyright and Permissions

Copyright @2013 by the Northwest Association of Teacher Educators. All rights reserved. No part of the material protected by this copyright notice may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without the written permission of NWATE.

The views expressed by contributors to the Northwest Journal of Teacher Education do not necessarily represent an official position of NWATE.
Call for Manuscripts for the Northwest Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 12, Number 1 – Spring 2014

Submission Deadline: March 21, 2014

Schools live in the nexus of social, political, and economic shift and chasm. “Fiscal cliff,” “debt ceiling,” and “prorogued Parliament” are contemporary articulations of some of the struggle in our North American economy and polity. By these we are affected. Within the classroom, consciously and unconsciously, these affections live. For the next issue, we welcome manuscripts based on research studies, and/or theoretically/conceptually based argument reflecting on these prompts:

How are teacher education programs prioritizing—philosophically and practically—the preparation of socially conscious and politically engaged teachers?

How can observations of children and youth resilience and/or struggle be explained by the broader social, political, economic, and/or cultural context?

What are the sources and examples of hope for teachers, school leaders, and students as experienced and gained through learning, extra-curricular life, professional development, community connections, and so on?

As we enjoy Fall and open the door to Winter, we encourage papers examining these questions in methodologically diverse and theoretically rich ways. We are asking you to adopt an appreciative pose if possible, and to deepen our understanding of how our worldly challenges impact upon our schools.
GENERAL ARTICLE REQUIREMENTS

• Cover Page – The title should be in 14 point, bolded, italicized, in Times New Roman, and centered on the cover page with authors’ name(s) and rank four spaces below the title in 12 point and centered. Include institutional affiliations and authors’ e-mail addresses.

• Abstract Page – All manuscripts should include an abstract following the title page. Include the title of the article above the abstract. Limit the abstract to approximately 150 words or less, single-spaced.

Body of Manuscript:

• Use APA guidelines in preparing the manuscript. See http://www.apa.org/journals/faq.html for formatting information.

• The NJTE accepts manuscripts of varying lengths – if length adjustments are required, the editors will contact authors.

• Leave a single space before and after headings.

• Use 12 point font size.

• Use Times New Roman font.

• Use 1” margins throughout the document.

• References and citations should also be prepared using APA guidelines. All table, appendices, footnotes, and bibliographic information will be placed at the end of the article in 12 point Times New Roman.

Please also add this line to your email: This manuscript represents original research and is not under consideration for publication in any other journal, conference proceedings, book, or encyclopedia.

Please submit all articles for submission consideration to nwate@shaw.ca
In this Edition

The Call for Manuscripts for Volume 11, Number 2 for Fall 2013 required scholars to consider “Possibilities of Teacher Education Programs.” The variation of topics and formats in which our colleagues addressed this theme was broad and, yet, from our co-editor perspectives, there was comfortable convergence. For example, social justice is a strong undercurrent in many of these papers; our attention is focused on the under-represented, seldom-considered, or persistently disadvantaged through scholarship about foster youth, American Indian students, and students from non-dominant linguistic communities. There is also contemplation on accountability in both an American and Canadian context. In sum, the variation of the themes is a remarkable reminder of our unity.

We wish to say thank you to both the authors and those who helped put this edition of the Journal together. We were, frankly and wonderfully, overwhelmed with articles. We thank those who authored the article and who then waited an extra month for us to pull the edition together. We also wish to thank our Director of Communications, Kurtis Hewson from the University of Lethbridge, whose time spent organizing and formatting the work expanded with the length of the edition.

We felt compelled to organize this journal issue to reflect the uniqueness of the submissions: “Research Papers” report on findings of empirical studies or theoretical description and/or argument. The second section “Reviews: Practice and Curriculum” provide reviews of pedagogical approaches and resources.

Article One: Editor’s Introductory Essay

In this Introductory Essay, Jim Parsons, co-editor of The Northwest Journal of Teacher Education, synthesizes his research over the past fifteen years to address the question “What have we learned about teacher collaboration?” In his essay titled “Work Less, Party More: A Review Essay about Collaborative Teacher Professional Learning” suggests that collaborative professional learning focuses on four connected ideas: (1) teachers share with each other; (2) towards building a common vision; (3) with learning as the primary goal;
and (4) constantly assess their success. Thus, professional learning is about improving learning and increasing teachers’ and students’ knowledge and power.

**Research Papers**

**Article Two: Carol’s portrait: The lasting effects of early career mentoring**

Kathleen Cowin, Assistant Professor in Teacher and Counselor Education at the Oregon States University—Cascades Campus, examined the question: What are the long term effects of a beginning teacher’s mentoring experiences on practice as a veteran teacher? Using portraiture as a methodology, Kathleen interviewed 10 teachers with minimum five years teaching experience, and who had experienced early career mentoring. Observation data augmented interviews. This paper highlights the portrait of one teacher—Carol—whose reflections after 25 years of teaching were particularly suitable for engaging in exploring of how early career mentoring impacts upon one’s teaching career.

**Article Three: Barriers to post-secondary enrollment for former foster youth: How teachers can make a difference**

Brenda Morton, Assistant Professor in the School of Education at George Fox University, shares insights from her phenomenological study into former foster youth’s experiences with the transition to post-secondary education. With specific attention to the barriers and supports of applying to post-secondary programs, these 11 men and women highlighted finances, housing, and application requirements and procedures as areas that high school teachers and career counselors may consider as they mentor foster youth through seemingly straightforward, or at least taken for granted, steps toward college enrollment.

**Article Four: The Common Core of a Toothache: Envisioning A Pedagogy of Renewal and Contemplation**

In his article, David Lee Keiser from Montclair State University makes a case for the metaphor of “Sea Mind” as seen through the lens of pedagogy and describes the importance of his perspective for teaching and teacher education. As a teacher educator who has engaged both educational and contemplative work, his essay introduces the concept of a
Sea Mind’s relationship to contemplative teaching and explores the challenge of maintaining healthy selves in a raging river of high-stakes testing and test preparation and the rough waters of public school reform.

**Article Five: Living the Flourish Question: Positivity as an Orientation for the Preparation of Teacher Candidates**

In this article, Sabre Cherkowski and Keith Walker unpack taken-for-granted elements in a question central to their research and teaching: “What if the primary role of teachers is to learn how to thrive as educators and, in so doing, to continually co-explore and facilitate all means by which everyone in their learning communities flourishes most of the time?” As they explore a positive orientation to teaching and research, they work to understand the potential for generative and positive growth in themselves and school communities. Their article focuses upon seeking to create and sustain personal and professional flourishing at the heart of educational practice and consider how flourishing may be central to what it means to become a teacher.

**Article Six: Enhancing AI high school student success: A work in progress**

Through the collaborative efforts of Mapuana Antonio, Mary Schilling, Sylvia Oliver, and Jennifer LeBeau, we gain insights into the first year of a specific project which was part of a federally-funded initiative aimed at preparing rural American Indian youth for successful transition to work or post-secondary study. The U.S. Department of Education’s Indian Education Demonstration Grants for Indian Children program places particular emphasis on enhancements that may encourage youth to pursue post-secondary choices in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Reflections after the first year shed light on strategies and practices that have shown promise, as well as serendipitous outcomes for instructors in the program.

**Article Seven: Personal, cultural, and educational implications of language loss/transformation: A Canadian context**
John Friesen from the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary (Alberta, Canada) provides an engaging account of language loss, transformation, and preservation, and the personal, social, cultural implications of language shift. John’s personal reflections on replacing Low German with English as a child, in tandem with a carefully researched account of various language communities in Canada, alerts us to the unique opportunities and challenges teachers face with respect to the multicultural, multi-linguistic character of the contemporary classroom. He punctuates his paper with four thoughtful observations with respect to cultural diversity in schools.

**Article Eight: Language as social context and literacy development of students from diverse backgrounds**

Abir El Shaban, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Washington State University, invokes Cummins’ model for social empowerment of minority students to suggest an alternative way of thinking about the empowerment of school communities. This paper provides a thorough explanation of Cummins' theoretical framework.

**Article Nine: Standardized testing: An overview for pre-service teachers**

Kurtis Hewson and John Poulsen from the Faculty of Education at the University Lethbridge (Alberta, Canada) provide a quasi-prolegomenon on the issue of standardized testing. With pre-service teachers in mind, Kurtis and John define and interrogate standardized testing, offering to pre-service teachers a framework of key considerations that essentially call for balancing caution against and utilization of standardized tests.

**Reviews: Practice and Curriculum**

**Article Ten: Technology: A tool to enhance professional capital**

This paper provides direction for teachers and school administrators interested in employing technology as a vehicle for enhancing professional knowledge. Referencing literature that argues the value of collaboration, J. Edward Frick bridges the question of why collaboration matters to professional capital with how to create an environment conducive to such an aim. Ten ideas are offered.
Article Eleven: House of cards: An edTPA Orientation Activity

Naomi Jeffery Petersen, Associate Professor of Education at Central Washington University, shares a theoretically-informed activity to support teachers who are impacted by Washington’s edTPA, the Teacher Performance Assessment. Step-by-step instructions are complemented with explanations of the conceptual connection between the activity and the edTPA requirements.

Article Twelve: Schoology-supported classroom management: A curriculum review

Shampa Biswas describes Schoology, a web-based tool with potential to support collaboration and improve student learning. Appropriate for all levels of education (K-12, higher education) and a variety of learning contexts (e.g. business), the Schoology website provides a platform for managing student information, program planning, and administration. Shampa provides an assessment of key learning criteria, and discusses the educational importance of the Web 2.0 world.

Jim Parsons
Professor
Department of Secondary Education
University of Alberta

Abstract

This article reviews the positive aspects of teacher collaboration. The author’s latest research focuses specifically upon teacher professional learning and teacher efficacy; and, findings in this research suggest that, of all the reported opportunities for positive professional learning, the highest percentage of teachers note that collaboration with colleagues is the “best” professional learning. In addition, the author’s previous research also had much to say about teacher collaboration. This article synthesizes this research and attempts to pull together foundational understandings that would help articulate “key attributes” of teacher collaboration.
Introduction

Professional development as a term and as a strategy has run its course. The future of improvement, indeed of the profession itself, depends on a radical shift in how we conceive learning and the conditions in which teachers and students work. Michael Fullan (2007, p.35).

My current research study is about teacher professional learning. I am interested in how teachers learn. Specifically, what can teachers tell us about their own best learning? We are only now in the midst of analyzing data; however, one finding sticks out. More than 80% of the teachers we interviewed and surveyed told us that collaboration with other teachers was the best professional learning they have ever experienced. If we generalize from the other things teachers say, that percentage would probably rise much higher. For example, some teachers told us they found conferences to be their best professional learning because they had a chance to “talk with colleagues about what they had heard.”

Teachers teaching other teachers – colleagues working together to better understand teaching and learning – is the core of collaborative teacher professional learning. Although the professional learning landscape differs today than even ten years ago, at its core, the PLC (Professional Learning Communities) movement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) was centered on teacher collaboration. When I advise teachers how they might best work to build collaborative professional learning, I tell them not try to build a professional learning community; instead, I tell them to commit themselves to two key educational goals: (1) Working Less and (2) Partying More.

Building Relationships

During my own research, teachers repeatedly reported that relationships were keys to teaching and learning success. For them, collaborative teacher professional learning meant building a community of teachers who enjoyed working and learning together. My teaching experience, supported by my research over the past 15 years, supports the efficacy of teaching and learning relationships – between students, between students and teachers, and between teachers. It seems that simple; and, sometimes I think we focus on word #1 (teacher) and word #2 (learning), but forget word #3 (community).
Furthermore, collaborative teacher professional learning research suggests that learning outcomes should be the primary criteria for assessing teaching and learning success. I am not alone in these findings. Martin Haberman (2004) saw that, if schools were to become learning communities, teachers had to “share a common vision that learning is the primary purpose for their association and the ultimate value to preserve in their workplace” (p. 52). Haberman also believed showing a love of learning was the best way to engage learner enthusiasm. He too believed teachers should “party more.”

My work suggests that collaborative professional learning focuses on four connected ideas: (1) teachers share with each other; (2) towards building a common vision; (3) with learning as the primary goal; and (4) constantly assess their success. Thus, professional learning is about improving learning and increasing teachers’ and students’ knowledge and power. My recent research (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2011) suggests that power is best shared; that success is best celebrated; and that dreams are the best goals. As Paulo Freire once noted, the purpose of literacy is to “diminish the distance between dreaming and doing.”

As I consider what I read, those who study professional learning agree on five keys: (1) leaders should support and share leadership; (2) teachers must believe in their collective power to create change; (3) visions and values should be shared; (4) communities must be built; and (5) teaching ideas should be shared. Let me discuss these five attributes briefly.

Key Attribute #1: Supportive and shared leadership

For supportive and shared leadership to emerge, principals must sanction and nurture the entire staff’s development. Principals must share authority, build capacity that helps others work, and participate without dominating. Principals must create an environment where teachers can learn.

Key Attribute #2: Collective Creativity

To build collective creativity, teachers should work together, actively sharing successes and ideas. Expansive patterns of thinking must be nurtured. Teachers must engage in considered and reflective conversation. Teacher research must become standard practice that informs decision-making.
Key Attribute #3: Shared Vision and Values

The goal for collaborative teacher professional learning should never waver from student learning. Teachers should talk together about what they believe should happen. They should converse critically – making the familiar “unfamiliar.” In other words, current practices and visions should be examined with the “common good” as the conversation focus.

Key Attribute #4: Supportive Communities

What are the natures of communities that promote teacher professional learning? Four areas stand out: (1) supportive physical conditions, (2) supportive skills and values, (3) supportive teacher characteristics, and (4) supportive student characteristics. The following physical conditions help support collaborative teacher professional learning. Teachers must have time to meet and talk and must have a space that promotes conversation.

The first value that helps teachers engage in collaborative professional learning is their belief that teaching is interdependent – that is, similar to other teachers’ work. From this belief emerges a willingness to give and accept feedback and the active respect and trust teachers must have for each other. Principals, my research has found, are keys to what happens in schools; and, as noted, principals must be supportive. A principal’s work includes building clear cultural norms that help develop a teaching and learning culture and finding time for collaborative teacher professional learning in the school’s schedule. Principals also support teacher professional learning by transparently working to create open communication. Simply said, teachers must have and know they have administrative support.

In my research experience, the following characteristics promote collaborative teacher professional learning. First, teachers must have strong communication structures. Although principals help create these structures, teachers must engage them. Second, teachers must feel empowered to act upon their beliefs. Teachers who hold positive attitudes toward school, students, and change engage in continuous collective inquiry and avoid cynicism. Teachers who focus on improvement as they work together share a sense of purpose. Such teachers engage in collegial relationships and share in school-based decision-making.
Finally, teachers and principals do not carry the burden for teacher professional learning alone. Students must actively embrace the community. Students must be engaged, which, my research suggests, is best done through “conversational pedagogies” – assessment for learning, problem-based pedagogy, etc. Finally, caring relationships between students, teachers, staff, and parents must be promoted.

Key Attribute #5: Shared Personal Practice

Finally, teachers must share their practices with each other. Teachers can share ideas about how they teach. Teachers can visit each other’s classrooms as peers helping peers. Teachers can share successes and failures and support those who need help, which, interestingly, is sometimes all of us.

What does collective professional learning look like?

A decade ago, Rick Dufour (2004) named three characteristics of PLC’s that have stood the test of time: (1) ensuring that students learn – his focus was not so much on teaching as on learning; (2) a culture of collaboration; and (3) a focus on results. Gone are the days when Dufour’s (2004) ideas set rules for building PLC’s or evaluating whether a PLC was really a PLC: although Dufour’s work was visionary, professional learning has moved past his lead. Today, teacher professional learning comes in many forms – teachers working groups whose goals center on curriculum building and assessing learning, peer coaching, and all forms of lead teacher models – including mentorship. Even school governance has become a shared practice of professional learning.

In addition to working as the Director of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) for fifteen years, I was for five years Director of Alternative Delivery Graduate Programs (the Masters of Educational Studies – MES) at the University of Alberta. In these jobs, I saw conversations help isolated teachers become part of a community of learning and children become part of that conversation. AISI, throughout almost fifteen years of existence, improved teachers’ morale, skills, and sense of professionalism as teachers worked in teams to build curriculum, develop assessment tools, share teaching strategies, and implement school improvement.
As AISI Director, virtually every project I reviewed noted the value of teachers learning, reflecting, and sharing resources and teaching ideas. As MES Director, I saw how powerful cohort graduate programs could be. Our completion rate for graduate students was over 98%, compared to an average under 50% for other graduate programs. I worked with teachers who increased their own professional learning by collaborating in action research and school improvement. I came to believe professional learning worked best when teachers (1) were collaborative, (2) focused on student learning; (3) sustained relationships; (4) decentralized and distributed leadership; and, (5) engaged in on-going inquiry and reflection (about curriculum, pedagogy, school climate, politics, community, etc.)

As I have considered collaborative teacher professional learning for the past two years, both through reading the literature and by engaging teachers in research data collection, I have come to the following insights.

First, collaborative professional learning should begin with teachers' self-identified needs. As teachers share their needs and formulate ideas with colleagues about how these needs might be addressed, they come to own their own teaching and learning. They begin to advance ideas about how to benefit their students and communities. As Jalongo (1991) long ago told us, they come to institute collaborative teacher professional learning by developing mutual trust and respect, engage ideas and values, assume responsibility for their own actions, freely explore alternatives, create and innovate; and learn by interacting with colleagues.

Collaborative professional learning is not complex in practice or philosophy. The most important element in improving teaching and learning is the commitment of teachers. Here, I agree with Dufour (2004, p. 11). Does collaborative teacher professional learning always work? No. And Fullan (2001) offers reasons why it won’t – teacher and administration overload, teacher isolation, Group Think, narrow perceptions of teachers’ roles, a lack of vision, and an understandably cynical history of failed or constantly morphing reforms. In some schools, cynicism reigns and a “culture of whining” absorbs teachers in “if-only” talk. Some teachers have lost a moral compass, and some lack a desire to empower their own learning.
As a result, barriers to collaborative teacher professional learning exist. These include both individual and school resistance to change; impatience that focuses on immediate results rather than engages process; top-down initiatives that undermine teacher ownership; and a lack of time and money. Obviously, errors are made. We often fail to understand school culture, impose change without building solid support, engage too much change too quickly, ignore adult learning principles, assume relationships build themselves, and fail to translate professional learning into professional practice.

What to do? I believe, to encourage collaborative teacher professional learning, schools should define school goals collectively to create shared vision. Teachers can collaborate and partner with communities and parents. Schools can merge collaborative teacher professional learning with professional development. Schools can define collaborative teacher professional learning broadly to include students. Finally, schools can create space where teachers converse openly about their work.

Teachers can collaborate toward goals: there are issues to study and problems to solve. And, there are parties to be had when goals are reached. In my experience, successful collaborative professional learning achieves two goals: it accomplishes the task at hand and it edifies a collaborative community committed both to action and relationships that are sustainable through adversity, dissent, and discouragement. The test of collaborative professional learning is not collegiality per se: it is how collaborative relationships advance student and teacher learning. Perhaps the biggest success of collaborative teacher professional learning is changed school cultures; and, the biggest cultural change is eradicating teacher isolation. Unless one is a first-order solipsist, one invites others to parties. Collaborative teacher professional learning means teachers are no longer lonely, but it also means teachers give up autonomy – a fear only relationships can overcome.

Collaborative teacher professional learning thrives on inquiry. We are moving as teachers towards the light of empowering action research. Most teachers’ first language is the language of best practices – of what works. The things teachers naturally want to share are best practices, their successes (and, where they really trust, their failures and questions), and how they have reached their learning goals. It is almost passé to declare that teachers
already are researchers – inquiring naturally to complete the complex work of teaching. However, teachers are not trained to be meta-cognitive about this research. We seldom ask teachers to legitimate their inquiry, which collaborative teacher professional learning demands they do.

For teachers, collaborative professional learning is both easier and harder than it looks. It is easier because as soon as teachers commit, it works. It is harder because the hegemony of teaching isolation breeds cynicism easier than collaboration. Furthermore, without good models for engaging collaborative teacher professional learning, few recipes exist. Permutations exist within and across schools, districts, grade levels, and subject areas. Finally, it is easier to understand good relationships than successful student learning, which is a contested concept at best.

Collaborative teacher professional learning begins with conversations about learning needs, achieving goals, and appropriate assessment. Collaborative teacher professional learning includes teamwork built upon appreciating and learning from different teachers skills and experiences. Hence, each teacher who collaborates brings both individual and collaborative experiences and skills.

**Finally**

Collaborative teacher professional learning is an exercise in hope – hope that things can improve and that teachers can activate that improvement. As Sergiovanni (2004) notes, placing hope at the core of collaborative teacher professional learning provides encouragement, promotes clear thinking and informed action, and gives teachers insight to promote learning and solve educational problems. Merging collaborative teacher professional learning and professional development is a key.

Collaborative teacher professional learning must be ongoing and transparent. There is little novel about good collaborative teacher professional learning. It quietly works to professionalize teachers. The “sit-down, shut-up, write-notes” professional metaphor is alien to collaborative teacher professional learning. As one Alberta school division suggests, learning honors the past, creates a clear vision for the future, and pays attention to the
present. Conversation is the means by which to travel this journey (Rocky View School District No. 41).

By working with teachers in collaborative teacher professional learning, I have learned at least four important lessons. First, being forced from one’s comfort zone can help. Standing pat makes change difficult. Second, teachers have different strengths. Realizing and utilizing these strengths is a key to productive change. Third, I have learned to celebrate – and not distrust – teacher diversity. Many of my best relationships emerged from partnering with opposite personalities and skills. Finally, I am reminded that we all respond to encouragement. Hence, I encourage us all to engage collaboratively as we promote change in teacher education.
References


Carol’s Portrait: The Lasting Effects of Early Career Mentoring

Kathleen M. Cowin
Assistant Professor
Oregon State University Cascades Campus

Abstract

Through portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), the author creates a word portrait of a veteran teacher’s beginning career mentoring experiences. The portrait illuminates long-term effects of the teacher’s early career mentoring experiences on her teaching practice as a now veteran teacher. The study concludes that the teacher’s early career mentoring experiences helped shape her 25 year teaching career. Three themes emerged from the portrait and may offer insights for current mentors in developing mentoring practices and programs: (a) an invitation to develop a mentoring relationship, (b) supportive mentoring actions, and (c) mentors as models. The study concludes with recommendations for mentoring practices and for teacher education and school district mentoring programs.
Introduction

The first years of a teacher’s career are filled with many challenges and are often difficult, so much so that many teachers leave the profession within the first few years (Howard, 2003; Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Jambor, Patterson & Jones, 1997; Kopkowski, 2008; Stern, 2003). Many researchers have investigated how mentoring helps support beginning teachers and often helps them overcome difficulties in their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Huling-Austin, 1990, 1992; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Little, 1990; Moir, 2009; Moir & Gless, 2001; Odell, 1987; Strong, 2005; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008).

Much of the research on mentoring beginning teachers has focused on reducing attrition, the mentoring process, and benefits of mentoring (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Cockburn, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2001, 2003, 2005; Heller, 2004; Howard, 2003; Huling & Resta, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Odell & Huling, 2000). However, I have not been able to find studies that examined the long-term effects of beginning teacher mentoring on teacher practice over the years.

For this study, I asked: “What are the long-term effects of a beginning teacher’s mentoring experiences on practice as a veteran teacher?” This research question was addressed through the use of portraiture.

Definition of Mentoring

Multiple descriptions of mentoring can be found in the literature. Galvez-Hjornevik (1986) suggested the term mentor means “teacher, coach, trainer, positive role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector, sponsor, and successful leader” (p. 6). This definition implies that a mentor is someone capable of taking on many roles. Odell and Ferraro (1992) suggested the focus of mentoring beginning teachers is to provide support and guidance, facilitate professional growth, and promote teacher retention (p. 200). Enerson (2001) noted that the word mentor, which historically was a noun, has now shifted to a verb (p. 8). She observed that from this shift the reader understands that mentoring “is an activity having even less to do with showing others what we can do than with helping them perceive what
they can do” (p. 8). Enerson explained that this change in language brings into focus how mentoring has come to mean a process that is focused on the learner (p. 8). Daloz (1999) focused on the needs of adult learners involved in mentoring relationships where the aim of education was to develop the whole person rather than focus on specific knowledge or skills with the hallmark of good teaching being to provide care (p. xix). Roberts (2000) described a phenomenological review of essential attributes of mentoring, and would add two additional components to the preceding definitions of mentoring: a teaching-learning process and a reflective practice (p. 151).

Review of Relevant Research on Mentoring

Feiman-Nemser (2003) commented, “By most accounts, new teachers need three or four years to achieve competence and several more to reach proficiency” (p. 27). She studied three well-regarded induction programs asking the mentors, principals, and new teachers to reflect on the question, “What exactly do new teachers need to learn that they could not have learned before they began teaching?” (p. 26). These identified categories of themes were related to teaching to the needs of the students, not just from the textbook; understanding and incorporating the required teaching standards into their instruction; and, understanding detailed aspects of instructional strategies (pp. 26-27).

Heller (2004) endorsed a mentoring model in which “mentors, supports, and scaffolding should be in place all along the way toward becoming a competent and consummate teacher” (p. 7). He looked at many parts of pre-service and beginning teacher practices. Heller examined differences between his own professional development practices and those of a social worker, who described an ongoing process of professional development that included sitting down with her supervisor and discussing her cases and other possible approaches. Heller compared this experience to his own less positive experience as a teacher of having his supervisor “walk into my classroom, take a bunch of notes, and then put a final document in my mailbox” (p. 70).

Carver (2004) stated that often beginning teachers “initially believed that acknowledging the problems they experienced in the classroom was akin to committing professional suicide” (p. 59). She emphasized the need for new teachers “to feel safe as learners” (p. 59).
Participants in the beginning teacher professional development program Carver evaluated cited the benefits of the program as learning “new classroom tips and strategies, the opportunity to troubleshoot common problems, a chance to learn from other participants' strengths, or spending time getting to know one another” (p. 59). Carver reported that high levels of trust and a clear separation of what Heller (2004) called “supervision” versus “evaluation” were needed to enable a member of the administrative team to join in the meetings.

Combined, these studies help describe potential benefits of mentoring from the point of view of beginning teachers who were just entering the profession or were relatively new to the profession (typically having served for less than five years). However, fewer studies have examined the early mentoring and induction experiences recalled by now-veteran teachers, probing for what they learned from their early career mentoring experiences. This paper presents one portrait of how mentoring of one early career teacher, Carol, affected her practice over her entire career and is from a larger, unpublished, study of mentoring practices used with beginning teachers. Through portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), veteran teachers’ stories about their early mentoring experiences shed light on how those experiences affected their practice over many years.

Theoretical Framework

Telling stories is how we make meaning of our experiences (Bullough, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). Sharing stories is a sharing of self in relation to others. The role of social interaction in facilitating learning was studied by Vygotsky (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Vygotsky’s work described how in relationship we “can rediscover mastered knowledge, ask new questions, and explore new avenues of inquiry, which creates the ability to discern deeper and more nuanced meanings from the material being revisited (Vygotsky, 1978)” (Cardwell, 2002, p. 76). Telling our mentoring stories is a way of learning from our experiences and having our audiences learn by integrating these experiences with their own. According to Jalongo and Isenberg (1995), teacher stories are significant in the teaching-learning process (p. xxxi). Teacher stories draw out other stories,
help clarify a professional perspective and then lead to insights into the meaning of teaching (Jalongo & Isenberg, p. 10).

Witherell and Noddings (1991) suggested that narrative and dialogue are powerful aspects of reflection and can provide opportunities for the development of relationships and the foundation for ethical action (p. 8). They used stories to describe how knowing and caring are woven in an intricate design and how “stories call us to consider what we know, how we know, and what and whom we care about” (p. 13).

**Portraiture Methodology**

Portraiture was used as a way to capture mentoring stories by allowing the researcher to integrate the participants’ answers to prescribed probes used in the study with the researcher’s observations, interactions, and discussions with the participants – the blending of art and science. In portraiture the researcher’s voice is present through her or his own understanding and experiences of the setting. Chapman (2007) echoes the visibility of the researcher in portraiture to “produce a full picture of an event or person that tells as much about the subject as it does about the researcher, or portraitist” (p. 157).

The portrait presented in this paper is from a longer word portrait that has been excerpted due to its length. A word portrait is shaped by dialogue between the researcher (portraitist) and the participant (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). The focal components of context, voice, and relationship from which the emergent themes surfaced, and the aesthetic whole, the portrait, was written gives a glimpse into the participant’s early career mentoring experiences.

A portrait is “designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). The interviews, which began with prepared questions, were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. My reflections each time I interacted with the teachers, visited their schools and transcribed the interviews became what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis call the “Impressionistic Record” (p. 188). The Impressionistic Record was where I recorded ongoing observations.
and reflections from the interviews and observations as they were happening, and later as I reflected on my interviews and observations. Often, as I listened to the tapes during transcription, questions would puzzle me or a perspective would emerge that I would want to consider the next time I interacted with the participant or visited the participant’s site. For example, as I listened to the tapes I wrote down questions I had about what the participant had said, and I wrote notes about tone of voice and recurring themes I heard. I also noted in the Impressionistic Record things I saw happening in the school setting, interactions the participant had with others, and details about the artifacts I collected. By constantly reviewing and reflecting on the notes in my Impressionistic Record I was also able to develop an action plan for future visits by drawing out points and themes to investigate further.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, a critical difference between the methodology of portraiture and ethnography is that “ethnographers listen to a story while portraitists listen for a story” (1997, p. 13). Portraiture, with its emphasis on wholeness, relationships, voice, authenticity, and listening for a story captures a ripe blend of science and art. The analysis was contained within the process of forming, shaping and writing the portrait.

After applying the essential features of context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes separately to the portrait, the portrait was shaped one more time, applying these essential elements in developing what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis called the aesthetic whole.

Using notes recorded in my Impressionistic Record, the interviews, site visits, listening to the tape recordings, and completing the transcriptions of the tape recordings provided a rich backdrop from which to begin the shaping of the word portrait. Using the multiple aspects of each lens – context, voice, and relationship – allowed an initial fleshing out of emergent themes for each participant in the larger study. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described the five aspects of emergent themes that are applied in constructing the portrait:

First, we listen for repetitive refrains that are spoken (or appear) frequently and persistently, forming a collective expression of commonly held views. Second, we listen for resonant metaphors, poetic and symbolic expressions that reveal the ways actors [participants] illuminate and experience their realities. Third, we listen for the
themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals that seem to be important to organizational continuity and coherence. Fourth, we use triangulation to weave together the threads of data converging from a variety of sources. And finally, we construct themes and reveal patterns among perspectives that are often experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the actors [participants]. (p. 193)

Through this layering of the data and application of multiple strategies, such as interviews, observations, and site visits, triangulation occurs.

In the development of the aesthetic whole the tensions of blending art and science are encountered. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) state that the motivations that guide portraiture are to “inform and inspire, to document and transform, to speak to the head and the heart” (p. 243). Critiques of portraiture (English, 2000; Hackmann, 2002) as a methodology open a dialogue about how to explore the many facets of paradox in portraiture, such as the presence of the voice of the researcher and the search for what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call “goodness” (p. 9). This ability of portraiture “to embrace contradictions, … to document the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human experiences and social relationships” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9) offers a glimpse into the reality of the paradoxes that exist in educational settings. The portrait of Carol that follows was developed and analyzed in this manner.

**Study Process**

Carol was one of those selected for the study which included 10 candidates who were: veteran teachers who had taught for at least five years; had been mentored; and who could recall stories from their early career mentoring experiences. Four candidates who met the study qualifications participated in the larger study.

Carol completed the initial screening interview, which took about 30 minutes, and two additional interviews. It was not possible from the initial screening to determine the nature of the mentoring experiences, nor whether these experiences were formal or informal arrangements. Thus, two additional interviews each lasting two hours or so were conducted
based on interview questions and probes. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Participant checks were completed to ensure accuracy of data.

In addition, I observed participants on four to six occasions in their classrooms and schools, and often met with them following the observation. More than 60 hours were spent in interviews, observations, discussions, and transcriptions for each participant. The participants’ responses to the interview questions and probes, their own stories of how they entered the profession and of their teaching and mentoring experiences, and information from my observations and Impressionistic Record, were woven into individual word portraits illuminating the participants’ mentoring stories. The following are excerpts of one of the portraits from the study – the portrait of Carol, a 25-year veteran teacher (all the names used in the study are pseudonyms).

A Portrait of Carol

Upon arrival at the school I noted it had a well-used but maintained-with-care look. As I walked to the main office to check in, I saw that someone had taken time to create a beautiful arrangement of fall flowers which greeted me at the door. I rang the doorbell to be admitted into the hall outside the school office and announced myself over the intercom. As the door buzzed open for me, I noticed the hallway was getting dark. I saw the lights on in Carol’s room, and as I walked in she was busy tidying up from the end of the school day. We chatted as she finished up and then she invited me to have a seat at the table at the back of the classroom. As I sank low into the primary student sized chair, I remembered my years of teaching Kindergarten from these tiny chairs and reflected about the perspective one has as an adult from this height of chair. The room seemed larger than when I first came in. It was a great vantage point from which to see how full of life Carol’s classroom was. There were posters and decorations everywhere on the walls and boards. There was an orderly arrangement of student desks surrounded by an area for small group work, a computer center, and large bulletin board display area. The huge wall of windows on one side of the classroom looked out onto a beautiful fall scene of trees, vibrant with shades of green turning red, orange, yellow, and brown.
As we began the second interview, focusing on the stories she had chosen to tell about her mentoring experiences as a beginning teacher, Carol smiled and reminded me that it was more than 25 years ago when she first began teaching. Carol pointedly said that both stories she would relate were from the same mentor, another first grade teacher. She explained that the reason she had chosen these two stories is because in one her mentor provided an impetus for Carol to search for her own, different approach, and in the other, her mentor was a model who Carol mirrors today. As Carol began to tell her first story, I made a note in my Impressionistic Record about how animated Carol was; her hands moving as she talked; how many details she included and how she seemed to be at ease as she leaned in at our first grade sized table.

**The Dot System Story**

Carol had been hired to come in each afternoon to relieve Mrs. Royal. When she was hired her relationship with Mrs. Royal was not formally established as a mentor-mentee relationship, but their relationship soon took on this character. Carol explained that she felt that, because Mrs. Royal had been teaching in the school and in that very classroom for so many years, and since Carol was a beginning teacher, it was clear to her that she was the subordinate to Mrs. Royal. Their relationship began with this unspoken arrangement. Carol explained that, because Mrs. Royal had been teaching for so many years, and Carol was only teaching during the afternoons, she decided to use Mrs. Royal’s system of classroom routines and management. Carol explained that she also felt it was less confusing for her students not to have to change routines, procedures or classroom rules each day.

As a new teacher, Carol had been experiencing a few difficulties in classroom management and had tried to discuss the difficulties with her mentor. Mrs. Royal encouraged Carol to just continue using her management system and the students would come around. Carol continued setting up her story by describing how she tried several times to have conversations about classroom management with Mrs. Royal, and how each time her questions were met with Mrs. Royal’s advice to just continue using her system and all would work out. Carol’s own developing philosophy about classroom management was
challenged by Mrs. Royal’s advice to just continue using the system she had developed and which was already in place.

Mrs. Royal’s classroom management system was well-known in the school. It was called the “dot system.” She displayed a large chart with each student’s name right next to the classroom door and the chart was posted for the entire school year. Mrs. Royal conveyed her assessment of each student’s academic progress and conduct using a colored dot system. There were gold, silver, blue, and white dots. Gold was for outstanding, followed by silver for superior; blue for satisfactory; and white was the color demarking unsatisfactory progress. After students earned a certain number of gold dots they received a special trophy that Mrs. Royal made herself. The reputation of these trophies was known throughout the school community. The reason white dots were dreaded by her students was because, when they were given, the student had to go to the chart and put a white dot on top, covering up one of the coveted gold dots.

Carol described how she had been having a problem in managing a particular student’s challenging behavior. When she tried to talk with Mrs. Royal about this problem, Mrs. Royal told Carol that this student never gave her any trouble. I made a note in my Impressionistic Record about Carol’s tone of voice and facial expressions as she relived the memory of Mrs. Royal saying that this student never gave her any trouble. Carol described how even after all these years she still clearly remembered how she felt after a particularly trying afternoon with this same student challenging her time and again. Carol continued setting the scene describing how the student had been really pushing the limits all afternoon and had been warned several times saying, “That afternoon, I just lost it and I said, ‘Alright Don, give yourself a white dot.’ So all of a sudden, after one white dot he was the perfect little guy.”

This event was pivotal for Carol. She described it this way, “I made a snap decision to put the power of the white dot to work to bring the student’s behavior back in line.” She described him as changing his behavior immediately and being very compliant after having to cover one of his gold dots with a white dot. Carol said she watched closely for some sign
that he was bothered by the white dot next to his name on the chart that was displayed for all to see, but she saw no such sign. The problem was, it did bother Carol.

Carol described how each afternoon she would walk into the classroom and there on the chart by the door was the white dot she had given Don. She described this experience as the beginning of a journey of self-discovery, challenge, and change. The result of her work and reflection about the dot system caused her to examine what it was that she did not like about it. From this self-study and reflection, she created a new classroom management tool that exemplified her own philosophy about how to help students develop self-managing practices. Carol stated she felt that as the teacher she was charged to help her students grow, not only in self-control but also in self-esteem.

As Carol explored her uneasiness with the dot system, the focus became issues of self-esteem, optimism, and believing that each day we should start fresh and renewed. Carol described how she went on to create a different student self-management tool that was kept by each student and not displayed on a chart. Carol continued explaining that another key part of her philosophy about student self-management was that she really wanted students to understand the choices they made and why their choice was being scrutinized and evaluated as needing to change. Carol said that she didn’t believe there was much dialogue with the dot system. She wanted her students to dialogue about their self-management choices and to understand the array of choices they could have made in any particular situation.

The Stomped Bug Story

Carol’s second story was one in which she described Mrs. Royal as the “hero.” Carol related how she could remember Mrs. Royal telling her many stories of the formidable power teachers have to model actions that define life-long values for students. As a mentor, Mrs. Royal believed this power was found in the simplicity of actions that are lived out in our classrooms each day.

Carol described Mrs. Royal as a master teacher of science. She would gather the children every day, sitting around her on the carpeted area of the classroom floor, and read amazing
stories from scientific discoveries, facts, and experiments. The lesson each story held was brought to life through Mrs. Royal’s dramatic storytelling methods, and then the lesson’s objective was sharply focused by having the children apply the stories to their own discoveries. Carol enjoyed watching Mrs. Royal teach science and stopped in often in the morning, before she relieved Mrs. Royal, to observe. The story began one afternoon as Carol was teaching a social studies lesson. During this lesson one of Carol’s students was more focused on a bug crawling on the floor than in following her lesson presentation. Carol walked over and stepped on the bug, smashing it firmly saying, “We don’t need to pay attention to the bug. Focus here on me, we are learning about social studies. I don’t want you paying attention to the bug.”

A few mornings later, Carol was enjoying watching Mrs. Royal teach a science lesson when a student noticed a bug crawling on the carpet area where they were seated. The student got up and promptly walked over and stomped on the bug with assured authority. Carol immediately saw herself in her student’s actions. Mrs. Royal stopped reading and with a stricken look on her face (and to Carol’s dismay) began a stern commentary on the beauty, preciousness and inter-related nature of all life forms and how could this student have killed one of our fellow creatures with such an assured stomp. Carol’s description of the student’s reaction to Mrs. Royal’s words painted the picture of an almost slow-motion effect. The student’s face slumped from his proud smile following the killing stomp to a look of deflation. Carol described how he seemed to melt back into his spot on the carpet.

Mrs. Royal’s lesson for all her students, included in that moment of deep reflection for Carol, was our individual responsibility for respect of all life forms – even bugs. The unintended additional lesson for Carol was the power of teachers in modeling behaviors for their students, reinforcing what Mrs. Royal had previously discussed with her. Carol described how she reflected on this event and how it changed how she acted from that moment on. The very next opportunity when a wayward spider was found in the classroom, Carol was very conscious of what she had learned from Mrs. Royal. She explained to her students that the spider needed to be in his home outside and she gently took the spider and put him outside the window. Carol said that now any wayward bugs that are found in the classroom present not only opportunities to discuss many science concepts such as habitat
and ecosystems, but are also a reminder of what she learned from this story, the formidable power she had to model values in action to her students. Carol’s openness to self-reflection on her own attitudes, actions, and the power of her attitudes and actions to be models for her students continued to be a central focus of her educational philosophy. Carol summarized by saying, “It is amazing at this grade level what you say, and what they remember and do.”

Discussion of Carol’s Portrait

Carol’s portrait reveals how some of her mentoring experiences and the stories of those experiences were still shaping her practice 25 years later as she related them to me. Her portrait demonstrates how, in remembering the experiences and having an opportunity to reflect upon her memories of the experiences, she saw connections to her current approaches, thoughts, philosophies, and practice.

The major themes discerned from Carol’s portrait were: (1) an invitation to develop the mentoring relationship, (2) supportive mentoring actions, and (3) mentors as models. These themes are discussed separately in the following sections.

An Invitation to Develop the Mentoring Relationship

Carol’s portrait reflects her memory of how Mrs. Royal’s role as mentor was not clearly established by the administration, or even by Mrs. Royal, but just happened. It is possible that, due to the nature of the position as a job-share and Mrs. Royal’s years of experience and long-time service in the school, her sense of agency in the classroom diminished the need for this discussion. Carol being assigned to the position without a discussion about being mentored by senior faculty raises questions about the clarity of roles that may need to be addressed when beginning teachers work with senior faculty. How are mentoring assignments made? Are best practices of mentor education, mentor discernment, assessments of key mentoring skills such as communication, and knowledge of students and curriculum being used? Has a potential mentor genuinely discerned they want to serve as a mentor to a beginning teacher?
These questions may help school leaders determine how to educate those who wish to serve as a mentor. Boreen, Johnson, Niday and Potts (2009) citing Odell (1990) described how choosing one's mentor is often the most effective way to achieve “mutual regard” (p.11). In addition to the manner in which the invitation to enter into a mentoring relationship is made to a beginning teacher, there are also considerations of assessing the mentor's skills in communication, knowledge of curriculum content and developmental age and stage of the students, and a willingness to open one's practice to the questions of a beginner. The lack of invitation or clarity about their mentoring assignment Carol described may also point to the importance of examining how mentors are selected and partnered with a mentee. Mentor education and then discernment about the mentoring role may lead to a refined mentor selection process along with a more open invitation to the mentee to be involved in the mentor selection process.

Supportive Mentoring Actions

Beyond common courtesies in getting to know one’s mentee are the larger topics of building trust and the conceptual frameworks of mentoring. The scope of this paper does not allow for a discussion of these complex topics in detail, but conceptual frameworks of mentoring programs such as style of mentoring approaches are key to effective and supportive mentoring actions. Boreen et al. (2009) describe an overview of the approaches a mentor might use in a coaching stance such as: mentoring through conferencing, questioning, mirroring or modeling reflection (pp. 40-53). Clear communication styles and skills (Cowin, 2012) and mutual understanding of the mentoring process by both the mentor and mentee may offer an opening for trust to grow.

Carol’s first mentor story about using a student management system (the dot system story) that she had reservations about, and not feeling as if she were able to enter into a conversation with her mentor about her concerns, has implications for developing the dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationship. If a mentor embodies a spirit of willingness to have his or her own practice observed, and even assessed, through the eyes of the mentee, will the relationship be strengthened? Can a mentor’s openness to accepting that not all of her practices will be adopted by her mentees be a key factor in the discernment process that
a mentor uses to decide to become a mentor in the first place? Or, is the mentor to transfer her knowledge in a paternalistic style to the mentee, where the mentee becomes a clone of the mentor? (Freire, 1997, p. 324).

This story had deep meaning for Carol in her own development of her classroom management practices. After reflection on her beliefs and practices, Carol took action to use a different approach to classroom management and child guidance. Her own action research in developing a new classroom management approach was based on her philosophy of wanting her students to reflect on what they were doing and not just be told what to do, and for students to have the opportunity for a fresh start each day. Could a willingness on Mrs. Royal’s part to discuss Carol’s concerns about the dot system have led to a different outcome for Carol’s feelings of concern for the white dot on the chart she gave her student? Might such an attitude have given Mrs. Royal pause to think about her own approach?

**Mentors as Models**

Carol’s second mentor story about the power of a teacher to model values in action for her students occurred in the context of seeing herself in the actions of one of her students, the death-dealing stomp of a bug that had found its way into the classroom. Carol’s telling of the stomped bug story, and her reflection on how her student had done what she herself had done, furthered her resolve to reflect on her own attitudes and actions and the power she holds to model for her students. The collegial respect, Carol still holds today for Mrs. Royal’s advice that teachers are powerful models for their students was brought to life by the learning she experienced first-hand in the stomped bug story. Guyton and Hidalgo (1995) found that such collegial support aided in teacher development (p. 41). In Killian and Wilkins’ (2009) study with pre-service teachers and their mentors (cooperating teachers), specific mentoring characteristics such as not having to have the mentees “duplicate their practices” (p. 71); being able to “resolve difficult issues at early stages”; giving “corrective objective feedback before problems escalated”; and using a “turn taking” approach” (p. 72) to teaching time were found in the most effective pairings.
Carol’s stomped bug story, though it happened years ago, has served her well in reminding her that each day she is a powerful model not only to her students but to all those in her learning community. A mentor’s ability to reflect on their own practices and supporting philosophies is important in serving as a model to a beginning teacher. This story could be shared with mentors and used as a case study for further discussion and analysis by mentors of their own experiences as a model for students, mentees, and ultimately those in their learning communities. Carol’s story could serve as an opening of a dialog between mentors and mentees about values, and modeling the values one holds.

**Stories of Experience, Reflection and Change in Practice**

Carol’s portrait reveals the importance of her mentoring and teaching experiences and how her reflections on these experiences brought about long-term changes in her practice. Carol explained that, through participation in this study, many other memories of her beginning teaching days had come flooding back to her and she was continuing to make connections between her experiences and how they shape her practice today. Schön’s (1983, 1987, 1991) work focused on the importance of reflection and reflective practice. Mattingly’s (1991) research on narrative reflection posits that telling stories is a way for us to make sense of events and experiences (p. 235). During our interviews and discussions Carol was often reflecting as she told her stories or answered questions, and was still seeking to make sense of what had happened to her in current reflection on her practice as both a teacher and mentor to beginning teachers. Meyer (1995) suggests the stories that were important in one’s formation as a teacher are retold and remain meaningful (p. 276). Carol commented several times during our interviews that she was reflecting on what she had just told me and continuing to question her formative experiences in light of her current practice, especially with the beginning teacher she was currently assigned to mentor.

**Conclusions and Implications**

**Establishing the Mentor-Mentee Relationship**

Carol’s portrait raises areas for consideration in planning a mentoring program for beginning teachers. Design aspects such as an invitation to develop a mentoring
relationship, supportive mentoring actions, and mentors serving as models may offer a starting point for the design process. Preparing a mentor education program to assist mentors in understanding their roles, assisting potential mentors in assessing their mentoring skills, and then in discerning their fit for mentoring could be initial components of a mentor’s choice to enter into a mentoring relationship. A well-defined process of invitation between mentor and mentee to enter into a mentoring relationship could then be designed and implemented. A system for ongoing assessment of the mentoring relationship could be put in place. For example, how is the relationship developing and is there compatibility between the mentor and mentee in the first weeks? Periodic check-in points could be set up to continue to assess the development of the relationship. To continue to enhance mentoring relationships a mentoring program could be designed with continued education of mentors in how to assess their own effectiveness and utilize ongoing feedback from the mentee. An acknowledgement in the early stages for both mentor and mentee that not every mentor assignment will develop into a successful mentoring relationship may be an important beginning step in the establishment of a mentoring relationship.

Carol’s portrait demonstrates how mentoring relationships may evolve in unintended ways. Because Carol was a less-experienced teacher coming in only in the afternoons to relieve Mrs. Royal, and the classroom had been Mrs. Royal’s classroom for years, Carol did not feel free to establish a different classroom management system. As a beginning teacher, Carol felt she needed to go along with the more established teacher’s routines, procedures and classroom management style even though there were aspects that made her uncomfortable.

**Supportive Mentoring Actions**

Mentors can be supported in their roles by having access to ongoing education, support, time for reflection on their own practice, and time for reflection on their mentoring practices. Time to consider, reflect upon, and answer the mentee’s questions, especially questions about the mentor’s practices, are key supportive mentoring actions. A stance of openness to questions about their practices can facilitate successful mentoring communication. Mentees also need to assess and reflect on their communication style. A
mentee’s awareness about possible communication style conflicts may be honed through education in how to communicate about their needs with their mentors, always assuring that the mentee’s questions are asked in a respectful way that honors the growing trust in the mentor-mentee relationship.

When Carol tried to discuss potential classroom management concerns, she did not feel Mrs. Royal was interested or open to a discussion of a different approach. Other beginning teachers may feel this way too in their new positions. In my work, student teachers have often told me they feel like a guest in their cooperating teacher’s classroom; and, because they are such novices, feel this same tension regarding how to ask questions about practices they observe. It is also possible that had Mrs. Royal been more open to self-examination and reflection about her own practice in using the “dot system,” Carol would have been supported in developing a practice of student management rather than just adopting her mentor’s system. It is also possible that Carol could have benefited from assessment and education in her communication style or patterns.

**Considerations for Teacher Education and School District Mentoring Programs**

The study demonstrates how mentoring experiences, and reflection on those experiences, can have long-term effects on teacher and mentor practice. Teacher education programs could be structured to ensure that pre-service teachers learn what to ask for from mentors and from mentoring programs as they begin their first years of teaching and by offering research-based courses to mentor teachers in assessment of mentoring skills and development of mentor best practices such as communication styles and skills. Teacher education researchers working in partnership with school districts could study effective mentoring practices, and design mentoring coursework based on research which could strengthen both university teacher education programs and the mentoring programs school districts use.

Carol’s portrait provides an examination of the complexity of human experience and interaction involved in mentoring, as well as the long-term effects mentoring can have on practice. There is a need for further study of the long-term effects of mentoring of beginning
teachers on both teaching and mentoring practice. Such studies better help us design mentoring programs, which positively affect mentoring and teaching practice over time.
References


Barriers to Post-Secondary Enrollment for Former Foster Youth

Brenda Morton
Assistant Professor
School of Education
George Fox University

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of current and former foster youth who faced challenges with the process of enrolling in post-secondary education. These participants illuminated the importance of teacher preparation programs that include awareness of the contexts of foster children and youth. Unfortunately, little is known about this group, leaving them vulnerable to significant barriers. Many foster youth aspire to a four-year bachelors degree, but need the help and support of high school teachers to get there. Teacher educators have the unique opportunity to prepare future teachers to work with students from such varying backgrounds and experiences.
Researcher Positioning

As a former high school English teacher with predominately upper classmen in my courses, I geared up each year for the onslaught of requests for letters of recommendations, Common Application reference forms, and editing and mentoring students through required essays. Wanting to give each student my absolute best required an organized plan to meet November 1\textsuperscript{st} university early action deadlines. As someone who completed her education through a non-traditional route, I always had a heart for those for whom early action deadlines just did not apply, no matter how much they wanted it. Two such students entered my classroom and my life and changed the way I viewed college applications, Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) and access to post-secondary education. These two students were in foster care, a population about which I knew nothing.

The majority of people do not know much about foster care (Wolanin, 2005). This includes teachers. Although teacher education programs provide pre-service teachers with training and education about academic and behavioral problems, foster children constitute a specialized context about which little or nothing is taught. Thus, beginning teachers often have a gap in their preparation. Foster children and youth often experience academic and behavioral challenges. This, combined with teachers’ lack of understanding of foster children’s needs can make schooling especially problematic (Zetlin, MacLeod & Kimm, 2013).

This paper provides information for teacher educators on the challenges foster youth face with applying for admission to post-secondary institutions, and ways teachers can support foster youth and help make their dream of pursuing a bachelor’s degree a reality. In the next section I review research that emphasizes statistically the challenges foster youth face in their academic lives. This is followed by a discussion of key themes gleaned from my data collection with youth who experienced foster care.

Background

Regardless of the emphasis in the U.S. for our youth to receive a college education, for many foster youth it is out of reach (Salazar, 2013). The academic career of children and
youth in foster care is fraught with challenges, arising from both the educational K-12 setting and the foster care system as a whole. The child welfare system is focused primarily on the safety and placement of children who have come into the system. The education and academic needs of foster children become an afterthought (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). In their study, Zetlin, MacLeod and Kimm (2013) found that there was no formal line of communication between the care system and teachers to notify them of students in their classrooms who were in foster care.

While there is a long list of challenges within the foster care system, a few important challenges to note include placement change, abuse occurring from within the new foster parent home, neglect from the foster care system, and a Department of Human Services system that is poorly preparing foster youth to be successful in society once they are out of the care system (Allen & Vacca, 2011). With this in mind, it is not surprising that four years after leaving the foster care system 46% of foster youth have not finished high school, 25% will be found to be homeless, 42% become parents, and only 20% will be able to support themselves (Ferrell, 2004).

**Barriers to college / university enrollment**

Foster youth graduate from high school at substantially lower rates than those of their non-foster peers. Approximately 50% of all foster children will graduate from high school (Bruskas, 2008). Of those who graduate from high school, approximately 20% will go on to pursue post-secondary education at a community college, four-year college, or university compared to 60% of students outside of the care system (Wolanin, 2005). Those who do enroll in post-secondary education, only 3-11% complete a bachelor’s degree. (Casey Family Programs, Stuart Foundation (2012). The Northwest Foster Care Alumni study revealed 1.8 percent of former foster youth achieved a four-year bachelor degree (Pecora et al., 2005). In spite of these statistics, Merdinger et al. (2005) found that 79% of the participants in their study reported aspirations to graduate from high school, and 63% of foster youth planned to continue their education beyond high school. For those who pursue post-secondary education three barriers have been identified: financial hurdles, the application process, and housing.
**Financial hurdles.** Optional Independent Living Programs are available to help foster youth with the transition from foster care to independence. Upon leaving the foster care system, 40.5% of former foster youth felt they were somewhat prepared to live independently (Merdinger et. al., 2005). After living in a structured foster care system in which they have adults making decisions on their behalf, emancipation has appeal. However, former foster youth find that they are not prepared to make their way through a less structured, complex environment (Uesugi, 2009). If by the time they leave care they have not attended an Independent Living program, and foster parents or caseworkers have not covered financial responsibility or money management adequately, the student is unprepared for how to manage her/his own living expenses (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). “Housing, transportation, health, legal matters, money management, and employment, are skills that virtually all youth need in order to have stable, happy and productive lives but that youth who have spent considerable time in foster care often struggle to master” (Salazar, 2011, p. 27).

Former foster youth do not have family resources like their college peers. This leads to resource insecurity such as housing, food, and clothing (Uesugi, 2009). The Northwest Alumni study found that one-third living at or below the poverty line (Pecora et al., 2006). Many do not pursue post-secondary education because they cannot afford to do so (Uesugi, 2009 & Wolanin, 2005). Financial barriers have proven to be one of the most significant reasons for those who have been in foster care to not enroll in college (Wolanin, 2005). Without the assistance of someone knowledgeable on how to navigate these options, the sticker shock of college tuition can cause foster youth to believe they just cannot afford it. Additionally, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) presents a barrier in the financial application process. The FAFSA provides an opportunity for applicants to check a box indicating if they are or were a ward of the court. Item number 52 asks, “At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court” (Free Application for Federal Student Aid, 2013 - 2014). Verification of this claim can cause delays. Until the financial aid is received, foster youth are unable to cover the cost of books, supplies and transportation costs (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010).
It is clear that foster youth are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to navigating the financial aid process. With little to no financial training and without someone to help, post-secondary education appears out of reach. For those that can overcome the financial hurdle, challenges continue as they encounter the complex application process for each institution they wish to apply.

**The application process.** Applying to college can be a daunting process. For foster youth this process is compounded because many face this process alone. As they begin to consider colleges, access challenges arise. Foster youth may not have gained the skills needed in order to gain admission to post-secondary institutions (Wolanin, 2005). As mentioned previously, the focus from the care system has been on safety and placement, not academics. Youth may have been placed in a good home with nurturing foster parents, but that does not guarantee help or support when it comes to college. Many foster parents just do not know how. In fact, 56% of foster parents were found to have a high school diploma or less, leaving them without the tools to mentor a foster child toward college (Oregon Student Assistance Commission, 2008). With emancipation looming at age 18, there has not been a focus on post-secondary pursuits. A gap exists in the training of State personnel and certified parents. Foster parents, case workers and others involved in the lives of foster youth have not been trained or prepared to assist foster youth with the college application process (Oregon Student Assistance Commission, 2008 & Dworsky & Perez 2010). Foster youth must find others outside of the foster care system to assist them as they navigate the application process.

With 56% of foster parents lacking the tools to advise a foster youth on college admission, it is clear that mentorship for foster youth is vital to overcome the challenges of applying to college. Foster youth need someone to stand in the gap and help with the application process. This includes someone willing to help them understand housing options at the institutions they are interested in attending.

**Housing.** Housing is a significant concern for those who have experienced life in foster care. Choice of post-secondary institution is often contingent upon sustained access to housing. Stable housing during campus closures is a unique concern for foster youth
In Martin and Jackson’s (2002) study 45% of participants reported accommodation challenges at post-secondary institutions (Martin & Jackson, 2002). This includes the timing of moving in and out, as well as requirements to leave the dorms during extended school holidays. While their friends return home to spend time with family, students from foster care often must scramble to find viable housing or face the possibility of homelessness. (Martin & Jackson, 2002). Homelessness becomes reality when their emancipation occurs before college move-in dates and when they do not have stable housing they can depend on during extended holidays, and summer months. Merdinger et al. (2005) reported participants experienced an average of 75 days per year without a place to sleep. Housing therefore, can compel a foster youth alumni toward one institution or another based on the housing options offered that would most closely meet their needs.

As former foster youth face the pursuit of post-secondary education, it is apparent that finances, applications, and housing prove to be significant barriers. For youth able to resolve these challenges, enrollment can become reality. For youth who are unable to resolve the challenges, or who fear resource scarcity with the choice of post-secondary attendance, they choose employment over education. The next sections outline the research design I used to conduct my study, and a discussion of the data.

Methodology and Analysis

Hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) framed this research. This research design was specifically chosen as it “differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (p.9). This design allows a story to be told in an organic fashion by relaying experiences. The study utilized interviews with open-ended questions. The study was conducted in Oregon, and specifically focused on current and former foster youth that had graduated from high school, were pursuing a post-secondary education, and had applied for the Chafee Education and Training Scholarship for Fall, 2011. Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funding is available through the Department of Human Services Independent Living Program, awarding up to $3,000 a year to eligible applicants. Eligibility is defined as (Oregon Student Assistance Commission):
Currently be in foster care, or

Had been in foster care for at least 180 days (six months) after their 14th birthday and exited substitute care at age 16 or older

Be participating in the voucher program on their 21st birthday. Youth may then continue to apply/receive funds until they turn 23 years old as long as they are enrolled in a post secondary education or training program and making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

The participants were connected to the Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC), a program of Children First for Oregon. The OFYC is a statewide, youth led advocacy group made up of current and former foster youth. Working with the Director of the organization, potential participants were contacted. While the participants for the study were all current and former foster youth, by soliciting participants from the Chafee Education and Training Scholarship pool, the study was strengthened by participants who had all experienced foster care, and who had all qualified for the Chafee Scholarship, ensuring that all participants had the same experience or phenomenon being explored. From the interested participant pool, 11 were selected. By soliciting from this participant pool, similar characteristics, common experiences, and themes emerged.

After transcribing each interview, important / significant statements were listed. These statements were then organized into themes. Next, a description of the “what” or the “textural description” of the experience was constructed. Next, a “structural description” was constructed (Creswell, 2007, p.159). The final step was the construction of a description that incorporated both the textural and structural, sharing the experiences as perceived by foster youth. Once this was completed, a draft was emailed to each participant for feedback. Participants were afforded a chance to clarify the textural and structural descriptions.
Findings

Textural and Structural Descriptions

The participants each shared their own exceptional story. While commonalities were found among the group, their experiences and perceptions on their time in foster care are unique. Given this, a brief textural and structural description of each participant follows, providing a sketch of his or her experiences.

Emily. Emily entered the State care system at the age of 7 due to neglect and was placed in relative foster care with her aunt. She stayed with her aunt until she was 14, when the abuse she endured at the hand of her aunt was discovered. Because her next placement was 35 minutes away from her middle school, Emily caught a bus at 5:00 each morning.

She said:

Well, it was 4 extra hours a day that I was riding, and my foster mom was at home all day and wouldn’t give me rides at all, even though she got reimbursed for it. So, that kind of sucked.

Once she entered high school, she learned about a program in her school district, which would allow for dual enrollment and earn college credits while completing her high school education. She graduated, earning a traditional diploma, and continued on to community college. She completed her associate's degree at a local community college, and is working toward her bachelor’s degree at a state university.

Roberto. Roberto was placed in foster care at birth, living with his aunt, as his mother was incarcerated. Roberto moved from foster home to foster home over the next 18 years, and had 18 or 19 placements. Placements types ranged from relative foster care to secure lock-down facilities. Roberto was eventually placed with in a solid foster home where he received support, acceptance and advocacy. This is the placement he calls “family” and the parents he calls “Mom” and “Dad.”
When asked how he could have experienced so much in his life and end up successful, he shared the following about his caseworker, as well as the judge, attorney, skills trainer and others who were supportive:

When I graduated, I walked across the stage and...she started crying and I was like “Oh my gosh. I am almost crying now.” I felt like the dream had ended. She said, “Okay, you are scheduled to be signed out on your 18th birthday. After all I have seen you go through, I would never have seen you be so successful.” Then she hugged me and was like so proud of me because I was able to do this. It was really because of her and my judge, my attorney, my skills trainer, everybody who was there for me.

Roberto is now attending a four-year university in Oregon as a Ford Scholar.

**Samantha.** Samantha was placed in the foster care system at the age of six. She joined a foster home with a large number of foster children. After living in the home for eight years, the Department of Human Services decided to close this foster home. This caused trauma, resulting in anger and distrust toward her future foster parents and placements, which then contributed to her consistent movement over the next few years. Samantha was eventually placed in a good home a few semesters before high school graduation. She said, “I actually did not find my perfect placement until I was 17.” This perfect placement provided her freedom to make choices within a structured environment. Once secure in this placement, Samantha learned that a math course she took at another school would not transfer to her current school, leaving her .5 credits short of graduation. Samantha took a summer class to complete the credit and graduated with a traditional diploma. After graduation, she enrolled in a university that allowed offered her a move-in date that kept her from being homeless.

**Dianna.** Abuse and neglect were the cause for removal from the home for Dianna and her brother. They were placed in foster care and lived together in traditional foster care homes for a few years before they were separated. After the Department of Human Services found rope burns on both children's ankles during a visit, the children were removed from the home and placed in a new foster home.
The second placement was with a married couple and two other girls in foster care. After living in the home, she learned the foster dad was sexually abusing the two older foster girls. She was safe from the foster dad, but not from the grandsons who regularly visited. The grandsons, who were just a few years older than Dianna and who regularly visited, began to act out sexually on Dianna. When she would not comply with their wishes, they would lie to their grandmother and she would hold Dianna down and allow her grandsons to repeatedly punch Dianna.

Dianna’s anger over the abuse turned to rage, resulting her placement in and out of lock-down facilities and residential homes. Even when she was placed with the foster parent she calls “Mom,” Dianna still struggled with anger. Dianna left this home once after assaulting a girl and was again placed in a lock-down facility until it was determined that she would be able to go home. Once she returned home, she attended a local high school consistently for four years, but dropped out to complete her GED. She is now enrolled in a local community college.

**Jason.** Jason entered foster care at the age of 17 after being kicked out of his home and left in the care of his grandparents. He shared that he was not without his own faults, but said he was never a bad kid:

> I wasn’t ever really rebellious in the sense that I tried to do anything rebellious. I just tried to be gone all the time. If they weren’t fighting then they were…I mean, it just wasn’t a good place to be, in my opinion.

Jason moved in with his grandparents and reality began to set in: “Three parents and no one even wants you.” He was also very concerned that if he were told to leave his grandparents home, he would be homeless. Over the next few months, he “got completely clean and sober” and focused on his academics yet he believed he was still treated without respect and without any trust from his grandparents.

Jason was moved from the home of his grandparents into traditional foster home placements and eventually ended up at a group home. It was while living in this group home that he was able to earn his GED and also enroll in a local community college. At the
time of our interview, Jason had just moved out and was living on his own in an apartment, still attending college.

**Andrew.** Andrew was removed from the care of his mother when he was 10 years old. He was living at that time with his mother who regularly took drugs and abused alcohol. When she was under the influence, the home became very volatile. It was not uncommon for Andrew to attend school with an injury caused by his mother. He said, “My mom would lie to my teachers and they would believe her.” On one occasion, he arrived at school with a broken hand and a black eye. A few days later the police and the Department of Human Services arrived at his school and took him into foster care.

Andrew experienced 65 placements over the next seven years. When asked why he had so many placements, Andrew said, “Some thought I was just too unstable. Not sure how to deal with me.” Andrew said he was a very angry child and acted out. He attributes his high number of placements to this anger and to foster parents not knowing how to relate to him.

Eventually, Andrew was able to return to his original neighborhood and attend a local high school. When he arrived, the transition was not easy. Andrew said, “When I moved into this placement, I hadn't been in school for like 6 months.” He eventually left this high school and earned his GED at a local community college.

Andrew is now living in a home with several other boys. They are all attending the same community college. His foster parent, who he now calls “Dad,” has taught him carpentry, and through working with his ILP worker he was able to obtain a handyman license. Working with his hands and building furniture reminds him of his love of art and of his favorite teacher who helped him deal with his feelings through art.

**Tanya.** Tanya was in foster care for 20 years, the longest of all participants in this study. Tanya entered foster care with her older sister. They were removed from what Tanya characterized as a “hurtful situation.” The abuse she experienced had long-lasting implications for Tanya: “Until I was 6, I didn’t speak one word. I signed everything. They said it was because of trauma.” After being selected by a television show, Tanya, eight and her sister 11, along with their caseworker flew to New York to participate in a special show.
on foster children available for adoption. A couple saw the show and was approved to adopt the girls. The girls moved to [Illinois] for about 11 months but the adoption failed. The girls were returned to Oregon and placed in separate homes. Over the next 12 years, Tanya moved very regularly. At more than one foster home placement, she was abused.

Tanya landed in a solid foster home during high school. The foster parents were supportive and encouraging, attending her many choir concerts and supporting her academically. As Tanya’s 18th birthday was approaching, she realized that if she aged out of the foster care system, she would be left homeless during her senior year. She contacted her caseworker and was able to extend her time in the foster care system, allowing her to finish high school and continue to receive support into her first few years in college. Tanya successfully graduated from a public high school and received her diploma. She is now attending a community college and living with her sister, from whom she was previously separated.

**Ben.** Ben, like two other participants, entered the foster care system through a voluntary route and was placed in a traditional foster care home. Unfortunately, that placement did not last long. The foster parents smelled gasoline and discovered that Ben had drenched a toy truck in the basement. Given the amount of fuel that was found, and the resultant danger to the occupants and the home, Ben was immediately moved to a residential treatment center. Over the next few years, Ben was in and out of residential treatment and group homes. When he returned to a traditional foster home placement, he was enrolled in a public middle school. He was given an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to support his needs. Ben was diagnosed with psychosis NOS, requiring supervision. He was moved from home to home, and was in and out of several schools. He entered his last public high school with only six credits. Due to his diagnosis, he was assigned a one-on-one. This is an individual who would accompany and supervise Ben at school and at home.

Even with the additional help and support, Ben found no way to get caught up. While the one-on-one was academically helpful, psychologically Ben began to question who he was. He said:
So they had someone from my house come to school and wait outside my classroom. It didn't keep me from being successful, but it made me feel really bad about myself. Am I this horrible kid you are making me out to be?

Ben decided to leave high school and pursue his GED. The staff at the high school made several calls on his behalf and enrolled him in a GED program at a local community college. After earning his GED, he enrolled at the community college, where he continues today.

**Jennifer.** Jennifer entered care at the age of 14, but her relationship with the Department of Human Services began when she was 12. Jennifer said she grew up in a dysfunctional home where she was neglected by her mother and abused by her brother. She described herself as rebellious, choosing to do drugs, run away, and have sex for the first time at the age of 12. She said, “It was my first time and I ended up getting pregnant. Shortly after becoming pregnant, Jennifer learned of her pregnancy when she was admitted to the hospital for overdosing on drugs. This is when the Department of Human Services became involved in her life.

When she was removed from her home at the age of 14, her pattern of running away continued, resulting in numerous placements in various settings. She started in traditional foster homes, but continued to run away. When asked why, Jennifer replied, “I just didn’t feel normal staying in a foster home. I felt out of place. So when I stayed with my friends, I felt normal again. I just wanted to feel normal.” Her placements continued to escalate in terms of security levels and treatment. She ended up in several lock-down facilities and residential treatment homes.

Two years later she found herself, once again, pregnant. Living now with an abusive boyfriend after running away from another foster home, the state placed her at [Mary’s Home], a residential treatment center for pregnant and troubled youth. In 2007, she delivered her second son. That child was also removed from her care and placed for adoption.
Jennifer received academic support while in the lock-down facilities where she was placed. It was here that she was able to focus on her education and began to see the value in an education. She was always a smart child and when she focused, she found that she enjoyed school. This enjoyment was reflected in her 4.0 GPA. Once she was enrolled in a traditional high school, she continued to do well. Yet, a few years later, she chose to drop out of high school, even though she was on track to graduate with honors.

Jennifer went on to earn her GED at a local community college. She then enrolled at a community college and began working towards her associate’s degree.

**Byron.** Byron is a 21-year-old male, who experienced 15 years in the foster care system. At the age of three, Byron was removed from his home because his parents were involved in drugs. His parents were involved in several criminal activities, including the manufacture, distribution and use of drugs, stealing, and pimping. Byron and his older brother were removed from the home and placed with their great aunt. During their time in this placement, both his great uncle and his older brother physically and sexually abused Byron. He was moved into non-relative foster care where he moved from placement to placement over the next 14 years.

At the age of 12, Byron was in another abusive foster home. After being physically and mentally abused, he was moved to another home. Byron said that this placement was “a high risk placement for kids who had stabbed someone or raped someone.” While at this placement, Byron began to run away, spend time with his friends and use drugs. At the age of 14, he was on the run from law enforcement. He said, “I was at like rock bottom. At that time I was going through so much. A lot of inner turmoil.” At 15, he was caught and sentenced to eight years for the manufacture, distribution and possession of marijuana and methamphetamines near a daycare. He spent close to two years in a juvenile delinquency center and was released a few weeks before his 17th birthday. Once he was released, he returned to the home of [Rebecca], the high-risk placement he was in before he was caught and sent to the juvenile delinquency center. [Rebecca] is whom Byron calls Mom. When asked why she made such an impact on him, Byron said, “She is just unconditional.” He felt safe and he felt loved for the first time in his life. Even though Byron is no longer in
foster care, he continues to enjoy a relationship with [Rebecca] and the boys he lived with. This is his family.

Upon his release, he attended an alternative school where he earned his GED and learned trade skills. The alternative school connected him with businesses in the community, where Byron learned the contracting and landscaping business. These skills have allowed him to find employment and pay his tuition bills at a local community college.

**Tessa.** At the age of 12, Tessa was an angry pre-teen who was dealing with a new step-dad who, in her opinion, was taking her mom away from her. Tessa began looking for ways to force her mom to pay attention to her. Unfortunately, Tessa chose to do this through skipping school, getting into fights at school, and being sent to detention. She said, “I would go to school and get into fights because I thought that if I did that I would get to see my mom more and that she would care about me.” When Tessa’s mother determined that she could not deal with her behavior any more, she turned to the Department of Human Services for assistance. Tessa was admitted into the foster care system as a voluntary case. Tessa said the hope was that both Tessa and her mom would have time to cool down and repair their relationship.

Over the next four to five years, Tessa was in and out of foster homes, alternative schools, and residential treatment. She had contact with her mom and had regular visits and weekends at home. Unfortunately, the relationship continued to be rocky, so she was placed farther and farther away from her mother, in the hope that this relationship would not distract her from being successful academically.

After being placed at a residential treatment center, Tessa began to focus on academics and found her teachers encouraging and supportive. She began to work on her classes and successfully complete credits. When she was moved into a traditional foster home, she found that many of her credits transferred. She worked very hard and was able to graduate with a traditional diploma.

Today, Tessa is back at home, living with her mom. She is attending a local community college, pursuing cosmetology training.
Challenges and Supports to Post-Secondary Attendance

Analysis of the data collected from these eleven youth revealed three challenges that had to be addressed in order for these youth to achieve their goal of post-secondary attendance: finances, application processes, enrollment requirements, and housing. These challenges are discussed in the following sections.

**Finances.** For many of these participants a significant barrier was encountered during the completion of the Free Application For Student Aid (FAFSA) application. One question on the application asks if the applicant was in foster care, a dependent or ward of the court. For applicants who check the box, the federal government would follow-up. Emily said:

They do these random checks to see if those who check the box that they are wards of the state or if their parents were deceased. Well, it just so happens that three quarters of those kids who are getting “random checks” are foster kids.

The applicant—in this case current or former foster youth—would have to contact the Department of Human Services to have proof of their claim. Applicants who were 18, who just recently aged out, or who were still in care knew they needed to contact their caseworker. Those who had aged out previously no longer had a caseworker and therefore had to find someone in the State system who could assist them, resulting in significant delays. Emily said:

You have to have proof of being a ward of the court for financial aid and if you finished foster care and you have been on your own and now you want to go on to college…who are you supposed to ask for that paperwork? They are supposed to give it to you when you age out, your social security card, your birth certificate, and a few other things. But if you lose it, it is really hard to get them back.
This delay in receiving financial aid is a serious issue for foster youth. Without the money they need, they are not able to purchase required textbooks, even though classes have started. Emily said, “They hold up your financial aid up to three months even after you turned in all of your forms. Things like that are really hard because you can’t be like, ‘hey parents, can I borrow $200?’”

Current and former foster youth are particularly vulnerable to financial set-backs. Without a consistent plan or individual in their life able and willing to cover books and supplies when financial aid is delayed, it becomes very difficult to stay in school. Once they have aged out of the system, they no longer have a caseworker they can call for help to navigate the financial or documentation barriers that may arise. And, even through they may still have a caseworker during the application process, the care system is not trained to assist.

**Application processes.** While the Common Application allows for students to apply to multiple schools with one application, a few requirements such as teacher recommendations, required personal essay, and application fees proved difficult for these participants. To overcome the challenges, several participants utilized the resources in their high school when it came time to fill out college applications, write application essays and look for scholarships. Roberto’s high school had the ASPIRE program. This program helps middle and high school student’s access education and training. He said, “ASPIRE really helped me find scholarships.” Tonya found a scholarship for which she qualified, but needed assistance with the essay. Tonya sought the help of her English teacher. She had never shared her story with a teacher before. Tonya said:

> I gave it to my English teacher. I was like, “This might scare you a little bit to help me with this but here, could you help me?” I ended up staying with her until like 5:00. She was like balling within the first 5 minutes and I was like maybe she is the wrong person to be asking to help me. But she ended up helping me edit them. I loved her for helping me with that.

High school guidance counselors were also credited with crucial support. Samantha said:
When I was trying to apply for colleges and I was trying to apply for scholarships and trying to get it all together, DHS was like even though I was in an Independent Living Program, they kept switching my worker so I couldn’t count on them and then I had my foster parents, but your parents only know so much. My counselor held it together. She helped me choose schools, apply to schools and get deadlines met.

It is clear that teachers and school counselors played an important role in the application process. Without knowledgeable individuals able to help foster youth through the process, scholarships and required documents would have been difficult to complete. Knowing what will be required during the application and eventual enrollment process, teachers and counselors can anticipate potential pitfalls before they occur.

**Enrollment requirements.** This barrier included important documents such as social security cards, birth certificates, and immunization records. Samantha had a difficult time with her social security card. She said:

I had an issue with my social security card. I went to the office and it said that my card had gotten taken out six times and somewhere in the midst of it being taken out so many times, and I am sure it was when I was moving foster homes and they would lose it, so God knows who all knows my ID. But in the process of it being taken it out one time, they misspelled my middle name. So, my social security card had a problem with my name so that was why I was having trouble getting scholarships. Even with my FAFSA they were like it didn’t go through. So, I had to go fix that.

Both Emily and Samantha shared challenges with immunization records. Emily said, “When I was filling out my paperwork for [MSU], they asked for your immunizations. That was really hard for me to get because I had lived in [Louisiana] when I got the first ones, obviously.” Samantha was able to enroll but said, “I actually got my grades held this term because I have not turned in my immunizations.”
With significant effort and persistence, Emily was able to locate her immunization records and remain enrolled and Samantha was able to correct her social security card error and apply for scholarships and financial aid. Unfortunately, one more barrier was identified by two former foster youth: Housing.

**Housing.** As the emancipation date for foster youth looms, housing becomes a priority. Foster youth hoping to continue their education must be knowledgeable about the housing options at the institution(s) they are interested in attending to ensure their needs will be met. Often, alignment between emancipation and college housing does not occur, requiring a plan for gaps in consistent housing. Samantha and Roberto shared their experiences pursuing stable housing.

For Samantha, her emancipation discharge date and lack of a cosigner for an apartment played a significant role in her college choice. Samantha initially desired a move to California to attend college. Evaluating her support structure in Oregon, however, she decided to stay local. She had two choices: she could attend a community college or pursue a four-year institution. She shared, “I was thinking of going to a community college and getting an apartment there with a friend. I couldn’t find a cosigner for the apartment or anything.” Once she was accepted to a private four-year institution, housing again became priority. Samantha said, “I was supposed to be discharged on Aug 26 and be on my own, so when that date came, I had a dorm waiting for me at [Cascadia]. So that was what really tipped the boat for going to [Cascadia]. Look, I have somewhere to live!” The university also offered housing during school breaks, with the exception of the winter holiday. Samantha shared she was able to stay with her former foster family for a few weeks, and then her foster mother arranged for her to stay with a family friend for the other two weeks.

Roberto also encountered housing challenges when he began to consider different institutions. He was offered a prestigious scholarship to a four-year institution and was relieved to see the housing agreement. They did not require students to move out during any school holidays, eliminating the anxiety of having to scramble to find a place to stay or face homelessness.
The unique housing needs of foster youth are often overlooked. Choosing an institution based on housing availability is a reality, which can significantly limit post-secondary options. If not resolved, this barrier can propel a foster youth alumni toward full-time employment instead of pursuing their personal goal of a bachelor’s degree.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that each participant encountered significant barriers to academic achievement during their time in foster care. Despite these barriers, they persisted thanks to reliable support. Teachers should not assume that the state care system is providing essential support to those in foster care. These individuals benefit from advocates as they work through the admission and FAFSA process. They also need someone who will help them finalize enrollment requirements. In my study, these foster youth credited teachers for providing the support they needed the most. Yet, researchers have reported that teachers are largely an untapped support resource for foster youth (Zetlin, MacLeod & Kimm, 2013). My study reiterates the claim that teachers can play an integral role in the lives of foster youth pursuing post-secondary education. Significantly, as these participants attested, the support, guidance, time, and mentorship provided by teachers does not go unnoticed or unappreciated. If you are an educator, how will you respond to the insights I have provided here?
References


Ferrell, F. (2004). Life after foster care: When foster kids turn 18, they often face great difficulties finding housing, health coverage, transportation, higher education, jobs, opening bank accounts and establishing credit. *State Legislatures*, 30, 28+


The Common Core of a Toothache: Envisioning A Pedagogy of Renewal and Contemplation

David Lee Keiser
Associate Professor
Montclair State University

Abstract

In this article, the author makes a case for the metaphor of “Sea Mind” as seen through the lens of pedagogy and describes the importance of his perspective for teaching and teacher education. As a teacher educator who has engaged both educational and contemplative work, his essay introduces the concept of a Sea Mind’s relationship to contemplative teaching and explores the challenge of maintaining healthy selves in a raging river of high-stakes testing and test preparation and the rough waters of public school reform.

Children without dental care are more likely to have toothaches; untreated cavities are nearly three times as prevalent among poor as among middle-class children. Although not every dental cavity leads to a toothache, some do. Children with toothaches, even minor ones, pay less attention in class and are distracted more during tests, on average, than children with healthy teeth. (Rothstein, 2004, p. 39)

More than 40 dentists and other dental professionals, many of them volunteers like Dr. Van Dam, are providing free dental care at several sites on the reservation during Rosebud Dental Days this week. In the first two days, 131 patients received dental care valued about $32,000. (Rapid City, SD Journal, July 26, 2013)

Unfortunately, there’s been too little honest conversation and too little democracy in the development of the Common Core. We see consultants and corporate entrepreneurs where there should be parents and teachers, and more high-stakes testing where there should be none. Until that happens, it will be hard to distinguish the “next big thing” from the last one. (Rethinking Schools Editorial, 2013, Summer, 27, 4)
Introduction: The Common Core of a Toothache

For anyone who has had serious dental pain, what counts as “the next big thing” is irrelevant. The shooting or throbbing sensation easily recalled by survivors of dental procedures is singular and makes a powerful symbol of how socioeconomic issues can affect schooling. As Rothstein (2004) states above, dental care provides a sad aperture into school achievement, as toothaches can well impede student health and success, including attending class and taking tests. While dental care, per se, is only one of many variables that affect student attendance and achievement, the universal viscerality of tooth pain makes it a salient entrée into our brief discussion of the common core. Not the Common Core State Standards only, but the common core that both unites and lies fallow—shared humanity, kindness, universal sacrifice and suffering, and breath.

For the first two decades of the 21st Century, Federal education policy in the United States might be encapsulated by a dozen words, or three four word phrases: No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and the Common Core State Standards. No Child Left Behind is perhaps the most inaptly titled, appropriated from the Children’s Defense Fund’s Leave No Child Behind Mission. Race to the Top used financial leverage to reform teacher evaluations, and now, the third lexical quartet, the Common Core State Standards looms as a Leviathan to which all teachers and students must submit.

Also in the early 21st Century, American Indian communities such as the Rosebud and Oglala Lakota Reservations in South Dakota have significantly fewer opportunities and rarer dental care than most of the country. In the above example, virtually all of the Rosebud patients accepted free extractions; and the average ‘free’ dental care was $244 per person. On the reservation and at the market in Wanblee, South Dakota, one observes ample need for residents’ dental preservation as well as the unfortunate eventuality of extraction.

Tooth pain and bone pain cut to the core. They can test one’s physical limits and also empower one’s sense of self and possibility. Yet these experiences in life, and one’s ability to get along with others, arguably matter more than performance and mastery of material easily tested. A recent book by Paul Tough (2013) speaks to this need. He argues in How
*Children Succeed*, that grit, curiosity, and character matter more than innate cognitive ability. Unsurprisingly, these attributes are harder to ascertain than static test scores. Yet the words Common Core are instructive both for their brevity and their misleading yet pithy evocation. What are truly common to our core are viscera, breath, tendons, and blood. Oceans and seas surround us and the language we use is insufficient to convey the complexities of life. Still, what is common cosmically connects us and is not static knowledge or any specific cultural literacy.

The power of place is to locate, to situate oneself, to find again. Much like the fisherwoman plying a pole or a fisherman witnessing the ebbing of the tide, sea mind locates oneself at the edge of possibility, the risky space fraught with potential and promise as well as humility. The purpose of this essay is to argue for a return to expansiveness in education; not ease, but expansiveness. This essay will posit that the quality of sea mind—expansive, open, transcendent, and inclusive—transcends discipline and grade level and current school reform or “next big thing.” Deep under the gloss of school reform movements and next big things lie incredible untapped potential and much of this is unseen, even ineffable. As infinite possibilities loom at the sea’s horizon, so too can educators create universes of inspiration and possibility. Conversely, the “consultants and corporate entrepreneurs” do not seem to believe that all children are teachable or that educational opportunities are infinite. In fact, the scarcity model in education—that the best public education is for some students, not all—is now both operationalized and unquestioned.

**Caring for Sea Mind: Envisioning a Pedagogy of Renewal and Contemplation**

The sea hath fish for every man. (William Camden, 1605)

The sense of infinite provision offered by the English historian William Camden simply encapsulates a sense of possibility, an absolute belief in the ability of the sea to feed all. Two additional citations help shape this cosmic possibility.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and
the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:9-10)

The sea does not reward those who are too anxious, too greedy, or too impatient. One should lie empty, open, and choiceless as a beach - waiting for a gift from the sea.

(Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

Let us refer to an expansive and nonjudgmental attitude as Sea Mind—the sense of limitless possibilities and spontaneous flexibility that naturally occurs when we humans let go of ourselves as masters of the universe or apex predators of the earth and skies. Sea Mind represents an opening, a sense of expansiveness and clarity and wonder about the world. Facing the sea’s shore, many experience a sense of safe overwhelming—the expanse and depth can both intimidate and nurture, make both secure and insecure—at the enormity before us. There is also danger and a need for constant vigilance. The popular book and movie The Life of Pi, for example, evoked both real and imagined magic of the open water; for the protagonist Pi, the sea was both sustenance and depletion, both friend and adversary.

Let us maintain as well that Sea Mind is a trait or a state rather than a place—there is no sea to go to, per se—that is accessible to all, even those landlocked or otherwise water-averse people. It is both a state, as in the expansive sense one feels while at the beach or shore, and a trait, as in those who seem able to access this sense as a normal or typical or regular feeling. In teaching and teacher preparation, such a perspective cannot be assumed.

In the brief essay that follows, I will make a case for the metaphor of Sea Mind seen through the apertures of pedagogy; that is, I will describe the importance of this perspective for teaching and teacher education. I am a teacher educator at a large public university who has long engaged with both educational and contemplative work, and this essay is one encapsulation of my wake from the burgeoning tide of contemplative teaching. The essay is structured by an introduction to the concept of Sea Mind and its relationship to contemplative teaching, followed by field and classroom explorations and anecdotes. The
discussion and conclusion frame the paper in a larger academic and pedagogical context; specifically, the challenge of maintaining healthy selves in a raging river of high-stakes testing and test preparation and the rough waters of public school reform.

**Seeing What Is Not Yet Visible: Imagining Different Pedagogical Waves**

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene has long argued that we cannot achieve what we cannot imagine; that is, we unnecessarily delimit our human possibilities by forgoing or truncating our imagination. Said another way, we can program ourselves from regimented living and learning rather than succumb:

> When habit swathes everything, one day follows another identical day and predictability swallows any hint of an opening possibility. Only when the given or the taken-for-granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is—contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense, (Maxine Greene, 1995, p.23).

The habit against which Greene (1995) cautions could refer to many things that occur in schools—the practice of elementary students lining up by height; the consistency of saying the Pledge of Allegiance every day in public schools; and the resolute gospel of high-stakes test scores can constitute habits which may well inhibit possibilities. As a means to “posit alternative ways of living and valuing,” imagination allows the unthinkable to be thought and the veiled to shine through.

Two phrases I often use in my college teaching are, “You cannot imagine falsely,” and “Nothing you create can be wrong,” from *The Life of Poetry* by Muriel Rukeyser. Unlike the static and reductionist recall knowledge of a standardized test, students’ imagination and creation, or creativity, are neither easily quantified nor always visible. Teaching with a contemplative perspective requires our vigilance at protecting such qualities in teaching and learning settings and policies. Teaching with a Sea Mind, then, includes the capacity, commitment, and courage to imagine and co-create rivers of possibility with our students.
Crafting Teacher Education Classes with Mindful Teaching

When I began teaching in 1990, I used methods I now consider to be part of my contemplative toolbox, but did not have a language or a field within which to frame them. At the time, lessons and units on creative writing, visioning, and slow movement, for example, just seemed to me to be good teaching. When I began teaching at the university level five years later, content demands did curtail classroom time, but contemplative apertures appeared through office hours, mid course feedback, listening exercises, and kindness. In this section, I will illustrate both the need for and examples of several contemplative classroom methods, exercises, or offerings. Although the explicitly contemplative examples emanate from my work with the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and The CARE for Teachers Program, they are undergirded and steeled by my many years teaching prior to my introduction to the concept of contemplative pedagogy at the “Making Peace with Ourselves in the World” Conference at Teachers College, NYC in 2005. The first I will describe is referred to as Just Standing, Silent Presence, or the Stage exercise. Since that time, I have embraced, explored, and espoused teaching with a mindful, contemplative perspective.

How to teach what some call classroom management remains a perennial challenge. New teachers, often young, discover what it means in practice is not as simple as setting and enforcing rules, but rather an expression of balance. Helping new teachers develop their presence and self-awareness in front of class is fundamental to teacher education. It is a listening closely for the sea in a shell, for finely attuning to the sound of the nuanced hum of synergistic sharing. Teacher education must attend to the affective domain, and teachers need to develop their inner resources, such as “interiority,” including “capacities for presence and attention, breakthrough and clarity, detachment and metacognition, and emotional resilience and balance,” (Hart, 2007, p. 247). That being said, unfortunately formal schooling and teaching settings provide ample evidence of the opposite as well. Two classroom examples help underscore the need for such attention.

Some years ago, during a short tenure in the San Francisco Public Schools, I was able to witness some extremely questionable teaching. The teacher herself did not seem to want to
be there, in the low-income Geneva Towers neighborhood, with a 6th grade class of students with special needs. The pedagogy was both pathetic and poisonous. For example, as part of her daily do-now assignment, the teacher counted down the remaining school days on the chalkboard; i.e. *There are 180 days in the school year. Today is day 89; how many days are left?* Not only was such work not interesting to the young tweens and teens, it bespoke general anomie—if the teacher is counting down the school year in January, it doesn’t bode well for stewardship or modeling. But the following exchange between the same teacher and a student illustrates this feeling and, by extension, the mindlessness embodied in the room. Said another way, the teacher could not ‘just stand.’

Teacher: Do I have to ask you to leave?

Student: Why? What did I do?

Teacher: I don’t know, but someone did something.

Student: You didn’t even let me finish.

Teacher: Good. I don’t want you doing things I don’t know about.

Good luck with that wish. The above passage well illustrates what not to do to create a trusting classroom. The student is unjustly accused, then told he’s not to act without the teacher knowing, all the while the teacher admitting she doesn’t know he did anything wrong. The school provided fertile ground early in my doctoral training—a veritable cornucopia of worst practices. But for me, it steeled me for the challenges of maintaining a mindful perspective: Just as I would have to hold my tongue at friends’ houses growing up, I learned to abide by others’ classrooms, and learn what not to do. Or, if you will, I learned to swim with the current, not against it.

Approximately ten years later, while observing a student teacher for the third and last time, an incident underscores the need to teach classroom presence and acceptance. The student teacher gave his final official teaching demonstration in front of his university supervisor, and it involved Business Math, computer terminals, and student research. The lesson was
clear, interactive, and reasonable, but he was unprepared for a student’s challenge to his authority as a teacher:

Student: Mr. R., Why do we have to do this?

Mr. R: (getting progressively more frustrated). It’s an important assignment; it’s the end of the unit; and, and because I’ll give you a Zero if you don’t!

In the back of the room, I thought, “So close, Mr. R., so close.” I use this example when preparing teachers because it illustrates the irreducible need for a strong teaching presence. In this case, the class was going well, that is, the students were engaged in the lesson but the teacher could not realize and enjoy that harmony, preoccupied as he was with feeling challenged and perhaps disrespected in front of me, his university supervisor. His teaching presence was tenuous and it showed. And through this aperture—the need to develop the teaching presence—the worth of mindful teaching or contemplative pedagogy is made visible. The expansiveness of the sea is clarified.

**Stage Exercise:** The acceptance of what is not yet—in the aforementioned case, self-confidence in student teachers—is integral to the development of teaching perspective, presence, and acumen. In short, simply standing in front of the class can be challenging for many new teachers. The following exercise can be adapted in many ways, but here is the basic instruction: A minimal ‘stage’ area is set, with no lecterns, chairs, or desks impeding the classmates’ view of the teaching candidate. The student simply walks mindfully to the front, pauses and takes a deep breath, stands up straight, makes eye contact at least once with everyone in the room, and mindfully walks off the ‘stage,’ takes another breath, and goes back to their seat. That’s all there is to it, and yet it is invaluable to many of my students, most of whom are adolescents, are self- and other-conscious, and are at times uncomfortable being stared at. As teachers, they’ll need to get over this, and the using the Stage helps.

**Pith of Perspective Exercise:** Nearly every semester I teach a class about equity and diversity in schools. For one of my readings, I assign a short anthology of Haiku poetry. After reading poems in English and Japanese, and writing their own Haiku, I give them an
exercise intended to help them hone their teaching credo or educational philosophy. It is adapted from an exercise I completed at an Academic Retreat; here I call it the Pith of Perspective Exercise. I ask my students to first write down a paragraph describing their field; most responses begin…. Mathematics is about…. or In Physical Education we…. This is the concrete or objective contribution. Then I ask them to describe themselves in the field; i.e. I teach English because…or I will be a strong History advocate in order to…. This is the subjective or critical contribution. Last, I ask them to boil down their previous two paragraphs into a three or four word phrase. This is the creative or expansive contribution. In being able to successful describe their pedagogical orientation, at least in a rudimentary and organic way, they are more easily introduced to the resolute need for clarity and confidence in teaching. Like a funnel or tributary that helps the flow of slow water, so too have I found contemplative practices such as this one to help students go slower and to create. The total exercise takes no more than five minutes but, in that time and that focus of attention, they come to better understand themselves as teachers—how they think about their field, their role in it, and the pith of their perspective on teaching.

**Listening Exercises:** In the same course, I assign a short article by Brenda Ueland, an early 20th Century journalist and author. Her article, entitled “Tell Me More: On the Fine Art of Listening,” promotes listening without judgment as a higher virtue than speaking,

> Now, how to listen? It is harder than you think. I don’t believe in critical listening, for that only puts a person in a straitjacket of hesitancy. He begins to choose his words solemnly or primly. His little inner fountain cannot spring. Critical listeners dry you up. But creative listeners are those who want you to be recklessly yourself, even at your very worst, even vituperative, bad-tempered. (Ueland, 1993).

Concurrent with this text, the students engage in a sustained three-minute monologue in partners. One student speaks, from a prompt (i.e. *What do you look forward to when you have your own classroom? Or: What are some subjects or subtopics in your field? Or: What challenges do you expect in teaching?*) for three minutes uninterrupted. Then they switch roles and with a different prompt, the listener now speaks for three minutes. In the debriefing after the
activity, most students remark on the difficulty of simply listening without commentary and as well on the difficulty of speaking without interruption for the same three minutes. In addition to slowing down their perspective about what three minutes feels like, the exercise helps them identify or even empathize with the disempowerment their students may feel if unable to speak in class.

**Conclusion: Making Friends with Jellyfish in the Sea**

Throughout the country, we are told that everything we have been doing in our schools is wrong. The education system that once was the envy of the world has become a hopeless, costly, out of control dinosaur. Further, we hear that the only way to save American education is through school reform—to manage our schools as though they were businesses, employing powerful, hard-nosed leaders who make tough rules and use data to measure students' progress and teachers' accountability in order to punish those who impede success, (John Owens, *Confessions of a Bad Teacher*, p. xvi.)

As the sea recedes, we are left with a low tide rendering of what remains. Mindful teachers and thoughtful citizens would do well to consider both the purposes as well as the measured effects of education; that is, why do we educate? If the development of a thoughtful citizenry is an aim, for example, it would seem our curricula, our systems of teacher preparation, and indeed our school policies would reflect such thoughtful consideration. But as Owens (2013) illustrates, school “leaders who make tough rules and use data,” seem more common and impactful than those who espouse curiosity, imagination, and transcendent vision. Jellyfish may be present, but may be avoided by living the “unexamined common sense,” to which Maxine Greene alluded.

As part of the journey described herein, I led a mindful reading group for teachers at a local high school. We met weekly in a room in the library, and one of our readings was *Coming to Our Senses*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Towards the end of the book, a passage emerged as particularly meaningful to the group,
When we reside in awareness, we are resting in what we might call an orthogonal reality that is more fundamental than conventional reality, and every bit as real. Both pertain moment by moment, and both demand their due if we are to inhabit and embody the full scope of our humanness, our true nature as sentient beings. When we inhabit this orthogonal dimension, the problems of the conventional reality are seen from a different perspective, more spacious than that of a small-minded self-interest. The situations we face can thus admit possibilities of freedom, resolution, acceptance, creativity, compassion, and wisdom that were literally inconceivable—unable to arise and sustain—within the conventional mindset. (p. 351)

With the same expansive mind with which this paper began, let us conclude this treatment of one contemplative pedagogical path. Let us ‘embody the full scope of our humanness,’ and ‘inhabit this orthogonal dimension.’ Let us think of education, of schooling, as more spacious than a pond or a lake. Let us return to the concept of sea mind, of inclusive, transparent, and nonjudgmental awareness and commitment. And to the Life of Pi.

It was on my own, a guilty pleasure, that I returned to the sea, beckoned by the mighty waves that crashed down and reached for me in humble tidal ripples, gentle lassos that caught their willing Indian boy. (p. 10).

The guilty pleasure of sea mind, of caring enough about teaching and learning to do it for a lifetime, of being open to the sensations and nuances of the world. When one thinks of 21st Century public education in North America, one thinks instead of limitations, of bite-sized readings, small enough to digest without preparation or attention. Perhaps canned tuna, as compared to fresh fish, fits into our sea metaphor here. What students of all ages and abilities need from formal schooling is much broader and more diverse than bite-sized curriculum and canned tuna; they need fresh fish. They need to not lose wonder about the world. As stated by Arthur Zajonc,

An education that would reach beyond information must work deeper; it will need to transform the very container of consciousness, make it more supple and complex. For this, we educators need pedagogical tools other than those
optimized for information transfer. At its most advanced stage, we will need to help our students and ourselves to create a dynamic cognitive framework that can challenge established intellectual boundaries, and even sustain the conflicting values and viewpoints that comprise our planetary human community. (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1-2)

The paradoxes of teaching and teacher education include the ways in which the information age can cloud or clarify the purposes of schooling. Two examples from popular media exemplify this paradox. The first is a half-page graphic that appeared in The New York Times. The artist Jonathan Harris printed a list of approximately forty sentence pairs, beginning with “Data will help us remember, but will it let us forget?,” and, salient to this paper, “It will help educators make excellent standardized tests, but will it help us embrace different standards of excellence?” Perhaps, perhaps not.

The second paradox reflects what happens when good ideas spread. In a Wired magazine article entitled “Enlightenment Engineers,” the author provides a snapshot of the contemplative programming underway in Silicon Valley. The subtitle? “It’s not just about inner peace—it’s about getting ahead,” meaning that an offshoot or by product of ‘searching within ourselves” is already tied to productivity and profit. Thankfully, most of us can search within ourselves and simply become more mindful educators. Just as the sea swallows without regret, caring for sea mind requires a respect for predators and perils. Programs such as those mentioned herein swim against the stream of testing and measurement and competition, and public figures from Tim Ryan to Goldie Hawn sound the foghorn, but those of us in the sea need to keep our heads above water. Students in our nation’s schools and universities deserve the best creativity, imagination, and vision we have to offer, including a capacious perspective on the world. All educators can collectively care for the sea mind of transparency, inclusion, clarity, and expansiveness.
References


Rethinking Schools (2013, Summer). Editorial, “The Trouble with the Common Core.” 27, 4, p.3


Living the Flourish Question: Positivity as an Orientation for the Preparation of Teacher Candidates

Sabre Cherkowski
Assistant Professor
University of British Columbia, Okanagan,

Keith Walker
Professor
University of Saskatchewan

Abstract

In this article, the authors unpack taken-for-granted elements in a question central to their research and teaching: “What if the primary role of teachers is to learn how to thrive as educators and, in so doing, to continually co-explore and facilitate all means by which everyone in their learning communities flourishes most of the time?” As they explore a positive orientation to teaching and research, they work to understand the potential for generative and positive growth in themselves and school communities. Their article focuses upon seeking to create and sustain personal and professional flourishing at the heart of educational practice and consider how flourishing may be central to what it means to become a teacher.
Introduction

Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. (Rainer Maria Rilke)

Recently, teacher educators and educational researchers have been attempting to live a certain kind of question. The question has not been readily taken up in educational research, and yet stepping into this kind of inquiry provides an interesting and fruitful shift in thinking, being, and practicing as scholars and teacher educators. This question, which has prompted this paper, is “What if we imagine that the primary role of teachers is to learn how to thrive as educators and, in so doing, continually co-explore and facilitate all means by which everyone in their learning communities flourishes most of the time?”

This “what if” question appears simple and even attractive. The question makes teachers’ personal and professional well-being the foundation from which educators then figure out, with others, how the well-being of everyone in their communities might, likewise, thrive. Life is hard, it is unfair, it can be ugly, it is unevenly experienced. No amount of “pie-in-the sky” idealism, wishful thinking, or optimism significantly alters the realities that place us and those we care about on the spectra of happiness and despair or thriving and suffering. Leadership advisor, Max DePree, championed his view that although the first task of a leader may be to define reality, the last task of a leader is to say, “Thank you.” This statement encourages the focus on gratitude, compassion and other human capacities that may have mistakenly been imputed with the reputation of being soft and without substance. In our work, we are aiming to provide teacher candidates with evidence-based and research-attuned exposure to concepts such as compassion, hope and trust. The human spirit is complex and we suggest that fundamental questions of personhood, identity and attention to what gives life (and what depletes it) are crucial to our work as educators. We have endeavored to unpack the taken-for-granted elements that constitute the infrastructure of the question to better understand its potential for generative and positive growth in ourselves.
and the school communities that we all seek to create and sustain. In this article, we share how we have been living this question in our research and our teaching. We describe the literature that informs our inquiry, outline a conceptual model that has emerged from this literature and provide several stories of our experiences as teachers in university settings and with our research participants. We aim to shed light on the potential for teacher development that focuses on the use of positive psychology and organizational studies perspectives. Ultimately, we invite readers to think with us about the potential of living attuned and aligned to this provocative question inside and beyond the education domain.

Using Positive Research to Conceptualize Flourishing in Schools

We locate our research in the fields of school development, positive psychology (Carr, 2004; Seligman, 2011) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003) linked to our ongoing research within learning community theory (Cherkowski, 2012; Cherkowski & Walker, 2011; Sackney & Walker, 2007). We support recent suggestions by established scholars in educational administration (e.g., Hoy & Tartar, 2011) to incorporate dimensions of positive psychology in educational research. Positive psychological practices encourage the development of positive outlooks, habits, and mental models and focuses on describing and building positive qualities in individuals rather than trying to repair the negative and destructive ones (Achor, 2011; Ben-Shahar, 2008; Seligman, 2002). It is the study of the conditions, strengths, and virtue—the study of what goes right in life—that enable individuals and communities to thrive (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Keyes, Frederickson, & Park, 2012). In general, traditional views have focused on “deficit models;” whereas positive psychology applies a “strengths-based” lens (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

As we have said elsewhere (Cherkowski & Walker, in press a), effective schools are characterized as communities of learners where, as Mitchell and Sackney (2009) stated, “real, joyful, human learning is at the centre of educational activity” (p. 2). If we think of schools as living systems that embrace their humanity to become life-enhancing rather than life-destroying, then one way to understand learning communities is as living systems, vibrant and growing communities of learners (Capra, 2002; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Where schools are organized around the principles of living systems, the work to increase
capacities results in synergy for new skills and knowledge, enhanced and focused resources, and focused commitments (Sackney, 2007, p. 172). Schools, as learning communities, generate hallmarks that include a sense of belonging, compassion for all, loyalty, trust, mutual attachments, hopefulness and shared concerns (Strike, 2004, 2007). Such communities of learners foster mutual cooperation, emotional support and personal growth, and produce a synergy of effort to improve learning for all (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The re-framing and re-culturing of schools as true communities of flourishing learners forms the foundations for the building of the personal cognitive, psychological, emotional and physical resources that transforms people for the better, enabling them to thrive.

As teacher educators, we want to focus our energies on efforts that foster educators’ self-flourishing, as well as helping them to develop life-giving learning communities within which students, their families and the entire learning community will also thrive. Recently, the focus on children’s social emotional learning in schools (Cohen, 2001; Elias & Arnold, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003), moral development through character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005), and even more prescriptively, learning how to develop empathy among school children (c.f., Mary Gordon’s Roots of Empathy program) are examples of research and program development which contribute to our understandings. Although the role of teachers is highlighted as a key element that ensures the success of these initiatives for developing students’ capacities and capabilities (Zins et al., 2004), research has yet to sufficiently focus on cultivating and nurturing educators’ abilities to deepen their own human capacities and capabilities within the learning community model. Given the antecedent role of educators to foster well-being in their students’ lives, we think this is a significant gap in our field of study.

A growing discipline of positive psychology is committed to uncovering the varied ways that humans can tap into a greater sense of well-being in their lives through attending to personal strengths and positive growth towards a sense of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). People who flourish experience the opposite of languishing, yearning for more, or feelings of being stuck in a rut (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). People who flourish are more resilient and come closer to self-fulfillment, contentment, and happiness (Haybron, 2008; Martin & Marsh, 2006; Rasmussen, 1999).
Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) emerged from the discipline of positive organizational psychology (Carr, 2004) and continues to contribute theory on positive human capacity development in organizations and communities. POS research focuses on “the dynamics leading to the development of human strength, producing resilience and restoration, fostering vitality, and cultivating extraordinary individual and organizational performance” (Cameron & Caza, 2004, p. 3); where an emphasis is placed on the ideas of goodness and human potential, meaningfulness, and high quality relationships for all. In our research we use a positive organization lens to view the learning community and the people within it. This perspective in educational research may offer innovative ways of enhancing the teaching and learning that goes on in schools (Hoy & Tartar, 2011) and offers an alternative to rational technical, high stake performativity models for school improvement and accountability.

We have drawn from the positive psychology and POS fields to develop a tentative conceptual model for flourishing in schools (see Figure 1). The emergent model is underscored by a holistic view of the development of human capacity (Nussbaum, 2011; Scheffler, 1985; Sen, 2009) from a learning community perspective. We posit that the elements of this model have high resonance for teacher candidates, especially as their role is conceived as creating space for their own and others’ flourishing. Three intersecting domains of attention: (1) Subjective well-being; (2) Leaderful mindsets; and (3) Adaptive community provide the foundation for exploring the phenomenon of flourishing. Hosting virtues—compassion, trust, and hope—combine and interact to evoke the nexus of flourishing schools. In the next sections, we describe the three domains and weave stories of our own experiences with teaching and research to reflect on the usefulness of the model for teacher education.
In this figure, we suggest that: if teacher candidates could be encouraged to attenuate to the presence or absence, and actualization of subjective well-being, leaderful mindsets and adaptive community leanings, together with increasing their own, and others’, capacities to reinforce and privilege the hosting virtues of compassion, trust and hope, then, flourishing in schools of people is more likely to be realized as a way of life. We see the development of trust as hosting or mediating between teachers, leaders and their learning communities. Interpersonal trust-brokering is a key hosting virtue of leaders, followers and the community. We think that the opposite of good is not “bad” but rather apathy or unloving disaffection. As leaders and followers reciprocate love, charity, and compassion in relationships then subjective well-being and leadership excellence is shared, accelerated, sustained, transformed and multiplied. The dreams, visions, and aspirations of communities are mediated by hope, which sees human purpose, potential and teleological attentions realized. The greatest good, happiness or well-being, is the cause towards which a community must adapt, shift, and support itself in order to attain. The higher good of well-being is for the common good and commonwealth. We believe that, as teacher candidates,
and subsequently, professional educators, it is the primary role of these trustworthy, compassionate and hope-purveying persons to promote flourishing in themselves and in their schools.

**Subjective Well-being**

Diener and Seligman (2004) described well-being as “peoples’ positive evaluation of their lives, which includes positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction, and meaning” (p. 1). Experiences that increase peoples’ feelings of positive emotion will improve their well-being by buttressing their physical, social, mental, and psychological resources (Diener, 2000; Frederickson, 2008; Frederickson & Losada, 2005). Of course, the capacity to access these resources is highly beneficial to learning processes (Achor, 2011). We see rich potential in adapting these research findings for schools, for uncovering ways of nurturing neophyte and cultivating veteran educators’ abilities to deepen their own human capacities, and in so doing, facilitate the enhancement of capacities and capabilities within the learning community.

The stories and experiences described to us by our students and by our research participants when prompted to talk about the importance of flourishing in their work encourages us to continue to think about ways of engaging teachers and teacher-candidates in thinking about well-being as a central aspect of their work. Recently we carried out an online Delphi survey of school principals in a rural district in British Columbia (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013). We aimed to get a better understanding of the concept of flourishing in schools through their stories, experiences and insights on how they describe, notice, cultivate, imagine and aspire to flourishing in their work with teachers, students and community members. As a survey instrument, a Delphi consists of progressive iterations of rounds of questions in which data is synthesized after each iteration, and then further elaborations, interpretations or extensional insights are requested from original participants (Dillman, 2007). The use of this instrument to gather an iterative understanding of the concept of flourishing through an electronic means enabled us to gather a maximum number of individual opinions on a topic, without bringing participants together to discuss the topic—a seemingly worthwhile methodology in an increasingly time-deficient education system. In essence, this method
allowed for the collective wisdom of the group to surface through the various iterations of the survey.

We used a video clip of Shawn Achor’s TED Talk1 highlighting the findings from research on positive psychology and learning as the prompt for the second round of questions for the Delphi. Many of the participants responded that they found value in watching and learning from the video as part of the survey and that learning about some of the science of positive thinking from the short video affirmed for them that gratitude, joy, compassion and hope, for example, can be cultivated in schools and are often the precursors to establishing meaningful learning opportunities for students and teachers. An interesting outcome of including the video clip as the prompt for this round of questions was that one principal responded that he was so excited about the content of the video that he was going to show it to the teachers at the next staff meeting in hopes of generating conversation about the importance of well-being in their work in the school. Keith has had similar experiences of eliciting generative conversations about flourishing when using learning materials from positive psychology such as Shawn Achor’s TED Talk in his classes with teacher candidates.

Before showing or assigning the TED Talk, Keith gives the teacher candidates an opportunity to consider their own state of well-being, using the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2006) or the commonly used (i.e., Gallup) Cantril Self-anchoring Striving Scale (Cantril, 1965). Students arrive at their own self-assessed determination of well-being and experience facilitated conversations around this. Another example of an exercise is where students are provided with the well-being results from a learning community of about 500 respondents (parents, students, and staff) with the challenge to interpret the data (Cantril scores for various groups) and consider what the leverage points and challenges for school development might be.

---

1 There are many TED Talks that serve as wonderful discussion primers for teacher candidates, including: ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work.html
Leaderful Mindsets

We have observed that positive role modeling throughout a school can lead to a vibrancy and a school full of leaders (Sackney & Walker, 2007). We link the concept of mindsets (Dweck, 2006; Kaser & Halbert, 2009), or a shift in thinking, to the need for broadening leadership capacity in schools (Eaker & Keating, 2009; Fullan, 2006; Slater, 2008). Increasingly, professional learning is becoming connected to concepts of teacher leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2006; Timperley, 2005) and together these are seen as a foundation for successful school improvement (Donaldson, 2008; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Mayrowetz et al., 2007; Gabriel, 2005; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). Ensuring capacity for sustainable school improvement means that formal leaders must develop leadership capacity at many levels of the school (Elmore, 2000; Slater, 2008). We have seen in our teaching the benefits of creating opportunities for students and teachers to develop a sense of ownership for developing a positive and caring climate in the university classroom and for creating this capacity for leadership mindsets in our classroom communities. Frederickson’s (2009) “broaden and build” theory of positive emotions informs us that persons who experience positive emotions enable their further resources for intellectual, physical, social, and psychological capabilities. We therefore assume that students’ experiences of positive emotions in the university classroom will enable their further resources for intellectual, physical, social and psychological capabilities such as those we attribute to our notion of leadership mindsets.

In the undergraduate policy and leadership class that Sabre teaches for elementary education teacher candidates, she initiated a classroom practice that aimed to bring awareness of individual and collective agency to create positive spaces for learning. At the beginning of the semester, after talking about the theory of learning communities, she invited the students to brainstorm the values that they believed to be important for creating a positive learning community. She developed this idea after reading Frederickson’s (2008, 2009) research and Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) research on character strengths that has resulted in a list of 24 values and virtues, such as compassion, love of learning, appreciation of beauty. Peterson and Seligman found that when individuals intentionally included and honoured these strengths throughout the various aspects of their lives (at work, in
relationships, in their hobbies and volunteering) these individuals reported a greater sense of overall well-being.

In her class, she and the students listed values such as honesty, honouring diversity, compassion, the need for giving and receiving constructive and respectful feedback as well as the value of laughter and play as important to building and sustaining their learning environment. They then decided as a group which of the list could be held as shared values. With the students, she established a routine for inviting students to set positive intentions as a way of signalling individual and communal agency in creating a climate for well-being in the classroom community. These moments enabled the students and her to reflect on their personal and collective positive agency—or what we might recognize as leaderful mindsets—in their classroom community. Near the end of the semester, she rearranged the routine during one class to allow for a guest speaker. One of the students waited patiently for her to introduce the speaker and then asked, “are we going to set our intention today? I’ve been looking forward to this today. I’ve had a crazy day and I really need that time to set my intention.”

Keith has vivid early recollections of a sage faculty mentor advising him that teacher education is best conceived of as leadership education and development. The mentor was a 30+ year veteran working in a First Nations and Metis teacher education program. This viewpoint held that an exclusively rational-technical approach with teacher candidates was woefully inadequate, short-sighted and even cruel. Yes, excellence in classroom-level leadership and authentic pedagogic practice were required and fundamental competency sets but there was a pattern of feedback, expressed as gratitude, received from this mentor’s former students who thanked him for the way he had built up their dispositions and vision to engage staff, students, families and communities in healthy patterns of living, gathering, mutual support, and decision making. The number of chief and council members who had their leader qualities and visions initially forged and inspired under the relational influence of this strategic influencer was astounding. He had held their well-being and his pastoral care for them and their families as his primary interest. The outcomes and impacts were profound and had been multiplied many times over in the lives of graduates. Yes, the mechanics of curriculum, instruction and assessment, with all the associated competencies
and dispositions were highly regarded, but the reality for this mentor’s teacher candidates was that when they had been teaching in their communities for a short while, they would succeed to significant places of influence and were attitudinally equipped for the accompanying stewardship and fostering of the well-being of their constituents (including, but not limited to, their students). As a practical exercise in bringing the leaderful mindset into focus, Keith has, for a number of years, offered the development of a template-based leadership portfolio or a narrative-based leadership portfolio as a part of the course learning contract.

Adaptive Community

The concept of community has been well-researched in education framed within perspectives of ethics, professionalism, inquiry, inclusion, among others (Brouwer et al., 2012; Furman, 2004; Little, 1990; Louis & Marks, 1998; Redding & Thomas, 2001; Strike, 2007; Wenger, 1998). From a sociological perspective, researchers indicate that we often build community in schools because we are drawn to work and live together in ways that help us to make deeper meaning of our lives (Block, 2009; Brown & Hannic, 2008; Rifkin, 2011; Vanier, 2003). Developmental psychology applied to research in leadership in organizations (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, 2009) and schools (Drago-Severson, 2009) highlights the importance of supporting adults through a challenging and caring community for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991,1998). We establish the construct—adaptive community—linked to ideas of resiliency (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Seligman, 1998; Werner & Smith, 2001; Wolin & Wolin, 1993) and self-aware, context-sensitive, emergent systems (Capra, 2002; Heifetz et al., 2009; Senge, 2006).

We know that students (and teachers) do their best learning in supportive, compassionate, and caring environments (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007) and have thought about how to develop new ways of thinking about community from a positive perspective in education (Cherkowski &Walker, in press b).

If a community of learners is framed as a setting or space where people congregate to flourish together, then teachers are the primary hosts or leaders of such communities. Leadership might be described as the hyphen between host and hosted, between leader and
follower, between mentor and protégé, or between teacher and learner. Like the word “relationship,” leadership describes the chemistry or nature of community connection between and amongst people rather than something that is inherent within the person or persons, themselves. An excellent relationship speaks to the quality of connections between two or more persons (the hyphen); and so, leadership speaks to the intentional effort of connected persons to strive towards creating more flourishing within a setting and within the members of the community. Flourishing people will naturally, out of their own thriving, influence others to flourish. What emerges from this way of framing learning communities is a vision that sees everyone as a teacher, every member as a leader and all participants as learners. Our contention is that teacher candidates are benefited when they understand and assume their role as animators and hosts within leaderful, resilient, reciprocal, and learningful settings.

Raelin (2003) offered the view that leaderful and adaptive learning communities will have concurrent, collective, collaborative and compassionate features. He said that in leaderful practice, followership and leadership are in essence part of the same process “. . . [where] leaders and followers are the interchangeable parts in the conduct of leadership” (p. 36) for the accomplishment of some greater and higher common purpose (we suggest this is fostering flourishing).

One of our participants in the Delphi study gave us an imagined story of flourishing that resonates with the ideas of resilience, connectedness, hope and joy at work:

The scene: a crowded staffroom after a rigorous debate and discussion about a student/learning related matter. The crowd: is inclusive, administrators, teachers, support staff. What do you see? People mingling. One sign on the whiteboard reminds folks that next Tuesday is "Soup Day" and who will be bringing the food. Another sign reminds everyone of a future staff party (organized by the school custodian) is going to be a cross-country ski event followed by a wine and cheese at a teacher's cabin.

What do you hear? Engaged, respectful conversation. Laughter—lot of it.
What do you taste? Plates of homemade chocolate chip cookies brought by the PAC [parent advisory committee] with a note, “thanks for caring so much about our kids.”

Hosting Virtues: Compassion, Trust and Hope

Whether fostering leaderful mindsets, adaptive community or subjective well-being, our aim with teacher candidates has been to engage them in what might be conveyed as the vitamin C’s of teacher candidate development. We want them to increase in consciousness, competence, commitment and courage with respect to flourishing. Our facilitation of teacher candidates’ learning aspires to provide some sense-making and conceptual clarity with respect to human flourishing. We think that if teachers are sensitive to and aware of the vital place of flourishing and its antecedents then this is a great start for them (consciousness of place of flourishing in schools). Secondly, if we can put beginning teachers in touch with what gives them life and enhances their own thriving (or to become aware of entropic or energy zapping patterns), then developing the competence to move beyond suffering and struggling to thriving will provide them with a base from which to develop the same with others. Finally, we have sought to encourage teacher candidates to adopt, habituate and foster flourishing as a key professional commitment and to understand that to consistently make this promise of focus a priority will take much courage and persistence.

We think that conversation about the practices and challenges associated with trust-brokering, championing compassion, and instilling hope are key aspects of professional virtue development. As indicated, we believe that compassion and hope are vital hosting or teaching virtues for those who want to see more flourishing in schools. For teacher candidates to custom-create their own vision of the future with a co-sense of what their own and others’ flourishing will and ought to look like, gives rise to passion and this passion held with others is compassion. We would like them to say, “we are here at this level but we need to be there!” as they reflect on their lives and the lives of others in the learning community. Or, “we know what well-being looks like and we want more of it for ourselves and especially for those who experience its lift less than do others.” Teacher candidates
need to be able to define reality and to assess current states of well-being relative to preferred and desirable states. Whether the learning community is losing steam and in a slump or is sleepy and plateaued in its energy levels or perhaps it is making great and dynamic headway, the teacher needs to have a sense for this. Teachers are tasked with the great challenge of sustaining the engagement of all members of their learning community. Of course there are culture busters and culture builders. We believe that teachers hold the key placements in schools to foster generative and synergistic settings of trust and hope which are anchored in their love for the people entrusted to them. Compassion is a big deal in schools; teacher candidates will learn by experience that sowing compassion will result in harvests of compassion. The same reciprocity principle applies in the case of other hosting virtues: hope and trust.

**Concluding Thoughts: Teacher Education as Learning to Flourish**

Based on research, we know that attending to strengths and positive outlooks, as opposed to a deficit-model of thinking, can increase resilience, vitality, and happiness and can decrease stress, anxiety, and depression (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). We see how we can use the findings from research in the science of positive psychology in service of greater flourishing in schools. Social-emotional learning is linked to increased academic achievement (Elias, 1997, Cohen, others) and is recognized as an important element for student development and success in school and in life (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). From a positive psychological perspective, increasing or maximizing social-emotional learning is an essential element in establishing habits for lifelong learning, but also for lifelong well-being. Moreover, being happy and feeling good are often necessary precursors to meaningful learning and development, so attending to feeling good at school is a necessary step in establishing school climates where children and their teachers can thrive (Achor, 2011).

There is also a growing awareness that learning is a social process and that much of what goes on in schools happens in a social context. Students do not learn alone, but in collaboration with their peers, their teachers, and with others in their learning community. Attending to emotions and social processes is an essential element in creating positive and caring learning climates where students can thrive. We suggest that teachers also need
similar learning climates in the school organization in order to take risks in their practice, make mistakes, open their private practice to collaborative inquiry, to pursue their passion, engage in meaningful relationships with their colleagues and create moments of play in their work—flourishing learning climates. Knowing that meaningful learning happens when we feel cared for, feel good and are generally happy (Knoop, 2011), we consider well-being as an integral element of a positive learning climate where students and teachers can flourish. As we continue to live the questions, in our teaching and our research, that open us to the complexity of the human spirit and awaken us to the crucial work as educators of exploring how we host and are hosted by the professional virtues of compassion, trust and hope, we sense that developing a personal understanding of flourishing may be central to learning what it means to become a teacher.
References


depth and dilemmas (pp. 1-13). Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.


Enhancing AI High School Student Success: A Work in Progress

Mapuana C.K. Antonio
Graduate Research Assistant
Washington State University

Mary Schilling
Director, STEM Pipeline to the Future
Grand Coulee School District

Sylvia Oliver
Director, Health Science Laboratory Operations and Education Outreach Director
WSU Spokane CityLab, LTW Affiliate Director for Biomedical Sciences
Washington State University - Spokane

Jennifer E. LeBeau
Research Associate
Learning and Performance Research Center Clinical
Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology
Washington State University

Abstract

This paper describes the first-year activities of a five-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education as part of the Indian Education Demonstration Grants for Indian Children program. The project brings students, families, the tribal government, and the tribal community together to improve the lives and education of students, as well as their families and community, through a comprehensive change in school culture. The project utilizes a unique, multifaceted approach to offer academic and student support; a four-year Biomedical Science program; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) enrichment; professional development; and community engagement. The overall goal is to assist American Indian (AI) students in making successful transitions to post-secondary educational and career pathways, particularly in STEM fields. The paper describes the work-in-progress and lessons learned, shedding light on current issues in education and encouraging open dialogue about improving the lives of students, families, and communities.
Introduction

This paper describes the first-year activities of a five-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education as part of the Indian Education Demonstration Grants for Indian Children program. The project is geared toward motivating and preparing American Indian (AI) students at a rural high school in Washington State for successful transitions to postsecondary educational and career pathways, particularly those leading to high demand, high wage Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. The project includes support from the school, families, community, tribal government, and tribal members to send a powerful message of the importance of a college-ready culture. In doing so, the project impacts students’ academic and college or career preparation and ensures future success of the region through well-prepared youth.

In the past six years, only two AI students in the project high school graduated from a four-year institution and only six graduated from two-year institutions. Further, persistence rates of AI students are significantly lower than those of Caucasian students at the project high school. Based on these indicators, two major education gaps are being addressed by the present project: motivation and academic preparation for successful transitions to postsecondary educational and career pathways.

Motivation has been identified as one of the most powerful indicators of student success or failure in school while academic preparation is crucial to successful transition to college. AI students are too often disengaged from their high school education, finding little relevance to their coursework, limited expectations of going to college, and no understanding of future careers in high demand, high wage STEM fields. A major emphasis of the present project is to increase student academic engagement by expanding school relevance to students’ own lives and future careers through the national Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Biomedical Science program. PLTW includes four courses: Year One Principles of the Biomedical Sciences; Year Two Human Body Systems; Year Three Medical Intervention; and, Year Four Biomedical Innovation. This highly interactive project-based curriculum aims to: (1) engage students in explorations of their own health giving them a better understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle in preventing
obesity, diabetes and heart disease; (2) give them a clear vision of the multitude of high demand, high wage jobs in healthcare and the biomedical sciences, and (3) help students anticipate future career goals and understand how doing well in school is important to achieving high value goals. For the first time in the United States, engagement will be enhanced through AI students' personal enrichment of the PLTW curriculum with cultural perspectives to human health. These will be posted to the national PLTW website following Tribal approval.

In addition to the PLTW Biomedical Science Program, the project seeks to increase AI student motivation and engagement by: (a) increasing support for rising 9th grade AI students through a summer STEM bridge program; (b) affording greater opportunities for STEM enrichment opportunities including hands-on authentic student research projects leading to regional and national presentations (e.g. at AI Science and Engineering Society (AISES) conferences); (c) increasing academic rigor by increasing the number of college preparatory courses taken by AI students who are also supported by tutoring programs; (d) offering rigorous two-week summer health science experiences on a major college campus; (e) enhancing counselling services, particularly those dedicated to STEM education and career preparation; (f) increasing connections between AI families and school; and (g) sending a powerful message of college-readiness to stakeholders through events, newsletters, website postings, and other venues. In sum, the project engages AI students, their families, tribal government, and the tribal community as a whole to find creative and meaningful methods of personal development to propel students into a successful future in a culturally relevant manner.

By describing the first-year project activities, this paper sheds light on current issues in education and seeks to encourage open dialogue about improving the lives of AI students, their families, and their communities. In addition, we outline and describe the importance of certain activities toward increasing AI student success that readers may find useful, such as creating Individual Education Career Pathway Plans (IECPPs) and instilling college and career awareness for AI students. We conclude with a description of unintended outcomes that have already occurred as part of planning and implementation of the project, and lessons learned through presentation of the paper at the Northwest Association of Teacher
Educators 2013 conference. By sharing the work-in-progress, we seek to address how we can more authentically connect schools and the diverse people and places they serve. In turn, we hope for enlivened discussion and enhanced relationships within education, particularly for AI students.

**Method**

The present project assists AI high school students in transitioning to postsecondary educational and career pathways through activities designed to attain two overarching goals: (1) to increase AI student motivation to complete a high school education and pursue career or postsecondary education pathways and (2) to increase student academic preparation. The project engages AI students, their families, tribal government and the tribal community through creative and meaningful methods of personal development to propel students into a successful future in a culturally relevant manner. The project is unique in comparison to other available programs, as it encourages AI student development through the use of a multi-faceted approach emphasizing student support, academic support, STEM Enrichment, professional development, and community engagement, as described below.

**Student Support:** Student support through this project enhances the academic and personal development of AI students through three primary activities: (1) a summer STEM bridge program, (2) individualized education and career plans, and (3) tutoring, counseling, and peer mentoring services. The summer bridge program is equivalent to a freshman orientation that helps AI high school students transition into high school. This program provides hands-on experience for AI students through project-based learning. Individual Education and Career Pathway Plans (IECPPs) provide a venue for students to identify their high school goals, subjects of interest, personal interests, post high school and career goals, careers of interest, and extracurricular activities. Through these IECPPs, the school personnel may develop a personal relationship with students and help them identify ways they may become more involved in STEM courses and activities. As the project progresses, our administrative team will also utilize the individualized student plans to assess each student on a bi-weekly basis for specific needs including tutoring, counseling and peer mentoring. Services will be
prescribed, tracked for progress, and adjusted as needed. Students will be included in this process as much as possible to ensure buy-in.

**Academic Support:** Academic Support is designed to provide students with skills necessary to excel educationally. Academic support includes PLTW Biomedical Science courses, Advanced Placement courses, rigorous mathematical and science courses, and Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) preparation. PLTW prepares students to be innovative and productive leaders in STEM fields while teaching students to make meaningful, pioneering contributions to our world. PSAT and SAT preparation will include additional foundational courses and fee waivers.

**Academic Enrichment:** Academic enrichment programs are designed as a means to increase student motivation to pursue postsecondary and career STEM pathways. Academic enrichment programs include the high school chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) and a two-week summer program called the Na-ha-shnee Health Science Institute. Through AISES, students complete independent research projects, present at national conferences, participate in AISES high school competitions, and compete and host regional science fairs. Similarly, Na-ha-shnee is a two-week summer program hosted by the Native American Health Science Institute and exposes Native students to careers in nursing, medicine, exercise physiology, pharmacy, speech and hearing, and other science-related fields in hopes of inspiring these students to pursue an education in a health care field.

**Professional Development:** Professional development occurs through various opportunities including PLTW training and attending a program at an institute for one week for high school teachers to become certified in Advanced Placement courses. PLTW enhances professional development of teachers and school personnel through two-week intensive summer core training programs, giving them the skills and content knowledge to teach each of the four biomedical science courses. The national PLTW program also provides teachers with relevant up-to-date support materials through an online Virtual Academy. PLTW also provides conferences for high school guidance counselors to help identify a clear connection between their program and the student’s scholastic/academic career path. Prior to this grant
the project high school had not been able to offer any AP courses to provide students with more advanced coursework and the opportunity to gain college credit.

**Community Engagement:** The project engages the community by promoting activities that allow collaboration and partnership with both the tribal community and the tribal council. A Community Advisory Council was formed consisting of tribal leaders, local STEM field professionals, a university representative, the project director and a student family member. The Council meets quarterly to evaluate progress towards the project goals and provide feedback to the project administrative team. The project also enhances family engagement through activities such as STEM Family Nights to educate families on college preparedness and celebrate student successes.

Students will engage in research projects that connect them with professionals in the field and real-life data and experiences. This will provide a severely missing connection between high school curriculum and the work world, and may serve to foster meaningful mentorships.

**Summary**

This project offers AI high school students rigorous and relevant STEM-related opportunities to enhance their motivation and academic preparation to ensure more successful transitions to college and/or career pathways. This project also provides multiple ways to engage the community and tribal members in AI student schoolwork and student STEM enrichment activities. This comprehensive approach will send a powerful message of the importance of a college- and career-ready culture to ensure the future success of the region through well-prepared AI youth.

**Unintended Outcomes**

In the first year, several unintentional outcomes occurred that are fundamental to the continued growth of the program and to the community at large. First, the program coordinator was given the opportunity to receive his teaching credentials. This unintended outcome is vital because the program coordinator is a former student of the high school
and tribal member; therefore, as a result of the program he, has increased knowledge about the culture and expectations of the high school students.

Second, current high school instructors with appropriate credentials have been given the opportunity to become certified as an AP teacher, which will allow AI students to be more prepared for rigorous college courses. Since the onset of this project, one of the high school teachers has become a certified teacher in an AP course, which will be offered to students for the first time for this upcoming school year. On this note, the high school teachers have also been encouraged to receive additional training to expand their knowledge and incorporate progressive educational practices to help engage and motivate students within the classroom. Finally, one of the high school teachers has been given the opportunity to gain grant experience to aid with the process of future directions for this program and similar programs within the community.

Lessons Learned

By sharing our work in progress, we hope to leave readers with an open dialogue and question how we may more authentically connect schools and the diverse people and places they serve. We begin this conversation by sharing our own lessons learned through the Northwest Association of Teacher Educators (NWATE) conference.

Lesson One: Consider the cultural impact your work may have

In his keynote speech, Dr. Anton Treuer shared his personal experiences and wisdom related to American Indians and academia. Dr. Treuer encouraged audience members to consider the ways in which our work may be portrayed differently than we intend, particularly when it is viewed from the perspective of others having a cultural background different than our own. After hearing Dr. Treuer’s presentation, we thought more about the work we planned to present at the conference and realized certain examples of how we had not made such considerations. The most poignant, and somewhat embarrassing, example was that we used an apple tree as the background for our Prezi presentation. Unbeknownst to us, the term “apple” is a derogatory term used by some American Indians to refer to educated American Indians. “Red on the outside” symbolizes the individual’s
identification as an American Indian and “white on the inside” symbolizes conformity to Caucasian beliefs and ways of living. Ironically, the apple tree in our presentation was intended to be a warm, artistic symbol demonstrating growth of the program; the roots symbolized foundational information related to the program and the apples symbolized unintended outcomes and educational accomplishments. We were quickly humbled upon learning of the metaphor and examined the remainder of our presentation for other content that may have been considered offensive to the audience we were trying to support.

Lesson Two: Good intentions are not always as good as they seem

In examining the remainder of our presentation, we found other examples that demonstrated how easy it is to have great intentions that seem supportive, but that could actually be offensive when viewed from the perspective of others. For example, we came across the term Na-ha-shnee, which is used to describe the health sciences institute to which we send students. Prior to the NWATE conference, we had not given consideration to the word and assumed it had a Native American meaning. As we prepared for our presentation, we decided to look up the meaning of the term so we could share it with the audience. We learned that the term is not a Native American word as it may appear, but instead is “…an amalgamation of the words Native American High School Summer Nursing Institute” (Benjamin, 2012, About Na-ha-shnee). Upon reflecting on Dr. Treuer’s words and considering our work from the perspective of others, we thought that it might be more meaningful if a local tribe had been consulted to identify a Nez Perce term that equally reflected the meaning of the institute, but that was more sensitive to those whom the institute serves.

Lesson Three: Be Open to Sharing and Talking about Your Mistakes

After hearing Dr. Treuer’s presentation, we contemplated changing our presentation before audience members could see the mistakes we had made. We decided, however, that recognizing our unintentional mistakes and sharing them with the audience would be a better way to open dialogue and to begin breaking down some of the barriers Dr. Treuer so vividly described. We hoped that by making ourselves vulnerable, others would feel more
comfortable doing the same. Post-conference feedback suggested that our presentation made an impact on audience members and that we achieved our goal.
References

Personal, Cultural, and Educational Implications of Language Loss/Transformation: A Canadian Context

John W. Friesen, Ph.D., D.Min., D.R.S.
Professor
Faculty of Education
University of Calgary

Abstract

In this article, the author provides an engaging account of language loss, transformation, and preservation, and the personal, social, cultural implications of language shift. John’s personal reflections on replacing Low German with English as a child, in tandem with a carefully researched account of various language communities in Canada, alerts us to the unique opportunities and challenges teachers face with respect to the multicultural, multilingual character of the contemporary classroom. He punctuates his paper with four thoughtful observations with respect to cultural diversity in schools.
Introduction

Language is our unique relationship with the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values and fundamental notions of what is truth. Our languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a people. Without our languages, our cultures cannot survive (Assembly of First Nations, Education Secretariat, 1990).

One of the primary concerns of ethnocultural communities in North America is maintenance of their cultural identities, a goal that is supported by both Canadian and American government policies. Most experts recognize that language is a vital component of cultural maintenance, and leaders of ethnocultural communities are fearful that many their languages are vanishing. Their concerns are well founded. Ironically, despite a commitment to immigration and multiculturalism, by various levels of government, most North Americans are probably unaware of the degree to which the two countries are linguistically diverse. Most North Americans, including some of the most highly educated and politically influential citizens, are largely ignorant of the sheer diversity, complexity, and cultural richness that these people contribute (Shaw, 2001, p. 7).

Despite protective legislation pertaining to the maintenance of language and culture, researchers estimate that, by the end of the current century, some 5 000 to 7 000 world languages will be lost for various reasons, and the cost will be high — personally, culturally, and nationally. According to international research undertaken by the National Geographic Society, a language disappears every 14 days (Solash, 2010). Factors responsible for this phenomenon vary and may include politics, media, international travel, economics, historical developments, and many others (Chrystal, 1999). In Canada specifically, it is estimated that in the next half century, nearly every Aboriginal language will be lost.

Linguists are often unable to assist with this tragedy because they do not have the where-with-all to recommend appropriate action. Mark Turin, a linguistic anthropologist at Cambridge University, notes that linguists are acquainted with only five to ten percent of the world’s languages. Documentation of the unique composition of the other 90 percent constitutes a puzzle of great magnitude and, sadly, to date has not yet been undertaken (Solash, 2010).
Language is also very much a part of individual identity. Individuals generally feel most at ease conversing in their mother tongue. When languages die, cultural identity is radically transformed, and it becomes necessary to adopt a new language. As a result, individuals may personally have to deal with both loss of identity and conceptual familiarity. In addition, members of their immediate family may suffer similar trauma. When experiencing language loss or change, parents lose a valued means by which to socialize their children and thus become incapable of conveying to them their culturally originated values, beliefs, understandings, and wisdom.

To illustrate: one family who had been in North America for a generation realized one day that their four children could not speak or understand their mother tongue, neither would they acknowledge it when their parents addressed them in it (Fillmore, 1991). In such a circumstance, language loss can be traumatic because language is the vehicle by which spiritual, emotional, and cognitive undertones are conveyed (Anderson, 2010; Shaw, 2001). Whenever a language dies, the respective culture loses conceptual knowledge that cannot easily be translated into another language—if at all. The brotherhood of humankind is similarly the poorer when a language dies.

This paper will discuss four aspects of language loss: (a) language transformation or change; (b) personal concerns and community concerns (c) efforts to preserve languages; and, (d) the intricacies of language preservation.

Language Loss May Be Personal

I can personally attest to having changed my primary language, having grown up speaking a Dutch-German dialect known as Low German. I did not learn English until my parents enrolled me in first grade in Trail, British Columbia, where my family had recently relocated. Originally from Saskatchewan, which was experiencing tough economic times, my parents migrated to British Columbia in search of employment. After several years, they experienced sufficient economic success in Trail, so that our family could make an annual trip back to Saskatchewan to visit relatives. I recall one such visit to a family gathering during which I was severely shocked to discover that everyone in the group was speaking Low German. I drew my father aside and demanded to know how this could be. Wasn’t
Low German our family’s private language? After all, no one we knew in our British Columbia community spoke the language; our neighbors and friends were all English speaking. I thought that having a private family language was a good idea; that way family members could safely share private information in the presence of strangers if they had to. I assumed every family had a private language.

My father smiled at my disarming discovery and gently informed me that our extended family belonged to a group called Mennonites and each of us shared an historical background, culture, and language. I remember my seven-year-old eyes widening at the thought. This was my first truly multicultural experience.

Losing one’s language, trying to learn a second language, or having to exchange one’s mother tongue for another can be a traumatic experience, particularly for older folk. Many older immigrants who migrate to this continent expect to maintain their culture and language and hope that succeeding generations will carry on their traditions. After all, immigration-oriented countries advertise that newcomers can expect that their cultural traditions and practices will be encouraged. For example, the 1971 Canadian government policy states:

The Government of Canada will support all of Canada’s cultures and will seek to assist, resources permitting, the development of those cultural groups which have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop, a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, as well as a clear need for assistance (Canada, 1971, p. 8545).

Canada specifically has not always been faithful in assisting immigrant groups to maintain their languages, but instead has encouraged incoming groups to acquire at least one of the official languages in order for them to become full participants in Canadian society (Remnant, 1976, p. 12). This apparent form of disconnect sometimes disappoints first generation immigrants, particularly when they witness the highly motivated fashion with which their grandchildren adopt one of Canada’s official languages. Elders sometimes perceive the acquisition of a foreign language as the first step in renouncing loyalty to the land of their origin. A practical result of this occurrence is the predictable loss of communication between generations as older folk retain their native language and their
grandchildren learn to speak a resident language (Rong and Preissle, 1998, pp. 41-42). This development is particularly unsettling among cultural groups where it is expected that grandparents will be involved in child raising. In the final analysis, however, it appears that language loyalty persists only as long as economic and social circumstances are conducive to it. If another language — like that of dominant society or the business world proves to have greater value, a shift to that language immediately begins (Edwards, 1993, p. 129).

Fillmore (1991) relates the story of a grandfather who arrived in North America from Korea, only to discover that his grandchildren, who were resident here, could not communicate with him in the Korean language. The children’s father ordered them to address their grandfather in Korean, but they were unable to do so. It was only then that the father realized he had neglected his children’s linguistic lessons. When the children did address their grandfather in a rusty form of Korean, they neglected to use proper forms of the language for addressing elders. The grandfather was shocked at the apparent disrespect the children were displaying towards him. He scolded his son who took it upon himself to punish his children, using a stick as his weapon of reprimand.

Another reality of language loss in the personal realm faces immigrant or resident minority students who hesitate to speak their native languages for fear of embarrassment or because schools encourage limited use of first languages by second language learners. Similarly, some students seeking to master an official language, but have difficulty in doing so, may avoid interacting with their peers who prefer to communicate in their first language, thus creating a wall of another sort (Egbo, 2009, pp. 70-71). Schools are therefore faced with the complex challenge of trying to help second language learners feel welcome while encouraging them to take second language learning seriously. Parents who become aware that their children are experiencing difficulty adjusting to the language scene, often enroll them in private schools. Such a move may reduce stress on the student, but it may also hinder their development in second language learning.

The challenge to retain languages is immense and often becomes quite personal, particularly to individuals who speak more than one language. As Professor Joshua Fishman (1996, p. 81) states: “What are you going to do with your mother tongue before school, out of school,
and after school, because that determines its fate, whether it is going to become self-renewing." The bottom line is that the most reliable way to assure language maintenance is to practice it in the home (Cummins and Swain, 1986; Friesen, 1991).

**Community Concerns**

Language goes deeper than skin color, or ethnic origin. Skin color is superficial. Language is not. Language calls for a different set of cultural references, a different school system, another literature… Language is more than a passing difference in a democratic and pluralist society…. It might even be the major one (Shaw, 2001, p. 6).

Language is undoubtedly a most effective carrier of cultural content. It is an invisible tie that binds people together. Sociologists call this phenomenon *Gemeinschaft*, meaning fellowship of the deepest order — a strong sense of community. The most important relationship between language and culture gets to the heart of what is lost when a language vanishes. When language use is depleted, specific ways to conceptualize phenomena disappear. As Fishman (1996, p. 72) suggests, take language away from a culture and you take away its greetings, its praises and curses, its laws and literature, its riddles and proverbs, its wisdom and cures, and its prayers. In other words, when you take away these things, you also take away the essence of culture that cannot be expressed in any other way.

Many culturally related interpretations of everyday activities are unique to specific cultural milieu. Individuals’ names or the identification of certain institutions may have special meaning within a given cultural context. Some Aboriginal communities recognize ownership of names so that when a child is born and the parents wish to assign a name that is owned by another family, permission to use the name must be attained. Ownership of a name is often bestowed, renewed, or recognized by successive generations at special occasions or recounted in formalized oral traditions (Shaw, 2001, p. 11). When translated into another language, that significance is lost.

A similar phenomenon occurs when new words are introduced into a heritage language. Researchers are quick to point out the difficulty of translating conceptual ideas from one
language to another. Meanings just do not have the same impact when rephrased in another language. For example, Canadian Francophones are proud of their language and envisage its use as a sign of intelligence and sophistication. The French language Academy in Quebec is under constant pressure to purge the linguistic community of any intrusions from English “junk” culture (Elliott and Fleras, 1992, p. 213).

Many incoming immigrant groups have quickly discovered the need to adopt a national language in order to succeed in the job market. Third generation immigrants are usually quite quick to abandon their heritage language, much to the chagrin of their elders. The latter often establish heritage language schools and enroll their grandchildren in them in an effort to preserve some semblance of their old way of life. Usually these efforts do not have meaningful results, much to the disappointment of the older set (Paupanekis and Westfall 2001, p. 101).

Abandoning one’s heritage culture and language often has spiritual and emotional implications, particularly when corresponding institutions in which to practice those are not available. This is particularly true in an Aboriginal context since few forms of religious life imported from Europe even remotely resembled the ceremonial life of North America’s First Peoples. In fact, at first contact their spiritual beliefs and rituals were condemned by incoming Europeans. Native American children who were rounded up and registered in missionary-operated day schools and residential or boarding schools were instructed to abandon the traditional beliefs and practices of their people and adopt European models. Students were punished if they conversed with one another in their native tongue although there were instances where Roman Catholic priests, for example, learned to speak Aboriginal languages even though the underlying reason for their doing so was to convert locals.

Some First Nations, like the Stoney (Nakoda Sioux) of Alberta, believe that some forms of uttered language are sacred; that is to say, when certain words or phrases are used in a specific context, a form of spiritual exercise or worship is enacted. In some cultures languages are considered holy in themselves while other cultures hold that forms of their
language contain holy thoughts, holy dictums, or metaphors of holiness (Fishman, 1996, p. 73).

Milton Gordon's (1964, p. 70) classic seven step paradigm of cultural assimilation includes language shifts only by implication, citing changes in cultural practice, adopting dominant group relationships, intermarriage, gaining a sense of peoplehood with the dominant group, absence of discrimination on the part of the group being assimilated, and arriving at the position that the assimilated minority experiences no issues pertaining to their loss of cultural identity. We have learned much since then, and now realize that language is the predominant vehicle by which to preserve cultural identity.

**Preserving Languages**

A few decades ago when it was discovered that heritage languages were disappearing, a myriad of government and community agencies heeded the call to establish second language programs, even though the evidence was not in to prove that these programs would be effective. In Canada, for example, the province of Alberta began a series of such schools in 1970 with the following enrollment figures: Ukrainian, 1 105, German, 935, Hebrew, 669, and Yiddish, 77. The province of Ontario objected to the idea of offering basic school instruction in other than the two official languages, except on a temporary basis to assist students in acquiring English skills. By 1982, over 80 000 students were enrolled in these programs (Martel, 1984).

Heritage language programs were not initiated without resistance since assimilationists argued that such programs would hinder the integration process. Their position was that, if immigrant children did not acquire facility in the country’s official language, they would not be able to compete effectively in the job market. If students had a deficiency in an official language, it would be contrary to good pedagogy to provide them with instruction in another language. Adherents to this line of thinking also argued that a child’s mind can only absorb so much information; therefore, time spent in other than ”essential” instruction would be time lost from learning important material (Ashworth, 1988, p. 187).
In Canada, some school districts mandate heritage language instruction, thus making available the opportunity for all students to learn a second language. In 1971, Alberta became the first province to deliver on this recommendation. Saskatchewan was the second province to do so in 1978, followed by Manitoba in 1978, and Ontario in 1989 – all responding to the federal government’s newly established multicultural policy. Despite these efforts, English continues to be the predominant language of instruction in English-speaking provinces, while French is the principal language of instruction in Quebec. School programs cannot maintain or rejuvenate heritage languages even if they have strong community support. However, such instruction must be made available if only to meet the intent of Canada’s Multicultural Act (Egbo, 2009, p. 70). Government assistance in establishing and maintaining heritage schools is not seen as a significant factor in determining their success. Still, yearnings to retain elements of cultural life from “the old country” remain strong.

Closely aligned with the above is the phenomenon of English as a second language (ESL) programs. ESL has been by far the most common educational response to linguistic diversity. Unfortunately, instead of teaching ESL in ways that encourage the maintenance of students’ first languages, schools respond in ways that de-emphasize primary languages. As Egbo (2009, p. 71) has concluded:

> There is an implicit assumption that exclusive focus on the teaching of ESL will facilitate minority students’ successful integration into the education system and mainstream culture…. Schools have to make an ideological shift that will give greater recognition to the advantages of maintaining students’ home languages while learning a second language.

The Indigenous peoples of North America are particularly concerned about cultural and linguistic maintenance, and have a hard job of it in light of the fact that their traditional world-view is so different from that imported from other continents. Many First Peoples still believe humankind should respect nature to the extent that individuals and communities should work in harmony with nature’s rhythms. They further maintain that all entities in the universe are interconnected in some way: this interconnection is implied and
confirmed by the phrase “all my relations,” which is often the ending of a prayer. Nature is not to be exploited, but appreciated and respected in a context of awe.

Naturally, this perspective is little valued by today’s increasing emphasis on economic growth and technological development. Native leaders have long sought governmental assistance for their campaign to Aboriginal languages. Antone (2003, p. 10) insists that, unless something is done about it, at least 50 of Canada’s 54 Aboriginal languages will disappear in the next half century. The only ones remaining will be Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktituk, all of which have more than 1,000 speakers, and possibly Dakota Sioux which use seems to be increasing in use amongst the younger generation. Most school systems tend to add instruction in Aboriginal languages following an ESL model that is insufficient to help students maintain a working knowledge of their heritage language.

Language and Politics in Canada

Canadians appear to possess a high capacity for debate on language issues, many stemming from the passage of the Official Languages Act in 1969 (Elliott and Fleras, 1992, p. 210). This legislation was quickly followed by the enactment of Canada’s multicultural policy in 1971. After the two official languages were adopted, many minorities attempted to seek official governmental recognition of their languages as well, but this did not occur. After all, official recognition of language is politically laden because knowledge of recognized languages is powerful. Those who make laws in a specific language simultaneously forge specific meanings for citizen behavior. Hence, countries like Canada embark on blatantly overt or underlying assimilationist endeavors. Incoming peoples must learn one of the country’s official languages. The argument is that those who are mainly fluent in a language other than an official language will not have opportunity to succeed economically on the same footing as citizens who are able to function in one of the official languages.

Canada’s record in attempting to assimilate incoming minorities has been an underlying goal, more so, in fact, than its multicultural policy boasts. Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882), often known as the “Founder of Canadian (English speaking) education” (McNeill, 1974, p. 118), endorsed minority cultures, but insisted that they become English-speaking. Some researchers suspect that his real target was to transform Francophone culture in Ontario,
although the evidence for this is minimal. In Ryerson’s words: “The youthful mind of Canada must be matured and molded if this country is long to remain an appendage of the British Crown” (Gaffield, 1987, p. 12). As superintendent of English-speaking schools, Ryerson wanted students to achieve the wealth and glory of his fatherland, including an understanding of British history and literature. In his opinion, comprehensive education would include familiarity with British achievements as well as British civil and social institutions.

Despite public announcements to the contrary, attempting to assimilate ethnic minorities into the Canadian mainstream has been an underlying goal of Canadian governments since the origin of the country in 1867. This goal is certainly true of ESL programs which, of themselves, are an unsuccessful means of preserving heritage languages. ESL programs unrelentingly foster integration into mainstream Canada.

No one knows more about cultural and linguistic loss than Canada’s First Peoples whose first occupation of Canada remains veiled in mystery. Many Aboriginal writers have drawn attention to what the late Harold Cardinal, first president of the Indian Association of Alberta, called “hypocritical policy statements” (Cardinal, 1969, p. 28). Cardinal insisted that whatever Canadian government leaders might promise First Nations about cultural maintenance would be disregarded by the Native peoples of Canada. In his words:

> Our people no longer believe. It is that simple and it is that sad. The Canadian Government can promise involvement, consultation, progressive human and economic development programmes. We will no longer believe them. The Canadian government can guarantee the most attractive system of education. We will not believe them. They can tell us their beautiful plans for the development of local self-government. We will shrug our disbelief. The government can create a hundred national Indian advisory councils to advise is about our problems. We will not listen to them (Cardinal, 1969, p. 27).

As the decades have rolled into the twenty-first century, many Indigenous writers have echoed Cardinal’s lament (Battiste 2000; Kirkness, 1998; Leavitt, 1993). These writers do not put much faith in schools as successful institutions of language maintenance. It must be
acknowledged that some schools have made great strides in addressing the problem, but few actually produce materials in Aboriginal languages (Egbo, 2009, p. 74). This task is often left to local Indigenous communities who lack sufficient financial resources to get the job done.

The final section of this paper will briefly elaborate four specific components of needed address by educators: (a) Recognizing and seeking to define the challenge of cultural/linguistic diversity; (b) Affirming the inadequacies of standardized forms of assessment; (c) Fostering cultural/linguistic appreciation, and, (d) Enhancing public awareness.

**Conclusion: Educational Implications**

Language minority students present a special challenge to educational institutions because of the varying cultural backgrounds and linguistic diversity they represent. It must first be recognized that minority culture students may have excellent reading, writing, and speaking skills in their heritage languages that unfortunately do not match those required in state-sponsored classrooms. This lack of match does not imply that these students are in any way less intelligent than their peers. What it does mean is that they present a special challenge for classroom teachers. If this situation is ineptly handled, it can be a formula for failure, despite the gifts that these students may have (Garcia, 1994, p. 31).

Second, when working with second language students, educators should tread lightly with the use of intelligent tests, or other forms of “standardized” assessment. These devices may provide unreliable results because such tools rely heavily on language — primarily the English language (Ashworth, 1988, pp. 146f; Gollnick and Chinn, 1986, p. 156). Using standard assessment tools may place minority students in unfair competitions. As a result, their abilities may not be fairly evaluated. This reality may trigger a call for increased and upgraded ESL programs, which have already been proven ineffective.

A third observation has to do with cultural appreciation. Both Canada and the United States promote the concept of appreciating cultural diversity, although both fall short in developing functional intercultural programs. The ability of classroom teachers to recognize
and appreciate the value of each language cultural group, and be able to adjust classroom conditions to treat fairly those abilities will to some extent determine the efficacy of a nation's multicultural policy. *This ability has far-reaching implications for teacher education.* Here the current emphasis on developing an interdisciplinary approach to language instruction has a great deal of merit. Such an approach would include insights and strategies incorporated in other disciplines such as composition studies, cultural anthropology, discourse analysis, genre analysis, and linguistics and translation. My own preference would be to offer cultural studies in teacher education faculties so that future teachers might come to appreciate the impacting factor that cultural values and beliefs (to say nothing of language), figure in socialization.

A fourth observation has to do with the need for increased public awareness and education regarding the richness of cultural diversity. Although schools directly can probably do less in this regard than the public media, meeting *that* challenge will require meaningful input from a multiplicity of avenues — public media, schools, postsecondary institutions, governments, and community agencies.

*In the final analysis, however, the nature of respectful one-on-one association — teacher and student (regardless of background),* is probably the most significant factor in enhancing student learning. In the words of the late Mark Hopkins (1882-1887) of Williams College, “The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.” Surely this unique formula would also prove most effective in a multicultural, linguistically-diverse context.
References


Fishman J. A. www.eric.ed.gov/ERICwebPortal/recordDetail?accno=eo3957


Language as Social Context and Literacy Development of Students from Diverse Backgrounds

Abir R. El Shaban
Doctoral Student
Washington State University

Abstract

In this article, the author invokes Cummins’ model for social empowerment of minority students to suggest an alternative way of thinking about the empowerment of school communities. This paper explains Cummins’ theoretical framework and suggests implications that might help teachers better understand social language literacy development in terms of Cummins’ (1986-1994) conceptual framework, which is based on the notion that students who are from a diverse background are in need of school literacy learning that attends to “the goals of instruction, the role of the home language, instructional materials, classroom management and interaction with students, relationships with the community, instructional methods and assessment” (Au, 1998, p. 298). This paper also attempts to explain how the relationships among students’ literacy development, social practices, and their diverse background empower them and assess them in developing their learning literacy skills, taking into consideration the types of literacy that best work with diverse communities.
Introduction

Social context plays an important role in enhancing children’s learning and literacy development. Social context is found in the children’s school and communities where they learn, talk, read, and write. Within the last three decades, many educators, anthropologists, and linguists have explored and defined the importance of the social context for students’ literacy development (Heath, 1989; Lewis, 2009). According to Heath (1989), children can be affected in their literacy development by their social context as well as their interaction with family members, parents, peers, and teachers. Thus, social context refers to “the societal setting in which events occur—in this case, the various surroundings at home, at school, and in the community in which children learn to talk, read and write” (Wells, 1982). Because of the significance of students’ literacy development and the social diversity of students from different backgrounds, many educators now consider these diverse social perspectives and acknowledge the importance of those students’ “ethnicity, primary language, and social class to literacy learning” (Au, 1998, p. 279). This means there is a tendency in education toward understanding and considering the relevance of the students’ linguistic background and cultural diversity.

This paper suggests some implications that are useful for teachers to understand the social language literacy development in terms of Cummins’ (1986-1994) conceptual framework, which is based on the notion that students who are from a diverse background are in need of school literacy learning that gives an adequate attention to “the goals of instruction, the role of the home language, instructional materials, classroom management and interaction with students, relationships with the community, instructional methods and assessment” (Au, 1998, p. 298). This paper is an attempt to explain how the relationships among students’ literacy development, social practices, and their diverse background empower them and assess them in developing their learning literacy skills, taking into consideration the types of literacy that best work with diverse communities.
Literature Review

Literacy Crisis

Educationalists in the United States have applied different kinds of educational and literacy reforms designed to foster literacy achievement and decrease failure among students from diverse contexts. Since 1983, many political debates have taken place concerning the literacy crisis. The National Commission on Educational Excellence sounded the alarm in its publication *Nation at Risk*. The report proclaimed that literacy and the educational measures had dropped, affecting both students and society (as cited in Cummins, 2007, p. iv). Cummins showed that low literacy rates and academic achievement were concentrated among students from poor families in groups such as African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. Many public debates excused society from being responsible for the minority students’ underachievement and attributed their school failure to the minority group’s own insufficiencies, either in term of academic growth, drug use, or ineffective bilingual educational programs that were supposedly convened by Hispanic activists to limit their exposure to learn English (Ferdman, Weber, & Ramirez, 1994, p. 297). However, Cummins (1989) related this underachievement to the uselessness of the implemented educational reforms to foster the academic achievement among students from different cultural and linguistic background. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proclaimed that there was a significant and increasing gap in the academic performance between the Euro-American students, the African American and Latino students. Cummins (2001) summarized the reasons for this gap:

(a) empirical data relating to patterns of educational underachievement that challenge the current ideological mindset are systematically ignored or dismissed; (b) there is a deep antipathy to acknowledging that schools tend to reflect the power structure of the society and that these power relations are directly relevant to educational outcomes. (p. 650)

Cummins (2001) argued for the importance of including and not excluding human relationships for effective educational system. He claimed that those whose identities have
been underestimated in schools and societies are the ones who face the most unequal school failure. He also argued that most of the reform efforts shed the light on the relationship between the students’ characteristics and learning achievement, ignoring an factor in the relationship between “achievement and social and educational inequities” (Cummins, 2001, p. 562).

**Framework**

Cummins (1986) believed that previous educational reforms set up by the government failed in making an effective change in the relation between teachers and students and between schools and communities because “they have not seriously challenged the social power structure” (p. 652). Cummins emphasized the significance of interaction among students, teachers, and communities. He believed that such an interaction is what challenges the coercive relation of power in societies. Thus, he established a model to face school failure and to improve the educational reform.

**Empowerment**

Cummins asserted that both educators and their students function under a sort of oppressiveness that is exemplified in structured curriculum and work conditions. However, they are not powerless. Educators have the opportunity to shape their classroom interaction by setting the social and educational goals that they would like to make with their students, as they are the ones in charge of building relation among diverse culture students and communities (Cummins, 1994, p. 653). Further, in his debate about empowerment, Cummins emphasized the idea of negotiating identity directly between teachers and their students. Each can identify the identity of the other through interaction and practice. Teachers reveal their identity through their interaction with their students, and students reveal their identity through their interaction with their peers, teachers, parents, and others. This creates a “context of empowerment… that challenges structures of inequity in small but significant ways” (Cummins, 1994, p. 653).

In his framework, Cummins classified the educators’ interaction with their students in three images: an image of the identities of the teachers as educators; an image of the identity
options educators highlight for their students; and an image of the society educators hope their students will help form. These images can be established in classroom interaction and they are a part of the educators’ vision of power structure of communities (Cummins, 1994, p. 654). The images can work as an effective guidance for policy makers to consider the children’s culture, linguistic, and identity.

**Social Power Relations**

In order to talk about Cummins’s framework, an overview of his opinion on coercive and collaborative power relations is required. *Coercive relations* of power signify the kinds of power that are exercised by the dominant group over the subordinate ones where “the more power one group has, the less is left or other groups” (Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 299). Coercive relations of power happen when the dominant groups is seen as superior, whereas the subordinate groups are seen as inferior, and is a commonly occurring a power structure throughout human history either within national or international relations (Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 299).

In contrast to coercive power relations, collaborative relations of power indicate a shared power among all participants. Through implementing this concept, Cummins claimed that power will not be “a fixed predetermined quantity but rather can be *generated* in interpersonal and intergroup relations, thereby becoming ‘additive’ rather than ‘subtractive’” (as cited in Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 299). In this case, all participants are involved in an empowered relationship through collaboration, where participants can confirm their identity and gain self-efficacy.

Cummins (1994) applied the values of collaborative relations of power in the educational context. Cummins believed that the insistence on keeping the coercive relations of power resulted in disempowering the dominant and the subordinate groups; the shift in paradigm from the coercive to the collaborative relations of power empowered all groups. Further, the coercive relations of power are the reason behind “educational failure, functional literacy, and impoverishment among subordinate groups,” which results in an increase in costs and the disempowerment of the dominant group (as cited in Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 300).
Cummins’ Theoretical Framework

Cummins (1986) proposed a broad theoretical framework for empowering minority students of diverse contextual backgrounds through developing educators’ attitudes toward minority students (see Figure 1.)

![Figure 1. Cummins created a theoretical framework for the empowerment of minority students. Adapted from (Harvard Educational Review, 56, p. 663).](image)

The main idea of this framework is that students from dominant groups are empowered or disabled as a consequence of their interactions with educators in public institutions. His framework is based on four roles or characteristics of interactions, which can determine the failure or the success of the learning activity. These characteristics are

- the extent to which 1) minority students’ language and culture are incorporated into the school program; 2) minority community participation is encouraged as an integral component of children’s education; 3) the pedagogy promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of students to use language actively in order to generate their own knowledge; and 4) professionals involved in assessment become advocates for minority students
rather than legitimizing the location of the “problem” in the students. (Cummins, 1986, p. 659)

Cummins (1986) structured his framework in terms of “majority/minority societal group relations, school/minority community relations, educator/minority student relations” (p. 660). The minority students’ failure and the failure of previous educational attempts were due to the failure in addressing the relationships “between educators and minority students and schools and minority communities” (Cummins, 1989, p. 656). Status and power relations between subordinate groups (minority students) and dominant groups (majority students) have a significant effect on the minority students’ school performances (Cummins, 1986, p. 660). For instance, Troike (1978) stated that Finnish students, who were a low status group, failed academically in Sweden while they succeeded in Australia because they were considered as a high status group. Similarly, Dominant groups consider themselves inherently superior and as a result they should be the ones to control institutions in societies (Mullard, 1985).

Cummins (1986) based his frame on four fundamental elements that are mentioned above and will be explained later. These elements control whether the minority students are going to be empowered or disabled. As it is shown in Figure 1, these elements incorporate the culture and the language of minority students, the minority students’ communities, the pedagogical assumptions, and classroom activities. The elements emphasize an advocacy-oriented assessment of the diverse minority students.

Cummins (1986) connected the educational failure of minorities to the “lack of cultural identification” (p. 660). Moreover, Cohen and Swan believed that minority student’s failure in learning the English language was a result of cognitive difficulties or lack of sufficient knowledge about their cultural identity values (1976, as cited in Cummins, 1989, p. 662). Cummins (1989) emphasized the importance of developing students’ cognitive skills through providing them with an intensive first language instruction and an emphasis on their cultural identity. Likewise, many researchers like Campos and Keatinge (1984), Cummins (1983), and Rosier and Holm (1980), associated minority students’ academic success with the integration of their first language and culture in the schools study.
Further, Cummins (1986) argued that disempowerment was not limited to minority students in schools only, but also occurred in their communities that have been excluded and disabled in their interactions within social institutions. Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) believed that equality is an issue in itself and can make a difference. They asserted that through equality of opportunities, individuals are more responsible for their own failure or for feeling inferior. Such assertions emphasize the critical nature of schools’ and communities’ interactions to help minority students gain an educational success.

**Cultural/linguistic incorporation**

Under this section of the framework, Cummins (1986) considered two important aspects of orientations: the additive aspect, which seeks teaching in the minorities’ first language and considers their culture, and the subtractive orientation, which subtracts the culture and the first language of the minority students. An additive orientation does not require the actual teaching of the minority language. Cummins associated these two aspects with the educators’ roles. Educators whose roles are to add a second language and cultural connection to their minority students would empower these students, unlike, the other educators who see their roles to replace the students’ culture and first language (Cummins, 1986).

Cummins (1986) stated, “an additive orientation does not require the actual teaching of the minority language” (664); however, providing minorities with some classes of their primary language would enhance the learning process of those with low concentration. This would increase these minorities’ self-efficacy when they feel that their language and culture are valued. Very often, improved metalinguistic elaboration can be established within the additive bilingualism orientation (Cummins, 1989; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; McLaughlin, 1984).

**Community Participation**

If educators succeeded in involving the parents of the minority students as partners in their children’s educational process, this would develop a sense of efficacy within these minority...
communities and students would be empowered, which in turn would enhance their academic growth (Cummins, 1989, 664). Further, parental non-involvement in school activities can be related to parental illiteracy. Illiterate parents are a cause of children’s school failure, as they may not be able to help their children academically (Cummins, 1984). Therefore, educators should include the parents of the minority students through collaboration in school activities. As evidence, Cummins cited The Haringey project in Britain, which took place in a multiethnic areas. This project involved the parents of minority students of three different schools in educational activities listening to what their children read. The teachers reported that the collaboration between them and the parents effectively improved the students’ performance. More importantly, the teachers stated that the students became more interested in coming to school and learning. Thus, the teachers’ success in adopting a collaborative orientation assisted them in engaging the parents to participate in fostering their children’s learning development at home and school (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982 as cited in Cummins, 1986).

**Pedagogy**

Cummins (1986) distinguished between two major models for pedagogy: The transmission model and the reciprocal model of teaching. The transmission model is the common model adopted by North American school system (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1982). Cummins stated that the transmission model idea is much similar to Freire’s (1970/1973) “banking” model of education:

>Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator. In this view the person is not a conscious being (corpo consciente); he or she is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty “mind” passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside. (p. 247)

Simply, the banking approach hinders the intellectual growth of students, turning them into “receptors” and “collectors” of education that lacks the association with their real lives (1973). Cummins related Freire’s banking concept to the transmission pedagogical
approach of teaching. The fundamental principle of the transmission model is that “the teacher’s task is to impart knowledge or skills that she or he possesses to students who do not yet have these skills” (Cummins, 1986, p.667). This entails the teacher being the one in control of the interaction. Educators like Cummins (1984) and Wells (1982) advocated that this model disregards the actual principles of literacy and language acquisition. Accordingly, all students can only create the meaningful use of language via actual interaction, conversation, and participation in the same environment; therefore, the reciprocal model is a better alternative.

Bullock (1975) claimed that the essence of the reciprocal model is that “talking and writing are means to learning” (p. 50). Cummins (1986) extended that this model to “empower students, encourage them to assume greater control over setting their own learning goals and to collaborate actively with one another in achieving these goals” (p. 667). Cummins emphasized the importance of developing the minority students’ self-efficacy in schools through the use of this model in teaching. The model encourages students’ oral and written dialogues within their peers and teachers in a collaborative atmosphere, thus, fostering the students' cognitive skills instead of merely recalling information.

Further, this pedagogical approach integrates language use with the curriculum instead of teaching the language in isolation. This is in addition to the class activities that promotes the minority students' academic growth and arouses the intrinsic motivation in them (Cummins, 1986, p. 667). Fillmore (1983) claimed that Hispanic students who were taught using the reciprocal approach based on engagement and interaction became better English learners.

**Assessment**

Assessment is used as a tool to determine problems that affect school performance for minority students. An assessment process usually has a psycho-educational concept. If the only available tools for a psychologist to locate the minority students' difficulties are psychological tests, then most of the students' difficulties will be assigned as “psychological dysfunction” (Cummins, 1986, p. 668). Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls (1986) claimed that psychologists would keep testing students until they found difficulties or disabilities that
would reveal some factual information regarding their learning difficulties.

Cummins (1986) stated that diagnosis and tests were more affected by bureaucratic procedures and financial issues and less a process for caring about the students’ learning performances (p. 668). Further, Rueda and Mercer (1985) stated that classifying minority students as having a learning disability or language disability was determined by who is diagnosing them, “a psychologist or a speech pathologist” (Cummins, 1986, p. 668). Moreover, an “analysis of four hundred psychological assessments of minority students” showed that most of these assessments were illogical, yet the psychologists were unwilling to admit this fact to either the parents or teachers (Cummins, 1986, p. 668).

Advocacy and delegitimization are alternative calls for the psychologists. So their role will be limited in delegitimizing “the traditional function of psychological assessment in the educational disabling of minority students by becoming advocates for the child in scrutinizing critically the societal and educational context within which the child has developed” (Cazden, 1985 as cited in Cummins, 1989, p. 668). Cummins (1986) stated that well-intentioned individuals emphasized the discriminatory assessment and neglected the socioeducational system that disempowered the minority students and that minority students are in need of “a comprehensive diagnostic/prescriptive assessment” to set up the appropriate remedial intervention for them (p. 672).

Criticism

Cummins’ framework has gone under many criticisms. Au (1998) claimed that the weakness of Cummins’ framework was first revealed by the critical theorists, who stated that his framework concentrated more on the educators’ role rather than power issues within societies that controls students and educators. Konzol (1991) also criticized Cummins’ framework for being neglecting “the material circumstances with which teachers and students must contend” (as cited in Au, 1998, p. 305). Still, Au argued that that “the greater challenge is not in proposing frameworks but in bringing about changes in schools that will close the literacy achievement gap” (p. 316).
Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to emphasize the need to pay more attention to minority students’ academic achievement and to locate the achievement gap between students from dominant communities and their counterparts from the subordinate groups. This work suggests that Cummins’ framework for empowering minority students’ academic achievement can provide solutions. Further, it suggests how educational programs and school systems may prevent the failure of minority students and help empower them through the reinforcement of minority students’ cultural identity, involvement and collaboration within their communities, and the integration of the meaningful usage of language in everyday activities (Cummins, 1989).
References


Standardized Testing: An Overview for Pre-Service Teachers

Kurtis Hewson
Faculty of Education
University of Lethbridge

John Poulsen
Faculty of Education
University of Lethbridge

Abstract

This paper serves as an overview for pre-service teachers of the current realities of standardized testing and offers some considerations when entering their first classrooms, where these assessments will most likely be a reality. It also aims to serve as a potential resource for study and discussion for pre-service teachers in their education programs.
Introduction

Considering the role standardized testing has assumed in education systems internationally, it can be safely assumed that a vast majority of pre-service teachers have experienced this form of assessment as students. More and more student’s lives are becoming influenced by standardized testing, as a societal push for educational accountability has led to a dramatic increase in the use of these assessments across districts and nations (Guskey & Jung, 2013). Although their experiences as students can provide a useful perspective, it is important that pre-service teachers have a general understanding of the impact these assessments typically have in the classroom. As Cheryl Franklin and Jennifer Snow-Gerono (2007) remind us,

Disregarding high stakes standardized testing and increased accountability in public education does little more than further marginalize teacher education in an area where it should have a larger deliberative voice (pp. 2-3).

Moreover governments require that pre-service teachers understand and are able to use information from standardized tests. The Alberta Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 1997), for example, lists 17 Knowledge, Skills and Attributes (KSAs) required for interim certification. Item 11 (k) requires that beginning teachers, “Know how to analyse the results of classroom and large scale assessment instruments including provincial assessment instruments, and how to use the results for the ultimate benefit of students” (p. 2). To meet the requirements of the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard, Alberta’s beginning teachers need to be aware of provincial standardized assessments and how to effectively use the results to ultimately improve teacher instruction and student learning.

This paper serves as an overview for pre-service teachers of the current realities related to standardized testing and offers some considerations when entering their first classrooms, where these assessments will most likely be a reality.
Definition

Stiggins (2008) states that,

These once-a-year tests are not likely to be of much value to classroom teachers as you plan and carry out day-to-day instruction. They are assessments of learning that are too infrequent, broad in focus, and slow in returning results to inform the ongoing array of daily decisions. But this does not mean that these tests are without purpose or value. That can communicate valuable information about students’ achievement status to other decision makers” (pp. 347-348).

This relatively rationale statement could be considered a definition of the battle lines that have been drawn up between proponents of standardized testing and those against it.

The intent of standardized testing is to have large numbers of students write a single test, then to compare single scores against all others to see how an individual’s score compares to the larger sample. The results are then posted on a bell curve that indicates where a score sits within descriptive statistical standards. Standardized tests are given to large groups numbering at least in the thousands, sometimes millions. To make the results as valid as possible, thus “standardizing” the administration of the assessment, the tests are:

1. Written at the same time and same day for all students.

2. Administered with consistent instructions.

3. Allow the same amount of time for each student to write the test.

4. Scored in the same manner.

Gronlund and Waugh (2009) note seven features to a modern standardized achievement test that, “measures a standard set of broadly based educational outcomes, uses standard directions and standard scoring procedures, and provides for a comparison of a student’s score to that of similar students who have taken the same test under similar circumstances” (p. 207). The first feature is that the test is based on common textbooks and curriculum
guides. Second, experts must write the test questions. Third, questions are tried out on groups of students. The results determine which questions have the greatest discriminating power and thereby influence the next iteration of the test. Fourth, test specifications determine the final set of questions. Fifth, the directions are rigidly prescribed. Sixth, a large enough population assures that the norms used in the test results are valid. Seventh, the test is published with information on the test’s administration, scoring, interpreting, and using the results.

Burke (1999) maintains that traditionally “standardized” meant that the test is standard or the same in three ways: (1) format/questions, (2) instructions, and (3) time allotment.

Format/questions means that the test questions are the same for all students writing the exam. The information that students are to show they know is asked in the same format that is usually multiple-choice. Multiple-choice is the format of choice because, as Stiggins (2008) suggests, “It is relatively easy to develop, administer, and score in large numbers” (p. 354). Further, for the test to be fair in the sense of all students having the same chance to answer each question correctly, all questions must be the same.

The instructions are to be the same as well. These instructions are to be delivered in the same way to all students so that no students are advantaged or disadvantaged. The last standardization is time-allotment. All students are to be given the same time to finish the exam.

In a time when the use of standardized, large-scale assessments are increasing, some nations have been involved in reforms effectively reducing their use, including England (Bew, 2011), as well Finland, Sweden, and Australia (Booi & Couture, 2011). Although these reform movements are evident in many nations and the use of standardized tests has been the subject of much debate and criticism (see Bower, 2013), standardized assessment programs continue to be a component of educational accountability across North America.

**Standardized Tests in the Classroom**

As pre-service teachers progress in their post-secondary studies and prepare for their opportunity to step into the classroom, they will most likely enter a world where
standardized, high-stakes assessments will impact on their professional work environment (Pedulla, 2003). Brookhart (2001) urges teacher preparation programs to limit the emphasis on large-scale testing while placing greater emphasis on classroom assessment. We completely agree with this statement. However, beginning teachers still need to have an awareness of the impact of standardized testing on contemporary classrooms, as well as be armed with some practical strategies that negate the negative impacts these assessments can have on classroom instruction. If pre-service teachers can be mindful of the following practical considerations related to standardized testing, they can be better equipped as beginning teachers to navigate a reality that, for better or worse, includes standardized, high-stakes assessments.

It is imperative that teachers are able to use the results from the standardized tests to improve their teaching and their students’ learning. The following suggestions should be taken with the proviso that the primary function of standardized testing in most systems is to assess the entire system and that information about individual students may not be as valuable. The most accurate assessment of their students’ abilities still must come from teachers. A single test should always be taken in context, providing a single snapshot of student learning that needs to be considered alongside other assessment information.

**Avoid Teaching to the Test**

Gordon and Reese (1997) believe “the single greatest criticism of high-stakes tests is that they inevitably lead to teaching to the test” (p. 346), whether through the narrowing of taught curriculum to focus exclusively on subjects included in the assessments (Guskey & Jung, 2013), or spending excessive amounts of time on test-preparation tasks (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004). Research suggests that there is, “ample evidence that teaching to the test is not the best way to improve test scores” (Bew, 2011). Teaching to the test may disengage students. As pre-service teachers, the best way to prepare for the reality of standardized assessments in the classroom is to learn about effective assessment practices. There is a strong connection between quality of classroom assessment and increase in average scores on large-scale assessments (Stiggins, 1999). To ensure strong student performance on standardized assessments, beginning teachers should focus on honing exemplary assessment
and instructional practices. That is not say that teachers should ignore test taking. Spending time examining how to take a test will probably aid students when they write and give them a sense of how to best write a standardized test.

**Establish a Low-stress Environment**

We know that “teachers outwardly acknowledge that some students do not do well on tests due to anxiety issues” (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2012, p. 6). For beginning teachers, establishing a positive, low-stress environment for these assessments is critical and needs to be addressed through a two-fold approach. First, student anxiety often directly reflects the anxiety level of teachers with regard to standardized assessments. Exhibiting low levels of stress in relation to testing is paramount for teachers to set a positive tone. Second, ensuring a physical environment that supports students contributes to lowering student anxiety. Having snacks available, frequent breaks, comfortable seating, and easily accessible needed resources and supplies may also be of value.

**Use Results as a Snapshot**

It is important that pre-service teachers develop an assessment philosophy that understands summative assessments as snapshots that together contribute to a photo album of student learning. This philosophy is also true of standardized tests. “Large-scale assessments can only provide a snapshot of some of the learning. They are better designed to describe what groups of students are able to do” (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2012, p. 7). With this in mind, it is important to view standardized tests and student achievement on them as just one more snapshot to add to the complete picture of student learning. When sharing results with parents, talk about how these results relate to student achievement on classroom assessments. As a pre-service teacher, it is important to understand, to model, and to communicate that one test cannot define a student’s learning or overall achievement.

**Use Results to Inform Teaching**

“By their design, large scale measures…are only able to measure a limited number of educational outcomes” (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2012, p. 6). With this in mind, it
would be short sighted to not reflect upon student results in relation to the assessed outcomes and how they can be utilized to improve classroom practice. As beginning teachers, the learning curve is steep and should always involve a desire to improve as a professional. Student standardized test results can become one more piece of data to be used as part of that self-reflection. Although it can be considered dangerous to over-emphasize results when considering effective classroom instruction, results can serve as one more piece of the puzzle to inform teacher growth.

Conclusion

Achievement testing has issues especially related to situational/environmental, personal/emotional, and grade-spread requirement that may make individual applicability difficult to ascertain. However, as long as teachers understand that there may be limitations to the applicability of standardized exams, improvements in teaching and learning can take place. For pre-service teachers, it is important to not only have an awareness of the purpose and development of standardized assessments, but also be prepared as beginning teachers when these assessments become a reality for their students.
References


Reviews: Practice and Curriculum

Using Technology to Promote In-service Teacher Education and Enhance Professional Capital

J. Edward Frick, Ed.D,
Western Governors University

Abstract

Collaboration has been identified as a vital component to enhancing the educational context and is a key component to professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). With that being said, technology offers a viable and productive venue for such collaboration to take place. The dilemma for districts is determining how to provide in-service education opportunities that promote the use of technology for the purposes of enhancing collaboration. This article explores how in-service opportunities that utilize technology for collaboration can enhance professional capital within the educational context. Recommendations for both district-level leadership and the individual practitioner are outlined.
Introduction

In looking at recent educational literature, much emphasis has been placed on the value and importance of collaboration among educators for improving practice. Recently, Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) discussed the concept of professional capital and how it can affect the future of teaching and public education. Professional capital consists of three kinds of capital: human capital (the individual talent base); social capital (the collaborative power of the group); and decisional capital (the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgments about learners that are cultivated over many years) (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p. 37). All these capitals promote teacher professional learning and teacher efficacy through their practice.

Integral to the idea of professional capital is collaboration on a variety of levels. It is clear, from their work, that teachers report effective support and motivation when educational entities promote both internal and external collaboration. In a broader context, the importance of collaboration is not lost when considering effective learning systems. Ash and D’Auria (2013) discuss a blueprint for establishing an effective learning system that includes five major tenets – one of which calls for collaboration in all directions and elevating the importance of teamwork (p. 44). Research is replete with evidence demonstrating that greater collaboration will foster collegial trust, enhance job satisfaction, promote teacher success in the classroom, and improve student responsibility (Fullan, 1993; MetLife, 2010; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

Even with the extensive underpinning research provides regarding collaboration, schools and/or districts are responsible for creating environments and promoting structures that help build teachers’ professional capital and, thus, increasing in-service teacher education. Technology offers a venue for both building professional capital and providing a structure to do so. The results and recommendations of a recent study looking at the relationship between technology and the development of social capital (collaboration) within six rural secondary schools in Pennsylvania reiterates that technology and collaboration are vital to the development of a rich professional culture (Frick, 2012).
The aforementioned study examined the relationship between attitudes of administrators and faculty at the secondary level toward Internet-based technology and virtual networking and the development and support of social capital within schools’ organizational contexts that can lead to school improvement as demonstrated by student outcomes (e.g., achievement and a sense of community welfare or connectedness). A mixed method approach utilized a questionnaire, focus group discussion, and site observation conducted in six selected secondary schools in Pennsylvania. The study’s findings demonstrate a positive correlation between (teacher and administrative) perceptions of Internet-based technology and virtual networking and the development of social capital within these schools.

The study revealed that perceptions of technology and collaboration within a secondary school context are highly correlated, making it evident that an educator’s skill, aptitude, and desire to utilize technology will significantly impact the professional learning environment (Bonk, 2009). Ultimately, through effective and innovative use by the organization (in this case a school or district), Internet and virtual technology have the capacity to place faculty and administrators into safe and secure communities. Within these secure communities, schools and districts can provide administrators and teachers with access to familiar social networking tools, allowing them to establish meaningful, relevant and authentic learning relationships with partners of varying skills, opinions and backgrounds. Such access helps teachers collaborate in discussions, share tasks, review and assess each other’s work and co-construct knowledge – arriving at a shared understanding and deep learning in alignment with core skills and standards.

The ability to belong to multiple learning communities, all with their own defined points of contact, enables faculty and administrators to break free of the constraints of the traditional organizational setting. This freedom allows both faculty and administrators to supplement and transform existing practice by extending access to learning opportunities beyond the constraints of the school day irrespective of time and location; making learning and their own professional growth a part of daily living rather than a narrowly defined span of time (Bonk, 2009; Zhao, 2009). The aforementioned use of technology within education may seem ideal, but literature surrounding technology and its impact on collaboration within
these contexts supports such findings given the level of capacity building within the organization.

The question that immediately comes to mind is how districts begin to address the use of technology to increase teacher professional learning. A focus on providing explicit in-service teacher education related to productive uses of technology for the purpose of enhancing professional knowledge is an effective starting point. Hughes (2004) provides four guiding principles that should be considered when evaluating, constructing, or redeveloping technology learning opportunities at the in-service level that, if implemented strategically, might facilitate teacher reflection, observation, experimentation, and, ultimately, develop teachers into effective users of technology. The principles, which focus on the ability to evaluate for use rather than the procurement of specific skills, are (1) connecting technology learning to professional knowledge; (2) privileging subject matter and pedagogical content connections; (3) using technology learning to challenge professional knowledge; and (4) teaching many technologies.

To illustrate how these principles could be applied at the district level to promote in-service teacher education, consider the following example:

Teachers can be directed to group themselves (along with curriculum coordinators, administrators, and/or media specialists) into subject-specific, collaborative groups that meet in an ongoing fashion. During group meetings, teachers can discuss issues within their teaching to identify problems-of-practice that determine future inquiries into technology (Principle 1 and 2). Alternatively, group members can demonstrate new technologies and propose possible integrated uses (Principle 1) or allow the technology to inspire discussion into contemporary issues within teaching and learning (Principle 3). Finally, teachers need access to technology (Principle 4) to facilitate their inquiries into problems-of-practice, to examine as possible solutions, and to spur discussion about theory and practice (Hughes, 2004, p. 356).

Given the previous example, it is evident that district-level leadership should focus on capacity building at the practitioner level as a way to effectively engage in-service teacher
education. The articulated use of technology should be relevant to needs (content, instructional, time) and relevant to technical ability and interests. As evident in the quantitative data of the Frick study, the perception variables significantly correlate to the collaboration variables. Specifically, if a teacher’s perception of technology is positive through exposure and usage of it, then the likelihood that greater collaboration can take place within the given context. Therefore, strategies or initiatives put in place should reflect that understanding. Qualitative data of that same study showed that familiarity with a technology’s specific purpose played a significant role in practitioner perception.

Several courses of action are suggested below for district level leadership and classroom teachers to pursue that will focus on enhancing perception of technology and ultimately supporting the development of social capital (collaboration) in that context. Certainly a commitment is needed from both the district and individual to devoting teacher professional development and teacher in-servicing (through a technology coach, mentor, train-the-trainer model, or collaborative inquiry groups) to learn how to effectively navigate and utilize the technological venues available to both connect and challenge teacher professional learning.

School Wide/Administrative Suggestions

1. Institute a district and/or school blog (or wiki) where events and class achievements are posted. This blog (or wiki) could also be a venue for posting innovative class activities/projects and for announcing upcoming student learning endeavors.

2. Start a district and/or school Twitter or Facebook page and ask all school personnel to participate and follow the school. Make this Twitter or Facebook page a place for sharing with teachers and the community – connecting the school, teachers, parents, and students.

3. Encourage each teacher to create a Twitter account and provide each department with a specific hashtag to follow, relevant to their content (e.g. #mathchat, #sciencechat…there are most likely hashtags specific to each content area). Encourage each department to check in with the hashtag at least once before the department meetings and bring an interesting article/blog/posting to discuss to their
department meeting. Such sharing and reflecting on content related topics will promote in-service teacher education by fostering collaboration, reflection on practice, bringing new ideas or creating topics for debate to help teachers learn and grow in their knowledge and support of each other.

4. Find relevant webinars or live conferences and provide the time for teachers to meet and participate in these. Everyone could be on their personal computer and participate and respond or they could be placed in smaller groups with a designated computer person who responds (usually these live events provide avenues for responding via chat panels).

5. Create an online community, such as Moodle, where resources are shared, discussion topics are posted and teachers can respond and reflect and ask questions. Post a weekly discussion and give teachers time to respond asynchronously. Provide ‘live chat’ times where a designated facilitator (colleague) leads a topic of discussion relevant to content or education or strategies or new tools, etc. Such online communities provide non-threatening forums for participation and collaboration.

6. Use Facebook to “like” Facebook Pages that relate to specific subject matter. Facebook can also be used to create a Group for the teachers in your school, district, or subject matter association. Doing so provides on-demand opportunities for in-service teacher professional development, knowledge exchange and the ability to easily share content.

Along with district and building leadership, teachers are responsible to engage in collaborative efforts for the purpose of improving their own practice. Given the financial constraints placed on educational organizations to engage their faculty and staff in opportunities for on-going teacher education, the use and promotion of Internet-based and virtual technological venues can serve to meet that need.

**Teacher Suggestions**

1. Start a Twitter account and choose one hashtag relevant to the content (for example, #mathchat, #edtech, #edchat, #science). Once this account is created, teachers can
simply read posts and click on links to read the articles/blogs they are directed to. If all teachers do is read interesting topics of interest, even if teachers do not tweet, they will be engaging in their own in-service education. In the long term, teachers might start contributing to conversations, and make connections to others who can become part of a broader learning network.

2. Find relevant content-related blogs to follow. Do content blog searches – read some posts. Set aside time every day, even if it is only 10 minutes, to read one post. Eventually, start responding and leaving comments – participate in discussions. These discussions link teachers to others who can support teacher professional learning and, in turn, create a community of teachers who engage their own communities of practice.

3. Join a community forum, such as LinkedIn. Such forums usually house group discussions – find a discussion of interest and read what people are saying. Teachers can then contribute their own thoughts and ideas to the discussion. Teachers can begin a discussion topic on their own, which in turn helps teachers build a network of peers who can challenge them, provide strategies, and help with struggles.

4. Initiate the use of a blog. For their own professional learning, teachers would focus on posting ideas relevant to what they were teaching – content, strategies, technology, etc. Teachers can start small and post what is happening in their classrooms. Alternatively, perhaps after reading an interesting article or viewing a meaningful video on YouTube, teachers can write a reflection highlighting their own insights. Teachers can also comment on things happening in the educational arena, like teacher layoffs or Common Core standards. Link referenced articles/videos/blogs and let whoever wrote it know that it is being used – this action also begins to build relationships and creates connections that will build even larger communities. Ultimately, such work is about building community and networking. Teachers who engage in such activities are reflecting, considering approaches and strategies, and beginning a process of improving their own and others’ practice.
Clearly this list of suggestions is not comprehensive, but the commonality of suggestions on this list point to using technology for the purpose of enhancing collaboration, connection, and community – engaging teachers in their own in-service education. The key for district-level leadership and classroom teachers is to perpetuate a culture in which technology is perceived as a viable and productive venue for administrator and teacher collaboration. These efforts will lead to some amazing learning experiences and connections that benefit educational practice by supporting and enhancing professional capital.
References


House of Cards: An edTPA Orientation Activity

Naomi Jeffery Petersen
Central Washington University

Abstract

In this article, the author shares a theoretically-informed activity to support teachers who are impacted by Washington’s edTPA, the Teacher Performance Assessment. The author considers the edTPA as a common language for best practices in teaching and as a useful tool for orienting candidates to the profession. Step-by-step instructions are complemented with explanations of the conceptual connection between the activity and the edTPA requirements.
Introduction

After several years of development and refinement, the edTPA is now implemented in the state of Washington. Candidates must now demonstrate pedagogical competence in its three tasks of planning, instructing, and assessing student learning before they can be certified to teach in this state. It is an expensive high stakes test, easily criticized as an intrusive and coercive means of professional accountability. This article, based on a presentation given at the 2013 meeting of Northwest Association of Teacher Educators, does not address the political machinations and ramifications of the legislation and policies of its mandate. Rather, the edTPA is used to as a common language for best practices in teaching, and thus as a teacher educator I regard it as a useful tool for orienting candidates to the profession.

Preparation programs, whether traditional or alternative, have responded to this new standard assessment by revising their courses and checkpoints to introduce the skills candidates need to be successful in practice, ever mindful that the aggregate of candidates’ scores will be published and used as a measure of the preparation program’s effectiveness. Scores of field supervisors as well as methods and foundations instructors need to understand its structure and logic as well as its usefulness to continue teaching what is already a part of the curriculum; its nuances of reform must also be made explicit. Although the handbooks are clear and specific, they cannot be absorbed quickly if the concepts are counter-intuitive and complex, as is the edTPA. In addition, the proprietary behavior of the edTPA publishers renders the handbooks inconvenient to access. Thus we need some professional development tools to help both novice and expert educators understand edTPA function and structure both systemically and contextually.

Presented here is an activity that is easy, inexpensive, memorable, and meaningful for making the sequence and integrity of the edTPA experience self-evident. This orientation activity uses just five index cards to build a 3-dimensional metaphor providing an intuitive understanding of the way all the parts work together, beginning with an understanding of the students. Then we identify the items included in each task and how student voice is integrated; we highlight key words and the importance of using academic language. Finally,
we fashion a pediment that represents the civic ideals that are the purpose and motivation for school. As each card is folded and the entire structure gradually assembled, participants are encouraged to share insights about the construction and their experiences implementing the edTPA. Either to conclude the activity or to reinforce it later, a worksheet (Figure 17) prompts the recall of the edTPA tasks and components as well as the Professional Education Program courses in which they are taught.

The lesson is informed by current theory and research regarding student engagement (Kuh, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Hefflebower, 2011), self-regulation (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Zimmerman, 2001), and multiple modalities (Gardner, 2006; Shearer, 2004). However, its success can also be analyzed in terms of Vygotskian cognitive tools promoted by Egan’s (1997) imaginative education, considered to be less linear and atomized and more intuitively accessible to non-western perspectives (Duran & Duran, 1995). The activity and its attendant commentary demonstrate the primary challenge faced by most candidates: integrating their knowledge, skills, and disposition to be effective in the classroom. The commentary is crucial to reveal strategies of effective teaching and their own learning process during the activity. Included here are rough quotes of a typical presentation, intended to prompt frequent student voice (PESB, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lesson Title:</strong></th>
<th>House of Cards: Introducing the edTPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context:</strong></td>
<td>Candidates for Teacher Certification in an orientation class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Professional development for inservice educators).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives:</strong></td>
<td>• Explain the components of each edTPA task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Predict opportunities to develop edTPA skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observe and label the experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Materials:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5 index cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Time estimate:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>30-40 minutes with full commentary.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Steps:**

1. Fold and label cards.
2. Write edTPA task notes on back.
3. Match Professional Education Program courses to task concepts.

**Assessment:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formative: Observation during the lesson.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summative: Worksheet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. House of Cards lesson outline.*

This activity is a convenient opportunity to demonstrate the practices we promote, so I tend to be deliberate about such routine functions as distributing materials (e.g. a stack by the sign-in sheet with a label saying “take 5 cards”; starting open packets to pass around the room with instructions to “take 5”), pausing to ask: “What other ways could these materials have been distributed?” and, to establish a learner-centered perspective, “Think of a grade level. What would a student in that class be thinking now that he or she has five cards?” To underscore the importance of being able to translate unspoken thought and feeling into language, and to set the stage for later discussions of student voice, I might prompt them to “Find out what your neighbor thinks might happen next.”

For a transition, I might say “Let’s see if you are right.” And, I might comment that suspense is a good tool for engaging student attention. This is partly to give teacher candidates a fairly reliable teaching tip but also to acknowledge the reality that you cannot guarantee the way things will turn out in the classroom—or in life for that matter. You can anticipate, prepare, rehearse, and monitor the unfolding drama. This understanding is key to a successful shift from thinking like a student (successfully completing a task as designed
by others for your development) to thinking like a teacher (successfully designing a task in response to others’ need for development). But it is important to set up experiences for such insight to be self-evident.

**The First Card: The Foundation**

The first phase in the activity focuses on edTPA Task 1.A., the Context for Learning, but I don’t tell teacher candidates that yet. I am transparent about my procedures: “Hold up one card” and I will hold it up, sweeping the room to make eye contact as I wait. I am careful to use no extra words and to patiently wait until all eyes are on me. And we immediately begin alternating between the activity and the metacognition about it: “In this first minute of the activity, what was I doing? What decisions did I make? Think like a teacher and describe what happened.” They might mention eye contact, classroom management, wait time, patience, monitoring, or expectations, but rarely using those terms. Whatever they bring up, I’ll nod to encourage observation and commentary. “That’s what teachers do all day long: Make decisions and observe what happens.”

If I am using a document camera to demonstrate the manipulation of the cards, I will point that out, as in “Your classrooms will be equipped with some sort of technology to help you display visuals. I will be using a document camera. I’m not sure what equipment will be available to you.” Thus, I am establishing a comfortable awareness of tools for functions rather than specific equipment. This focus reinforces the important perspective of a resourceful and flexible teacher compared to a diligent but rigid student. The entire exercise establishes the importance of commentary, that is, finding words to explain an experience.

1. **Fold the card in half horizontally, and in half again horizontally.**

At this point, I have the perfect opportunity to make the concept of ‘academic language’ meaningful as well as the importance of choosing ‘developmentally appropriate’ content. “How many of you were thinking ‘hot dog’?” Most will grin, and I will launch a brief Socratic dialogue: “At what age would it be appropriate to use the term ‘hot dog’?” Several will suggest a very young age. I will nod and comment, “Using a familiar shape is a useful way of engaging students the first time, and it makes the activity less intimidating to think
of such a familiar object.” Then: “At what age would it be appropriate to use the term ‘horizontally?’” Most will suggest middle school, some younger. I will look doubtful and ponder, “I wonder which grade is expected to understand the term ‘horizontal’ in the Common Core Standards.” I will shrug and say, “They can handle ‘tyrannosaurus rex’ at age 5, so I don’t think this will throw them.” (Most smile.) I turn serious: “So why on earth would someone use the term ‘hot dog’ more than once if the children can understand the more accurate term ‘horizontal’? Because it is cute, and that is why people use baby talk: to let kids know you expect them to remain cute and naïve and inaccurate. As teachers, we want kids to think of themselves not as ex-babies but as future engineers, future airline pilots, and future artists – anyone who might need to consider the horizon. Be casual, implying that of course they can understand this because they are smart!”

A metacognitive moment provides the transition back to the task at hand: “You can seamlessly integrate academic language into your speech, reinforcing their confidence in using accurate terms and their optimism in becoming one who would. You are nudging them toward success with the subtle use of academic language. I hope you didn’t mind a brief bird walk to emphasize the importance of deliberately using academic language appropriate for your students’ development. You do know that no matter what you teach, you are responsible for monitoring your students’ language development, right? So let’s find out about your students.”

2. **Label each section** (Figure 2.). Sometimes for professional development workshops for inservice educators I might print the front side on the cards, but I usually demonstrate writing each term via the document camera, for it is less passive for them to write the words themselves and it gives them time to consider that each term is a separate aspect of the concept.
“Each one of your students will walk through your door with an identity already intact: ‘This is who I am, and that is what I have in common with other people.’ They also walk in with their own circumstances, or context, that may differ quite a bit from your own.”

3. **On the back, write your best guess about students you might teach (Figure 3).**

“Think of a real school in a real location. How might your students see themselves? What will they look for in each other to feel like they have something in common? Or more importantly, from a student’s point of view, why might they feel left out?”
4. Partially unfold so it forms a step (Figure 4).

![Diagram of School and Students]

**Figure 4. Task 1.A Context**

5. Discuss the importance of accurately describing the students and their context. (If they discuss in small groups, you have an opportunity to gauge their level of awareness as well as expression.)

“Do you think any of this context might affect their learning? This is the first step of the first task of the edTPA, the Teacher Performance Assessment. It takes a week during your student teaching. You must demonstrate adequate mastery of all three edTPA tasks for a teaching certificate. It is a logical but fairly involved experience, and this context information will be infused in all the decisions that follow. Everything must be designed to benefit the real students in the real context you are really teaching.”

6. Predict opportunities to learn more.

Most candidates in an orientation course are not yet familiar with the many courses and their sequence in the Professional Education Program (PEP) (Appendix A). They are still applying to be accepted into the program, taking their entrance tests, and rounding up recommendation letters. This is therefore an ideal opportunity to engage their student voices in their own learning: “When will you have an opportunity to learn more about these context factors? Write the PEP courses near the topic.” At the end of the activity, they are given a chart showing when each edTPA task is introduced and reinforced throughout the program (see Appendix B).
“In the next steps we build three pillars, one for each edTPA task: Planning, Instructing, and Assessing. Each of these three cards will be folded lengthwise into thirds to form pillars. These are the pillars of your teaching performance.”

*The Second Card: edTPA Task 1 B-E Planning*

7. Fold the second card into thirds lengthwise and label it Task 1 B-E Planning (Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Front side of Task 1.B-E card.](image)

“The Context is actually the first part of this task. It is edTPA Task 1.A. There are four more parts to this task which we list on the back.”
8. List parts B-E on the back (Figure 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 1.B-E Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Lesson Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Assessment Plans &amp; Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Reflective Commentary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Back side of Task 1.B-E card.*

“You will plan all five parts of Task 1 Planning before you teach any lessons. The planning is your rehearsal for all the activity and materials but also for finding out whether your students actually learned what you hoped they would.”

*Figure 7. Assembled column of Task 1.B-E Planning card.*
9. **Predict opportunities to learn more.** “So far you have the steps for your students to enter the classroom and you have planned what they will learn. In addition you have figured out ways to find out if they learned it. Finally, you have explained your decisions in terms of theory and research. The Planning task covers a lot, and fortunately you will take several different courses to learn many ways to do each part.” Again, refer to the Professional Education Program course list (Appendix A) to find opportunities to learn more about each of the edTPA Task 1 Planning components.

The Third Card: edTPA Task 2 A-B. Instructing

“The first task is completed before you teach; the other two tasks occur after you have taught the 3-5 hours of connected lessons. Once you have done all the planning and it has been approved by your supervisor, it is time to implement the plan.”

10. **Fold the card into thirds lengthwise and label it Task 2 A & B Instructing.**

![Task 2. A-B Instructing](image)

*Figure 8. Front side of Task 1.B-E card.*

11. **Label the back with the two components of Task 2.** “No more planning. Now you just do what you planned but also you monitor how it is going and adjust it so the students are engaged. Notice the two bullet points. These two points are what the video clips will capture: how well you put everything together and keep the momentum, engaging students. Let’s make it personal: Have you been actively engaged so far? What teaching skills have you noticed? Share one thought about your experience so far related to being actively engaged and observing skills.”
A: Video recordings

- Pedagogical Skill
- Student Engagement

B. Commentary on video clip evidence.

*Figure 9. Back side of Task 2. A&B card.*

12. **Identify professional education program opportunities to master Task 2 skills.** “Have you seen the classic teacher bumper sticker that ‘They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care’? Your relationships – your interactions and responses to students—are so important that several courses focus on those dynamics: classroom management, bilingual methods, students with exceptionalities, in addition to both general methods and your content area methods. The video clips will be just brief snapshots representing what you are doing all the other time you teach. Of course, it’s one thing to be able to teach and another to be able to videotape, so you will have some practice doing that in several courses, especially your content area methods courses. And, in every single course you will have practice reflecting on your experiences. You are not simply recalling the events, but interpreting your experience in a professional way by integrating your knowledge of psychology, educational theory, research, and especially the context of the real students you are actually teaching.”
Now we will take a metacognitive moment. I might simply direct them to “Tell the person next to you what is occurring to you.” An open-ended invitation is adequate to prompt the candidates to recognize how they are feeling and what language they have to describe it. Rather than ask for volunteers to share their thoughts or what they heard someone else say, I will ask a few general self-identifies. “Is anything looking familiar?” If it looks like someone is eager to share, I’ll invite candidates to do so, linking whatever they say to an appropriate course they will take, commenting that “you have plenty of time to learn more about that in the next year or so.”

It is important to address the affective dimension. “Anyone feeling overwhelmed or confused? On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being completely mellow and 5 being completely freaked out, show us your fingers. Look around: notice that others may feel differently but you are definitely not alone. Your students will have a range of reactions, too, and that is what you will notice in your video clips.”

**The Fourth Card: edTPA Task 3 A-E. Assessing**

“The last task, assessing, involves using the assessments you planned in the first task and administered while teaching those lessons. You are demonstrating your ability to monitor your students’ learning and to adjust your teaching in response to their progress.”
13. Fold the card in thirds lengthwise; label it front and back Task 3 A-E Assessing.

**Figure 11.** Front side of Task 3.A-E Assessing card.

- A: Student Work Samples
- B: Evidence of Feedback
- C: Assessment Commentary
- D: Evaluation Criteria
- E: Student Self-reflections

**Figure 12.** Back side of Task 3.A-E Assessing card.

“Notice that the tasks are no longer about you and how well you teach. This is all about your students and how well they have learned. To illustrate, let’s position the Task 1.A. Context steps before the three Task columns (Figure 13).

“This task is all about collecting evidence of effectiveness. You will use the assessments that you already planned in Task 1 to generate student work samples (A) and you will summarize the trend in student work (D). You could use the video clips or more student work to prove you gave feedback (B) and were interested in student voice (E). Your
commentary (C) will show that you have a professional understanding of the students’ work and you can make new plans based on what you think these students need to learn better.”

Figure 13. Assembled Task 1A, Task 1 B-E, Task 2, and Task 3 cards.

The Fifth Card: The Learning Focus

“Thus we arrive at the last and most significant element: the learning focus. This is not a separate task but an overarching perspective guiding all the tasks. This last card (Figure 14) requires a different folding technique:
14. Fold under a base for it to stand on, and fold back the two corners to form a triangle.

![Front side of Learning Focus card](image1)

**Figure 14.** Front side of Learning Focus card.

15. **Label front and back with the systemic issues infusing all three tasks:** "If these terms don’t seem obvious, relax: that is why you have the rest of the Professional Education Program: to learn about teaching strategies and how to incorporate them into your professional perspective. By the time you student teach and you take a week to complete the edTPA, you will be confident in your skills to do so. Today it is enough for you to grasp the scope of teaching you will be mastering. You can trust that the program is designed to address what you need, and at this point, you need to know that each one of the courses in the program is a door to much deeper understanding."

![Back side of Learning Focus card](image2)

**Figure 15.** Back side of Learning Focus card.
Figure 16. Assembled edTPA structure sheltering some third-graders. “Now for the most important question. What difference would it have made in your understanding of the edTPA if you had not constructed this model of a classroom from the ground up but instead you had been given a worksheet with it drawn and ready to label? Find out what your colleagues think.”

Folding five cards to create a structure is a variation of Zikes’ foldables technique (e.g. http://foldables.wikispaces.com/Foldables) of using hands-on manipulatives to make concepts more self-evident. The innovative variation is in the building metaphor: the foldable is a memorable image for the entire structure of the edTPA tasks but also the routine interaction of teachers’ logic and decisions. I must admit that when I first developed the activity I was teaching middle school social studies and it was useful for the very challenging unit on the U.S. Constitution. Each card was introduced on a different day, focusing on different National Council for the Social Studies themes. The three columns
represented Power, Governance, and Authority; the top pediment Civic Ideals. However, the Context steps remained somewhat similar: Individuals, Group affiliations, and Formal organizations. The students enjoyed storing the cards flat in their textbooks, ready to add more notes. The bonus was that they were allowed to use their cards on the test, as long as all the writing was in their own handwriting. Many tried to write legibly and small for the first time. More importantly, they all managed to explain democracy in a pluralistic society.

According to exit surveys and ‘metacognitive moments’ in class, following this activity candidates’ gain not only understanding of what the edTPA entails but also optimism in their own capacity to learn the skills necessary to be successful student teaching. The candidates are not the only ones who need to be oriented to the edTPA, though. Especially problematic is the need to orient administrators and Professional Education Advisory Board (PEAB) members who may be somewhat removed from the classroom and may not have become familiar with the academic language of the instrument. Because students of all ages benefit by using hands-on, interactive instructional methods, the elements of the House of Cards activity are foundational and therefore useful for orienting future teachers and other stakeholders to the complexity and logic of the decisions they will make.
References


Appendix A:

Central Washington University Professional Education Program

The Professional Education Program provides opportunities to acquire the pedagogical knowledge and skills that allow students to demonstrate a positive impact on P-12 student learning. The Program offers information about and experience in integrating research-based pedagogical constructs for diverse learners and learning situations.

Pre-Admission Observation. (no credit). Students must complete 40 hours of observation in a P-12 school prior to enrolling in EFC 210. Students must arrange to complete this observation outside of Ellensburg, and must complete a short workbook that has been verified by a school official.

EFC 210. Seminar. (1) Discussion of field observation. Program planning. For prospective teachers. Prerequisites: Completion of Pre-Admission Observation required prior to enrolling.

EFC 310. Orientation to Teaching. (3). Teaching as a career and essential features of preparation. Study of the teacher’s role and function in the school; characteristics of good teachers; preparation for professional competencies and certification; the American public school system; and the responsibilities of schools in a democratic society. Prerequisites: Prior or concurrent enrollment in EFC 210.


EFC 320. Multicultural Education. (3). Exploration of marginalized groups and the implications for change in education. Examination of foundational elements of and
approaches to Multicultural Education as the underpinning to the development of cultural competence. Prerequisites: EFC 310 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

**EFC 330. Field Experience. (2).** A laboratory experience for prospective teachers. The opening of school, professional relationships, school/community relationships, school district organization, instructional support, and resource services. Students are assigned in off-campus centers for approximately two weeks prior to fall quarter. Grade will be S or U. Prerequisites: EFC 310 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

**EFC 340. Methods of Instruction. (3).** Introduction to basic methods of classroom instruction. Development of a comprehensive curriculum unit plan. Methods appropriate for subject and grade level in lab and field experience. Prerequisites: EFC 310, admission to the Teacher Preparation Program, and prior or concurrent enrollment in EFC 315, EFC 320, and EFC 330.

**EFC 350: Classroom Management. (3).** Development of values, confidence, assertiveness skills, and decision making skills in classroom management. Development of a comprehensive management plan for first year teaching. Includes a field experience component. Prerequisites: PSY 314, EFC 340, and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

**EFC 416: Educational Technology. (3).** Concepts and resources related to appropriate and effective integration of technology and media in school settings. CS 101 or IT 101 recommended prior to enrollment. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

**EFC 440: Educational Law. (3).** Major legal issues confronting educators, including student and teacher rights, due process, torts, and the identification and reporting of child abuse. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.
**EFC 480: Student Teaching. (16).** Teacher candidates must demonstrate their competence by student teaching a full quarter in their major endorsement area. Includes 20 hours of seminar at a time and place designated by the university supervisor. See Student Teaching Requirements in this catalog, and the Student Teaching Handbook for other requirements and policies. Prerequisites: All other courses in the Professional Education Program with a grade of C or higher. SCED 325 may be substituted for EFC 350, and SCED 487 may be substituted for EFC 416.

**PSY 314: Human Development and the Learner. (4).** Development through the life cycle. Prerequisites: None.

**EDSE 302: Introduction to Students with Exceptionalities. (3).** Designed to introduce effective teaching strategies and strategies for adapting standard instruction to meet the needs of a range of students found the typical classroom. This course provides information about students considered disabled as well as gifted, and students with multicultural heritages. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

**EDBL 401: Principles and Practices for Educating Linguistically Diverse Students. (3).** Required coursework that provides the fundamental background in language and learning theories needed to educate linguistically diverse students. The basics of sheltered instruction are introduced. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.
### Appendix B:

edTPA Tasks in CWU Professional Education Program (PEP) Courses

| PEP Professional Education Program | PEP Pre-Admission Segment | PEP Foundation Segment | PEP Check-point 1: Admission to the Teacher Certification Program | PEP Check-point 2: Adequate Progress in Course Performance | PEP Application Segment | PEP Endorsement Programs: Academic Language Content methods | Endorsement Programs: 
PEP Check-point 3: Clearance to Student Teach edTPA |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDTPA TASKS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Teaching edTPA</td>
<td>EFC 480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFC 210</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: PLANNING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Describe context.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Plan lessons.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Select materials.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Plan assessment.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Write commentary</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: INSTRUCTING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Video recordings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Reflective commentary</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 3. Assessing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: Student work</th>
<th>B: Evidence of Feedback</th>
<th>C: Commentary</th>
<th>D: Evaluation Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall 2013, Volume 11, Number 2 186
Schoology-Supported Classroom Management: A Curriculum Review

Shampa Biswas
Washington State University

Abstract

Schoology is an online learning, classroom management, and social networking platform that attempts to improve learning through better communication, collaboration, and increased access to curriculum and supplemental content. In this article, the author evaluates different prospects of Schoology-supported classroom management using selected principles of students learning and literacy development from Cummin et al (2007). Innovative approaches and tools in the Schoology website facilitate both teachers, students, parents to build a collaborative community of learners to fulfill the educational goals in the 21st century. It can be expected that Schoology’s supported instruction has the strongest potentiality of connecting and collaborating school stakeholders at the same platform. These communal relationships may help to fulfill the demand of multi-literacies. Furthermore, different values of Schoology for individuals have the credibility to raise academic achievement and educational innovation of students.
Rationale of the study

Educational transformation is imperative to bridge the gap between students' learning interest and teaching content in the classroom in the 21st century. The main crucial commitment for schools must be to foster students' participation and active engagement in discussing, analyzing, and critically comprehending information within a small group or whole classroom (Cummins, et al. 2007). Technology-enhanced literacy teaching can advance students' learning and allow them to practice learned knowledge intuitively. According to Egbert (2009), teachers can lead students to the effective use of technology in the interest of creating something innovative in the classroom. Consequently, students will be motivated to express their own ideas and thoughts and learn from others. Thus, these literacies will drive students toward a different kind of meaningful thinking and decision making that is strongly connected to their daily activities. This review of Schoology website evaluates how the Schoology website is appropriately aligned with the students' learning and literacy activities in the classroom today. The Schoology website is reviewed considering the following three design criteria from technology supported instruction by Cummins et al. (2007):

- Provide cognitive challenge and opportunities for deep processing of meaning
- Promote self regulated activity for collaborative inquiry
- Focus on multiliteracies in the twenty-first century need

Schoology-supported classroom management

Schoology is a promising educational tool for meeting both current and future challenges of teaching and learning in the 21st century. Schoology.com is a free teaching tool that helps teachers to manage classroom information. It is a collaborative platform for teachers, students, and parents. The purpose of developing and integrating Schoology in schools is to connect school community in the technology-supported classroom for improving students' learning. This technology-supported instruction creates dynamic educational support that can be fitted to new ideas from teachers and students.
Schoology supports an intimate partnership between educational institutions and technology developers and serves as a catalyst to empower teaching and educational effectiveness at different levels of any environment (i.e., K-12 education, higher education, corporate). To assess its value to teachers and students, it is important to evaluate if the Schoology website is appropriately aligned with students’ learning and literacy development in today’s classrooms. If the Schoology website and system does what it claims, teachers can use it to help assure the promotion of students’ motivation to share their ideas and solve multiple problems for the benefit of individual or community.

This Schoology website provides an integrated platform for Student Information Management System (SIS) beyond the typical learning management system (LMS). It also offers an advanced API (Application Programming Interface) to help teachers concentrate more on an effective teaching instead of administrative responsibilities. Schoology has three account options for teachers, students, and parents that are integrated with classroom management applications. These classroom features are developed for schools and can create dynamic educational support for teachers and students, empower teachers by creating a collaborative learning environment for students, integrate experiences among educational stakeholders, and advance academic achievement and success in schools.

**Evaluation of Schoology.com**

The review of Schoology evaluates how Schoology website is appropriately aligned with the students’ learning and literacy activities in the classroom today. Through the Schoology website, teachers can assure students’ motivation to share their ideas and solve multiple problems for the benefit of individual student or school community. The following three design criteria from technology supported instruction are considered to review Schoology website from technology supported instruction by Cummins et al. (2007):

**Design Criteria 1: Cognitive challenges and opportunities for deep processing of meaning**

Schoology embedded course design offers an opportunity to share questions, problems, and opinions within the classroom community. Teachers can motivate students to add, create,
record, and share supportive materials (i.e., audio, video, pages, pictures) (see Figure 1, 2) for class lessons by using this website. In addition, teachers can make class lessons more involving and applicable in daily life after facilitating students to use their prior knowledge and experiences.

Figure 1: Course Creating option for the classroom management in Schoology website

Figure 2: Different options of “add material” in Schoology website.

Design Criteria 2: Self regulated activity for collaborative inquiry

The Schoology website offers to help students create personal profiles. This website provides Email and SMS text features in mobile that can easily bring course updates to
Student-to-student and teacher-to-student interaction features can encourage students to contribute and share interesting and relevant ideas with classmates and teachers. Students’ interaction on class content with classmates and teachers promotes deeper understanding and advances their ability to apply for diverse context.

Figure 3: Concept Bank alignment with Common Core Standard of reading and listening

For instance, ConceptBank application is one of the applications of Schoology website that supports an embedded feature with common core standard for Language and Arts, Mathematics, Special education, and Technology. Student can read the standard and then practice and relate their reading or listening content by practicing quizzes or questions. They can immediately check their performance. These activities promote awareness about the lesson tasks (see Figure 3). As a result, Schoology-website supports learners to take control of their own learning by checking their performance in their account as well.
Figure 4: Privacy settings of Schoology teachers’ account

Figure 5: Student access in a Schoology supported course
Design Criteria 3: Need of multiliteracies in the twenty-first century

The Schoology website provides an integrated platform for practicing multiliteracies for students. It stores all personal, academic, and instructional information in one place with restricted access (see Figure 4). Teachers can both monitor students learning performance, but students can also check their performance. Student users can share rich-text file with others. Teachers can guide students to create a classroom networking by using this website. As this website can connect to both Facebook and Twitter features, the scope of students’ learning may move from individual to classroom, classroom to society, and society to the world. Overall, students can practice multiple literacies through the Schoology website. For example, students can sign into the website with a class code (see Figure 5, 6) (i.e., computer literacy), complete their lessons for the class (i.e., academic literacy), create videos or compile a food/travelling album for the class, and share their ideas inside the class (i.e., group) and outside the class (e.g., Web 2.0 services: Wikipedia, Facebook, Google Search). In brief, the Schoology website can adjust to the need for multiliteracies in the 21st century. Thus, different innovative applications and tools in the Schoology website can facilitate both teachers and students to build a collaborative community of learners and also fulfill the need of current educational goals.
Our schools are not ready to provide support for the broader range of literacies that are multiliteracies (Cummins, et al. 2007). To cope with the current educational challenges, teachers should be equipped with the concept of multiliteracies. Likewise, diverse research on technology-supported teaching strongly focuses on student’s everyday use of Web 2.0 technologies and their participation on Web 2.0 both in and outside the classroom (Greenhow, et al. 2009). Technology-enhanced literacy teaching can advance students’ learning capabilities and practice in different situations, contexts, and problems. These different multiliteracies pedagogical practices may facilitate students’ abilities to think,
observe, participate, and apply learned information from the text to the real problem solving.

Teachers can use the Schoology website to manage everyday classroom practices of the school community with a goal of improving students’ learning. Different embedded options in this website can enhance interactive learning for students, connect school stakeholders at the same platform, increase teachers’ teaching efficiency, and shape students’ learning and thinking for the diverse community needs.

A collaborative platform for school stakeholders

Schoology’s supported instruction holds a strong potentiality for connecting and collaborating school stakeholders at the same platform. These communal relationships may help fulfill the demand of the broader range of literacies in the 21st century need. This different pedagogical approach not only increases teachers’ teaching efficiency, but also shapes students’ learning and thinking for the diverse community needs (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Cummins, et al. 2007). Consequently, Schoology enables students to monitor their own learning process and makes students responsible for their own understanding and thinking.

It can be expected that school stakeholders can share challenges with others in this integrated learning environment. Furthermore, different values of Schoology have the credibility to raise academic achievement and educational innovation of students. Therefore, Schoology.com can be a supportive and advanced tools that helps school stakeholders fulfill the demand of strong literacy skills and development for students. Comparing Schoology with other available teaching tools might open a new lens for teacher educators to consider this Schoology website in their classrooms. Exploring the experiences of school stakeholders who already used this website could help Schoology developers to understand the benefits and shortcoming of this Schoology website. However, creating an information system for school stakeholders on students’ learning success would provide good evidences for educators to integrate this website in classroom management and successful teaching.
References


