Enhancing Teacher Awareness and Professionalism through Prolonged Critical Reflection: Influences of Socializing Forces on Educational Beliefs and Practice

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Abstract
A graduate course in curriculum and instruction was utilized as an intervention to enhance teacher awareness about their teaching practice. The researchers employed a purposeful and prolonged critical reflection approach for graduate students, who are also teachers, over a 15-week period. The teachers juxtaposed their prior experiences against a frame of educational philosophies. The researchers found that prolonged critical reflection about educational philosophies and associated approaches increased teacher ability to discern and disentangle their teaching dispositions from their teaching practices and articulate these distinctions. Additional significant outcomes included teachers questioning of socializing forces that influence their instruction, prompting action and agency. Similarly, teachers commented about gaining increased open-mindedness and a willingness to transform schools. Triangulation of data corpuses that included journal reflections/blogs, field notes, and assignments revealed four salient phases associated with their enhanced awareness and transformation: (1) Uncertainty, (2) Development and Growth, (3) Realization and Agency, and (4) Self-Characterization associated with this critical reflection process.

Key Words
Reflection, critical reflection, Dewey, teacher beliefs, teacher practice, professional development, educational philosophy, socializing forces

> *Having progressed through this course thus far, I have realized how my teaching beliefs and pedagogy clash and why they do. My beliefs are fundamentally progressivist in nature; however, my teaching practices resemble essentialism. I know I am a progressivist because I strongly believe that instruction should be learner-centered with a bit of essentialism tied into it. Unfortunately, due to my lack of support currently and lack of experience, I cannot take full advantage of my situation and resort to essentialism more than I wish to do so. Having gone through student teaching and surrounding myself with essentialist practices, I discovered that those practices are what I fall back on… (Sandra, Narrative)*

Research about how teachers can critically reflect on their teaching conceptions

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and practices is a topic of much discussion especially in the last couple of decades. Weshah (2013) notes, however, that while several teacher education models exist, there is "[…] little evidence of attempts to identify discernible gains in student ability to reflect upon and synthesize their belief/value systems as they relate to their perspective roles as classroom teachers" (p. 115).

> Requiring that teachers develop a sense of personal biography and professional history is one way of having them begin to overcome their inertia and unwillingness to question where particular teaching practices came from, and to that extent, no longer accepting teaching actions as natural or common sense and unquestionable (Smyth, 1989, P. 11).

Hytten (2000) also notes that it is extremely uncommon to have students, let alone teachers reflect through personal narratives. Researchers have suggested that teachers gain greater satisfaction and knowledge is extended if they are challenged and that perhaps teachers and preservice teachers alike should defend and provide reasons for their beliefs (Beatty et al., 2020b; Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1995; Warfield, Wood, & Lehman; 2006). Philosophical schemes provide a frame for promoting a conscious-driven practice that grants individuals opportunities to ponder their beliefs in relation to their present and actual experiences (Beatty et al., 2020a; Dewey, 1933; Taylor & Valli, 1992; Valli, 1992).

Little research exists about how to make the connection from abstract philosophies to provide evaluative purpose in actual teaching practice (Beatty et al., 2020a; Bredo, 2002; Dewey, 1916 [2004]; Hytten, 2000; Taylor & Valli, 1992; Weshah, 2013). Teachers who are not fully aware or understand how their teaching practices emanate from particular philosophies have trouble disentangling their beliefs from their actual teaching practices (Beatty et al., 2020c; Hofer, 2002; Olafson et al., 2010; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). "Attention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot" (Pajares, 1992, p. 329). This type of purposeful reflection promotes further insight about the internal beliefs as well as the possible external factors that may interfere with or influence their conceptions of teaching that they may not have considered before (Beatty et al., 2020a; Dewey, 1933; Gerges, 2001; Johnston, 1984; Ponterotto, 2005).

Reflection as a Tool for Enhancing Teacher Awareness

Reflection is often used as a tool for professional development during preservice preparation and can be employed with teachers, but opportunities to do engage in meaningful reflection are rare unless they participate in induction programs. Much reflective practice is outcomes-based, passive, and not deliberately focused through means that contribute to an evaluation on a more contextual level (Beatty et al., 2020b; Davis, 2006; ; Valli, 1997) and challenges their preconceptions (Lasley, 1980; Crookes, 2015). Preservice teachers as well as those in induction programs provide evidence of how they are improving their practice yet oftentimes they do not have the opportunity to critically reflect on their epistemological beliefs that contribute to who they are as educators within the situated context of socializing forces (Moss & Lee, 2010; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Pantarotto, 2005; ; Zeichner, 1999; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

Reflection about teaching outcomes provides teachers with information about learner outcomes but does not promote

reflection about their role in this process (Davis, 2006; Gerges, 2001; Moss & Lee, 2010; Niessen et al. 2008; Taylor & Valli, 1992). Active, productive, or deep critical reflection that hones their true beliefs helps them interpret their actions to positively affect the approaches they utilize in their classrooms (Davis, 2006; Dewey, 1933; Hytten, 2000; Moss & Lee, 2010). It is not just reflection for the sake of learning student outcomes and producing modifications but purposeful reflection in which teachers understand the theoretical implications of their practice. Moreover, deep reflective approaches which can be contextualized for learner interaction can range from the deliberate approach of considering other theoretical perspectives, the personalist approach based on narratives of their teacher selves and experiences, and/or the critical approach in which they consider their teaching selves in comparison to their outer world and socializing external policies they believe may influence their teaching conceptions and practice (Crookes, 2015; Gerges, 2001; Mansvelder-Langayroux et al., 2008; Moss & Lee, 2010; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Pantarotto, 2005). Social and political forces can influence teacher practice and the ways in which teachers can be influenced by their environment or become actively involved in creating change (Freire, 1970; Gerges, 2001; Moss & Lee, 2010; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

Several authors have noted the importance of utilizing and comparing learning theories and educational philosophies to enhance teachers' ability to more clearly express what influences their instructional beliefs and practices in early education (Farquhar & White, 2014; Hedges & Cullen, 2011) and higher education contexts (Reber, 2011; Weshah, 2013). Critical evaluation about educational philosophies provides a constructivist basis for challenging teachers' instructional conceptions (Beatty, Leigh, & Dean, 2020b; Crookes, 2015; Dewey, 1933; Johnston, 1984; Moss & Lee, 2010).

Hofer (2004), among other researchers, advocate for more research that explores and identifies approaches that promote the facilitation and co-construction knowledge to help teachers gain an understanding of their instructional motivations in heuristic ways (Beatty et al., 2020c; Kitchener, 1984; Moss & Lee, 2010; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982; Taylor & Valli, 1992). Therefore, as researchers, we were not only concerned about how educational philosophies guided teacher development but also how teachers "process" their understanding to understand underlying motivations through critical reflection. Beatty, Leigh, & Dean (2020a) recommend research that delves into how "one's espoused teaching philosophy and one's enacted teaching philosophy differ" and what patterns emerge as their teaching narrative evolves (p. 539).

Guiding Framework

To gain an understanding of oneself is to have a space from which to experience, reflect upon experience, and rationalize about that experience to gain an understanding of self within the context of our world. Dewey (1933) argues for careful and prolonged consideration of our situated experiences as juxtaposed against our beliefs, values, and judgments to become aware of our practices. Engaging in prolonged critical reflection is related to Dewey's model of reflective practice that involves conscious driven systematic inquiry. Prolonged reflection promotes increased understanding about the self and situated experiential context. Reflection promotes dialectical meaning-making or making sense out of one's experience to provide a metacognitive space to rationalize and transform their teaching through deconstruction, reconstruction, and reconceptualization of

knowledge (as suggested by Bendixen & Rule, 2004).

Dewey's six phase conceptual model of critical reflection is the theoretical frame of reference for this study. The teachers juxtaposed their prior experiences and knowledge about their teaching and teaching beliefs against novel educational philosophical research through prolonged critical reflection. Dewey's six phases can be summarized as: (1) identify an actual experience for reflection, (2) spontaneous questioning of the experience, (3) interpreting as well as investigating the experience based on new knowledge (3) begin to decipher their experience based on new knowledge, (4) abstract what they've found with possible hypotheses about their experience, (5) building of general hypothesis to justify their understanding of the experience, and then (6) testing or evaluation of rationale for taking action. These stages are similarly indicative of a sociocultural frame of reference that reveals the spiraling nature of epistemic change, through continual cognitive awareness, and/or realization, as well as consideration of external environmental influences described by Bendixen (2002).

Study Context

The study takes place at a state university in a large urban area of southern California. The school is attended by more than 26,000 students and is a commuter campus. This study explored the ways in which 17 novice teachers, with less than five years' experience who are graduate students in a master's in Curriculum and Instruction, volunteered to participate in this study. Of the 17 teacher participants, three had limited curriculum leadership expertise and were relatively inexperienced about education philosophies per the initial demographic survey administered.

This study was exploratory and context specific to this bound system of teachers who are graduate students in a Curriculum and Instruction course. Critical reflection was utilized as a tool to help extend teacher knowledge about their own epistemological beliefs as well as their pedagogical practices in the classroom (Dewey, 1933).

The course instructor prompted the teachers to relate their epistemological beliefs through weekly reflection. The teachers were asked to write in their journals about specific practices during the two initial sessions before they began an in-depth study of educational philosophies. Their essays provided a base of evidence about their teaching practices and why they believe and teach in certain ways. During the first and second session respectively, they were asked to describe a favorite lesson and how they would teach, and then described what they believed to be the best approaches to classroom management (as suggested by Crookes, 2015; Lasley, 1980; Reber, 2011). Subsequently, the teachers delved into the literature about educational philosophies, the various processes of critical reflection, as well as thinking about what or who influenced their instructional decisions and whether this had a bearing on their teaching beliefs and attitudes. The instructional tone was primarily constructionist in nature (Golding, 2009). Teachers gained an understanding of educational philosophies that the professor applied to realistic classroom experiences through instructor modeling (as recommended by Beatty et al., 2020b; Hofer, 2004; Niessen et al., 2008).

Four educational philosophies (and one philosophy respectively) were the primary focus of their curricular understanding: Perennialism, Essentialism,[1] Progressivism, Social Reconstructionism, and Existentialism. For

[1] Existentialism which is more associated within the context of the study of varying philosophies such as realism, idealism, tends to be one that is often referred to in educational research as an educational philosophy beyond the four core educational philosophies aforementioned (Jersin, 1972).

instance, a more essentialist philosophical tone is associated with the authority figure who disseminates knowledge through lectures, promotes foundational knowledge, and may use little to no student-to-student interaction. Similarly, perennialism is teacher-centered yet includes the study and mastery of the classics (including literature, fine arts, and foreign language study), and promotes intellectual reasoning. A progressivist style would denote less teacher lecture and more facilitative cooperative student-to-student approaches towards learning. Social reconstructionism has the aim of creating a classroom environment that facilitates student learning, acknowledges prior knowledge, yet also creates a classroom environment that promotes agency, change, and/or social reform in society and institutions (Beatty et al., 2020a; Crookes, 2015; Mansvelder-Langaroux et al., 2008; Moss & Lee, 2010).

Thus, within this context, teachers were asked to reflect on each of the educational philosophies, their own teaching practices, and describe what influences, e.g., ramifications of educational, institutional, and social policies of practice promoted in schools have influenced their teaching philosophies, related approaches, and their instructional beliefs. Using enactivism, the course instructor facilitated class and peer-group interactions in class through deep reflection and dialogue about blogs and assignments to promote greater awareness of the dynamic relationships that exist between the "student–teacher, individual–community, [and] cognition" (Niessen, et al., 2008, p. 27) congruent with Dewey's (1933) phases of critical reflection.

Methodology

The researchers were interested in exploring how sustained critical reflection over a 15-week-period could help the teachers make meaning of their teacher selves by reflecting about their teaching environments. The researchers chose a qualitative case study approach to analyze how the teachers defined their instructional beliefs through self-discernment based on critical reflection. The aim of the researchers was to uncover how sustained critical reflection might enhance the teachers' ability to reason out why they teach and believe in certain ways. Merriam's (2009) critical research frame was employed to explore but also challenge teachers' notions of themselves and their teaching world. Understanding the ramifications of varied educational philosophies instructional styles can help teachers define the beliefs and goals of their own teaching and whether their goals align with the instructional missions of their schools. The research focused on whether teachers found the process of sustained critical reflection useful in defining their beliefs about teaching and why they engage in certain types of instructional approaches. In this way, the research is focused on answering the following question:

> 1)How might sustained critical reflection about their teaching beliefs and practices lead to enhanced understanding of their teacher selves, teaching context, and forces that influence that context?

Data Analysis

The purposeful sample of participant cases was analyzed to gain insight about how sustained critical reflection may transform their understandings within their world. The researchers directly examined the qualitative data (survey, field notes, in-class journal reflections, online blogs) to identify recurring patterns to generate an inductive coding scheme. Recurring and co-occurring codes were further collapsed into major categories and themes. The

researchers used the coding paradigm to re-examine the data corpuses to achieve intercoder reliability—a form of inter-rater reliability (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of the various data pieces are reflected in the coding paradigm utilized to characterize the participants' exploration of their teacher identities and instructional practices, as well as their perception within their bound institutional systems (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Through this process and the examination and re-examination of the data corpuses, four salient phases emerged which permitted for further data categorization and analysis: Phase I: Uncertainty; Phase II: Development and Growth; Phase III: Realization and Action (Agency); and Phase IV: Characterization of Teacher Self. The phases are indicative of how the course flowed and the overall group responses to course content and materials within an evolving community of inquiry (Beatty et al., 2020b, Golding, 2009; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). The teachers were encouraged to continue to reflect, analyze and rationalize about their teacher selves based on prior teaching evidence (e.g., lesson and classroom management essays) and studies about critical reflection, curricular approaches, educational philosophies, as well as social and institutional policies. Themes emerged were indicative of phases of initial inquiry as they progressed through conscious-driven practice of reflection to explain and think about the why of their teaching beliefs and practices. The following table provides an overview of the phases that emerged, themes as subthemes from data analysis, and brief outline of topics the teachers reflected upon.

Table 1. Spiraling Model of Critical Reflection and Self-Characterization

Coded Phase Descriptions	**Themes and Subthemes**	**Data Sources (ICF=in-class reflection; Blog=online reflection)**
Phase I: Uncertainty (Weeks 1-3)	**Themes:** Vagueness Sense-Making Subthemes: conflict, motivation	Week 1 ICF about "Lesson and Approaches" Week 2 ICF about "Classroom Management Beliefs and Approaches" Week 2 Blog about Luft & Roehrig (2007) about teacher beliefs, practices. Week 3 ICF about Jersin's Educational Philosophies survey outcomes and whether matches their beliefs and practices.
Phase II: Development and Growth (Weeks 4-7)	**Themes: Cognitive evaluation, Cognitive dissonance**	Week 4 ICF about initial understanding of personal philosophy.

	(teachers were conflicted when personal beliefs did not match their instructional practice and what they perceived as institutional interference) **Awareness** (becoming more self-aware) Subthemes: motivation	Week 5 Blog about curricular designs and how it compares with school and beliefs about teaching and practice. Week 6 Blog: Online synopsis of Mansvelder-Langayroux et al. (2008) and connections to teaching. Week 7 Fieldwork Report and analysis about school's principal and school mission and educational philosophy.
Phase III: Realization and Action (Weeks 8-11)	**Themes: Development and Growth** (teachers realize that their practice and beliefs are influenced by institutional policies) **Agency and Action** (Teachers reveal a desire to transform curriculum to better reflects their beliefs rather than the status quo)	Week 8 ICF about social foundations of curriculum, society, social and institutional policies (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009. Week 9 Blog about curricular models (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009) Week 10 Blog about historical foundations and change (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). Week 11 Blog about elementary school programs and/or issues that are relevant to your teaching context.
Phase IV: Teacher Self-Characterization (Weeks 12-15)	**Themes: Transformation and Growth Agency and Action** (subtheme: external forces, e.g., educational policies, mandates)	Week 12 Personal Belief Narrative Draft Week 13 Personal Belief Narrative Rationale Week 14 Personal Belief Narrative Final Week 15 Curriculum Rationale Final

Analysis of Findings

The study revealed how the process of prolonged critical reflection can promote greater depth of understanding, analysis, critical thinking, and metacognition about teaching practices. The process of self-reflection for self-discernment was novel for participants and challenged their outcomes-based critical reflective practices. Engaging in a reflective process without the fear of grade reprisal was novel for them. Thus, teachers were free to

engage in reflection for their own professional development. This self-reflective process itself evoked a level of initial uncertainty and lack of clarity about whether what they genuinely believed aligned with their practice or vice-a-versa.

Phase I: Uncertainty

Two prominent themes that emerge in the *Uncertainty* phase are vagueness and sense-making. At this stage many of the teachers referred to their pre-service teacher experiences to compare and reflect upon their understanding of their beliefs and practices. The type of approach utilized by teachers is personalist in nature as they try to identify and define their own philosophy(ies) and teacher identities (Mansvelder-Langaroux et al., 2009).

1.1. Vagueness

The teachers note their uncertainty about their development or their progress in understanding whether the educational philosophies that described them in the Jersin (1972) survey truly measured their educational philosophy. They reflected about whether the Jersin measure accurately indicated their philosophical bent. Thus, the measurement tool was used to create a conversation and have them reflect further and apply their knowledge from the course about the varying philosophies.

> In reflecting upon scores from an educational philosophy test: "I felt that as I went through the test, I didn't have a strong feeling of agreement towards only one answer for many of the questions. I was surprised that I didn't have any responses in the essentialism category because I went through school in an era more or less with influences of this type of educational philosophy. I think that if I were teaching, my answers may have varied some but right now I think my ideas are more idealistic than they may be after I have more experience in the classroom" (Teresa, Phase I, In-Class Reflection).

Teresa also echoed what other teachers mentioned—the idea that once they enter the schooling systems as full-time teachers that they may become more essentialist due to accountability mandates and testing expectations. Furthermore, participants overall noted how they are still developing their conceptions about teaching and how that is related to their teaching practices.

1.2 Sense-Making

Associated with participants' uncertainty was their need to make sense of the newer content which was unfamiliar. As part of the facilitative learning environment, they were exposed to various articles intended to facilitate their understanding of the terminology such as epistemology and the difference between teacher beliefs, practices, and attitudes. They were asked to reflectively explore how information in Luft and Roehrig (2007) might affect their own understanding of their beliefs and pedagogy.

> The article points out that our beliefs about how [...individuals] learn are a predictor for our actions in the classroom, and I agree. I didn't really understand why it is important to understand our beliefs and how they relate to our teaching methods, but I now understand that understanding my beliefs in relation to knowledge and learning can allow me to effectively grow as an educator. I will be able to take in information and suggestions and relate them to my methods in the classroom. An interesting question to consider is can teachers control the influence that our beliefs have and do our beliefs or its

> influence change over time? (Helen, Phase I, Luft & Roehrig, 2007, Blog)

Initially, the lack of familiarity with new information promoted a sense of uncertainty about tying a particular educational philosophy that would match their beliefs about teaching. At this stage, they ask spontaneous questions and attempt to answer them. The teachers also begin to make sense and explain their initial epiphanies about their beliefs versus instruction, leading them to create and reformulate their ideals about teaching perspectives.

Phase II: Development and Growth

During the Development and Growth Stage II, reflective article and blog responses provide evidence of intellectualization and reasoning about their teaching beliefs and practices (Crookes, 2015; Dewey, 1916, 1933; Olafson et al., 2010). Much of their reflections at this stage were about gaps between their teaching beliefs and pedagogy and how to bridge those gaps. At this stage they begin to identify with educational philosophies. Reflecting and assimilating new knowledge is demanding as they engage in cognitive evaluation of their experience. Engaging in cognitive evaluation helped them gain the ability to identify with particular educational philosophies and attain a modicum of awareness (self-awareness) of their teaching practice during the still developing stage. The most dominant theme during Phase II was growth and/or development discussed below. Other relevant subthemes noted were conflict and awareness (e.g., increased epiphanies and connections with subject matter).

2.1 Cognitive evaluation

Accordingly, teachers wrote about how critical reflection for "real purposes" leads to their self-development (professional development) and growth while enhancing their learning. Journaling and dialogue permitted them to critically evaluate, clarify, and re-formulate their beliefs. They are beginning to note the benefits of this type of metacognitive activity for translating and evaluating how they actually believe about instructional practice.

> Through this class we are beginning to reflect on our thinking and practices through in class activities and the readings. This will help us when it comes to writing our personal narrative because we will have been forced to analyze *what we think and how we translate our principles into practice*. I remember having a guide [in the credential program] from which I was supposed to develop my reflections. For the most part, I was supposed to reflect on the end results of my lesson, and its success by the amount of understanding the overall class [scores] obtained. I don't remember being asked about my epistemology and my ways of teaching. In regard to my beliefs, I believe reflecting on oneself is important because not only do we grow as educators and people, but we can see from another perspective if what we are doing is working or not (Joanna, Phase II, In-Class Reflection).

Like Joanna, other teachers also began to recognize that journaling promoted critical evaluation and re-evaluation, and clarification of their beliefs. Moreover, teachers commented on how this was becoming part and parcel of their professional development.

2.2 Conflict

The teachers read articles about reflection on teaching and whether their teaching habits might be influenced by schooling institutional aims or goals. Reflecting upon this

new information within their own context challenged them to re-evaluate their ideas of their own teaching beliefs and approaches as juxtaposed against institutional aims. This supplementary information caused them to question whether their beliefs and approaches were their own or influenced by socializing institutional forces. Leticia is in conflict about whether her environment caused her to choose more essentialist types of responses on her Jersin (1972) educational philosophy questionnaire the prior week or whether she was inherently an essentialist. Taking a critical comparative approach to understanding why she scored primarily essentialist rather than child-centered, or progressivist, Leticia ponders whether the school has influenced her performance-based essentialist disposition and actions.

> I believe that a crucial step in developing a self-awareness of critical reflection practice refers to knowing who you are and what works well for you. As exemplified through the Mansvelder et al. (2008) article, learning activities encouraged the student teachers to become aware of their own actions, functioning and development. I reflected on this piece by referring to my own student teaching. I did have to conduct weekly reflections [then] yet I seemed to center on student outcomes as compared to my own process of thinking. This lays true in my teaching philosophy of essentialism. Although I did mention some aspects of whole child-centered curriculum, my reflections were more academic-based oriented. Perhaps this was due to my lack of experience or being that I had been placed in a high performing academically centered school in a high socioeconomic location. Nevertheless, my reflections exuded academic performance. This would be beneficial to my recollection for the [upcoming] personal [narrative] because I will have to consider whether or not I made a choice or if it was a choice already laid out for me (Leticia, Phase II, Mansvelder-Langayroux et al., 2008, Blog).

Teachers at this stage became conflicted while reasoning why they behave, instruct, or believe in particular ways. At this stage, greater questioning about the intent behind socializing forces that might affect instruction and beliefs emerged. Teachers similarly show greater interest and excitement about their self-awareness, and their self-reflections were more extensive during this stage.

2.3 Awareness

Closely related to conflict gained through comparing and contrasting of prior and new knowledge during critical reflection, were the epiphanies about themselves. Although the teachers were not asked to pull information from prior teacher education courses when reflecting, many of them did, curious about how their beliefs were changed or influenced over time. Thus, teaching philosophy statements and other primary source documents surfaced as part of their own self-directed analysis. Lindsey, like Leticia, was also motivated to review her two-year-old teaching statements from the credential program.

> Surprisingly, I found that many of my [prior] statements fit into a progressivism philosophy…The surprising factor for me was that nowhere in my teaching philosophy did I ever mention California content standards, holding students accountable

> for their learning, or maintained a rigor with my instruction to ensure all students are growing as learners. Now that I have worked for almost two years, I believe that my original teaching philosophy has changed since leaving the credential program. I tend to now lean toward an essentialist view with behavioral objectives. This may be because I have been submersed in an environment that is so heavily influenced by standardized testing (Lindsey, Phase II, Mansvelder-Langayroux et al., 2008, Blog).

As teachers acknowledged their increased development and growth (and awareness) by the second phase, they continued to examine literature related to teaching beliefs and practices juxtaposed against educational philosophies and corresponding subject design contexts. Greater awareness occurred during this second phase as major epiphanies were based primarily on their personal and local schooling influences and experiences. Sustained reflection prompted revision, reformulation, and greater ability to concretize their teaching contexts. By the third phase, however, teachers looked increasingly outward for explanations about what external factors influenced their beliefs and instruction. The dialogue moved from inner consciousness towards outer consciousness when hypothesizing about their teaching context, resulting in a greater realization about what external factors influence their instruction.

Phase III: Realization and Action

Thus, teachers, such as Lindsey, expressed curiosity about their teaching beliefs and practices and acknowledged initial awareness about their teacher selves. The epiphanies were associated with conflict in what they saw as a change in their belief and/or teaching practices when reviewing articles about society, institutional policies, and historical foundations of teaching. The increased awareness of socializing influences on their teaching resulted in teacher resistance towards what they perceived to be uniformistic essentialist agendas (as recorded in blogs and other reflections). This concern was further voiced when they realized how their teaching beliefs and instructional desires diverged from school policy.

> Although I work in an environment that is Essentialist, I don't necessarily agree with that philosophy. The basic subjects are a foundation that needs to be taught to all students. However, the method can be modified. I believe that if teachers would be "allowed" the opportunity to incorporate the arts, music, and social science and/or science into daily lessons, students would benefit from their learning. In our group we discussed the value of a score and how we "teach" to the test. *It's difficult to change the status quo*. We also discussed that if we don't teach to the test or scores may not be good enough and we may be frowned upon by our leaders and fellow colleagues. We also mentioned that there are some schools that do not follow essentialist philosophy. This type of learning is a great way to get students thinking about real-world situations. However, it may not work in all communities (Amanda, Phase III, Week 8 In-Class Reflection).

3.1 Action and Agency

Teachers not only identified aspects of the null and hidden curriculum but agendas that would not provide for equity pedagogy or multicultural curriculum. Three preschool

teachers feared that the encroachment of language arts and mathematics came at the expense of losing humanistic, artistic, and culturally relevant approaches to learning. Paul, who is a sixth-grade teacher, similarly advocated for and took action to remedy this absence by incorporating multicultural literature and culturally responsive approaches reflective of the classroom population.

> My goal is to integrate the students' multifarious cultures with the required reading that is designated by the district. For example, when reading a story, "Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip," about a Korean-American girl's visit in Seoul, I considered the various countries of origin represented in the group of students that I was working with and brought in photographs that were familiar to them…This lesson eventually led into an interdisciplinary math activity wherein the students were required to use measurement skills to help me prepare empanadas of our own. *As trivial and irrelevant as these experiences may seem to some, I believe that they give me a unique opportunity to bond with my students and teach affective and academic lessons concurrently*. This realization, though, did not come to me with ease. The reflective activities required of me during this course supplied me with opportunities to compare my ideologies and pedagogical practices with established curricular philosophies (Paul, Phase III, Blog: Elementary School Programs and Issues).

Phase IV: Teacher Self-Characterization

One of the last course assignments was the Personal Belief Narrative where they must provide a rationale for their educational philosophy and how it aligns with their belief and instructional practice. During this last phase, teachers further reflected upon their own evidence as recorded in blogs and journal summaries and class notes to verify which educational philosophy best represented their teaching beliefs and practices.

There is mention of greater self-awareness about internal as well as external socializing forces that influenced their practice. Similarly, teachers showed great confidence in their ability to self-characterize, and continued points about their desire to take action and make change. Major themes were self-awareness (ability to self-characterize), agency and action (or reaction to social forces that interfere with the authentic development of a teacher persona), growth and transformation, as well as associated connections between theory and practice.

> The readings in the class helped me make connections between my teaching practices and theoretical philosophies. For example, when I observed my own classroom environment, I noticed that I had the desks and chairs in rows. Would that make me an essentialist? In terms of the curriculum that I use for the program, the subjects are clearly delineated, and materials being taught are focused on specific goals and objectives. Moreover, reflecting on one of my favorite lessons in class, I noticed that I conduct a lot of direct instruction or "teacher talk" [referring to Journal reflection #1]. By reflecting on that aspect of the curriculum, I noticed that it reflects more of an essentialist style […]. In contrast, my instructional practices reflect more of a progressive way of teaching. For instance, my willingness to encourage whole and

> small group discussions and encouraging my students to think critically show a more student-centered approach (Sandra, Phase IV, In-Class Reflection #3).

4.1 Transformation and Growth

The phases reveal how knowledge is gained, received, and then assimilated, which leads to greater reflection and deconstruction of their role as teachers. "The course forced me to critically examine, analyze, and deconstruct how I teach, what I teach, and why I teach the way I do in the context of my own classroom" (Eng, Personal Belief Narrative).

While an important outcome included their perceived ability to engage in general reflection about their own teaching and their socialized educational experiences, another significant finding was their notion of transformation and growth. Teachers wrote about how, considering their beliefs, they were able to transform or, to a lesser extent, change their teaching approaches and classroom methods. Maria, who has not yet found work as a teacher, convinced the Inclusion Teacher she supports to concede greater choice which is associated with the existentialist approach.

> At the beginning of the course, I did not have an open mind. As I have progressed through this course and through the year as a teacher's assistant, I feel my experience and knowledge has matured. […] through my reflections I discovered that I did not know myself as a teacher. I felt my practices completely conflicted with my beliefs. It was frustrating for me to teach in someone else's classroom. […] In my second reflection I stated that I do have the opportunity to exercise my beliefs in my practice to an extent. The Inclusion Teacher has progressively given me more freedom in her classroom, and I have started to connect my beliefs with my practice. I have worked with the sixth graders on their novel. I give the students options for their activities and their tests (Maria, Phase IV, Personal Belief Narrative).

New knowledge was continually incorporated, evaluated, reasoned, justified, re-evaluated, and incorporated. Epiphanies and realizations occurred that provided teachers with indications of their own development, growth, increased self-awareness, and the ability to characterize as well as recognize their teacher selves towards the end of class. Also significant was the realization that they had engaged in transformation about the way they would think and, consequently, teach in the classroom. Moreover, the teachers admitted that they began to transform by questioning not only their instructional beliefs and actions but also the actions of their schools.

Considering these findings, the researchers discovered that when teachers gain knowledge about educational philosophies within social, historical, political context, they were able to deepen and critically analyze the educational institutions objectives and influence. Teachers came to understand and recognize the types of curricular formats that epitomized prescriptive or essentialist and other types of practices such as progressive learning formats. Furthermore, the prescription of an institution's curricular formats can interfere with teacher's inherent beliefs about what teaching approaches may be the most effective way of engaging and including diverse students. Those teachers who associated their beliefs and instructional approaches with progressivism as well as constructionism expressed a greater desire to change and/or question the status quo.

Discussion and Implications

Prior research reveals that preservice and classroom teachers have trouble disentangling their beliefs from their practices. Hofer (2004) asks if the use of critical analysis can help individuals reconcile their conflict about teaching conceptions versus teaching practices. Using sustained critical reflection throughout the course provided these individuals with a space from which to engage in inner dialogue and introspection about their true teacher beliefs and practices and develop as critical educators (Beatty et al., 2020a; Bendixen & Rule; 2004; Bredo, 2002: Cheng et al., 2009; Crookes, 2015; Dewey, 1933; Moss & Lee, 2010).

What occurred was a spiraling of cognitive dissonance, reincorporating and restructuring their beliefs based on that new knowledge. The teachers evaluated and challenged educational theories that contradicted how they had originally defined their classroom beliefs and practices (Dewey, 1933). The teachers were conflicted and questioned their beliefs when sharing or defending ideas about teaching and instructional practices in their journal reflections yet came to identify a particular educational philosophy that matched the ways their beliefs emanate from their lived experiences (Beatty et al., 2020c; Bendixen & Rule, 2004; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Congruently, teachers described their frustrations and internal conflicts, of how they perceived their instruction and their teaching selves within an institutional context governed by mandated federal policies that were not culturally and linguistically appropriate for the diverse students. Epiphanies about the ways in which the schooling environment and associated political forces influenced their teaching practices and beliefs were more prominent in teacher reflection comments during the self-characterization phase. It is during this phase that teachers not only hypothesize but test their hypotheses. Even in the last stage, teachers continued to re-conceptualize and revisit their ideals about their teacher selves yet at higher levels of cognition. Reflection prompted increased metacognition about their practice and recognition of the types of socializing forces that influence their beliefs.

While much of the inner conflicts were sustained throughout their exploration of their teacher selves, greater understanding and argumentation about how external social and political forces associated with teacher training have shaped their instructional decisions. In describing how external socialization processes (state and federal educational policies) affected their teaching, they voiced their resistance. The hidden curriculum of primarily teaching language arts and mathematics at the expense of valuable subjects such as social studies/history, science, and the arts was denounced. Teachers expressed a desire to become advocates for expanding the curriculum to include more creativity, inclusivity, as well as culturally responsive approaches (as suggested by Cheng et al., 2009; Moss & Lee, 2010). Thus, this study similarly points to the need to review a school's educational philosophical frame of reference and whether current policies conflict with or promote best practices for equitably meeting the needs of diverse children in schools.

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