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Finding my way: Teaching methods courses from a sociocultural perspective

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As teacher educators we are asked little about our teaching and offer little to others about ourselves (Bullough, 1994; Cole, 1995; Lanier & Little, 1986; McIntyre, 1980). This fear of self has been observed in both developed and developing countries (Raina, 1995). There is a definite disrobing in publishing self-study where one is immediately exposed to public view. There is support for the notion that professors of education can refine programs of education through their own self study and that of their students (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Knowles & Cole with Presswood, 1994). Listening to other self-study educators who seemed absorbed in introspection validated my position on wanting more than just my story; more than a narcissistic analysis of my pedagogy and theoretical orientation. I do view my life experiences and research as very connected to my teaching and seek the linkages between my own experiences and what I try to understand, but I need to know what in actuality my students are learning (see Richardson, 1990). What contribution does my self-study have to others?

I see possibilities for innovation in teacher preparation, particularly in the methods courses I teach, because I am beginning to see myself and my students more clearly. I am coming to know the possibilities of those innovations because I have searched for them through self study' and with the support of others. I want my students to begin to embrace this developmental reflection of constructive knowing (see Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), to recognize the object of their search, and to make choices on dilemmas through reflection and action. Action research allows reflections of self to take shape, facilitate change, and connect the theoretical with the practical (Ashburn, 1995; Erdman, 1990) According to Kenneth Zeichner (1995), most academicians involved in teacher research pay little homage to the process of action research in studying their own university-based teaching practices or in school-based inquiry as a form of knowledge production.

In this chapter, I share insights gained through ongoing self study of my pedagogical efforts in guiding preservice teachers' self study through a collaborative process. Framed within teacher education reform efforts of reflection in practice and the influence of teaching methods courses on preservice teachers' development and socialization into teaching, I will describe: (1) the provocation of my search, rooted in my years of teaching and research; (2) my work context; (3) my theoretical perspective; (4) a description of my pedagogical formats using the Vygotskian approach; (5) my self study and research (i.e., appraising preservice teachers' perspectives of the process); and (6) implications of my search for a teacher education curriculum.

Provocation of my Search
The epistemology of my teaching practices grows out of my personal history of schooling and teaching (Samaras, 1995). Self study is not new for me. I can remember when I first taught junior

high school students in 1972. 1 would come home, sit in silence, and retrace classroom events. I felt a resistance, yet uncontrollable compulsion towards reflection, similar to looking at a bad photograph of oneself. I still enjoy inquiry and spend enormous amounts of energy thinking about my instructional style and engaging in incessant hypothesis-testing of my teaching. I have found self study to be a difficult, yet emancipating process. I had not been taught to reflect on my teaching in any of my teacher education methods courses. It just seemed to be what I did, privately. As I read the work of other Professors who engaged in self study (Bullough, 1994; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993; Cole & Knowles, 1995; Knowles & Cole, 1994) I knew I was no longer alone.

I have always chosen to teach. I did not stumble into teaching teachers, or default into it as one of the additional assignments given to beginning Professors. I have taught over half of my lifetime. One of my mentors once told me that my challenge was that I liked to teach everything and everyone. My immigrant parents imbued a passion for learning. There was always another course I wanted to take. I began my teaching career in 1972 as a secondary education social studies teaching and while teaching received a Master's degree in human development. As I raised three children and worked on my doctorate in early childhood curriculum and teacher education, I continued to teach part-time at high schools and colleges. Receiving certification in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade enabled me to teach in early childhood, secondary, and postsecondary school settings with roughly 10 years in public school settings, Regardless of who I taught, my query was the same: What conditions for learning do I create within my own classroom and what difference does that make in my students' learning?

I recall my best teaching days when students talked about their learning, but it was difficult for me to let go of didactic teaching methods for several reasons (e.g., lack of collegial support, peer pressure, job security, and no understanding of a theoretical basis for my teaching). Why did I want to use group work, discussion, and role-playing activities? Was I a maverick? Teachers teach by lecturing on detailed information with students taking lots of notes. That is how it had always been and that is how it was for me. My thinking about teaching strategies shifted like a pendulum; I doubted my efforts when they were unsuccessful and felt like an expert when I received positive student feedback. In 1989, 1 team-taught my first university course to preservice teachers under the tutelage of a visiting professor of clinical psychology who used much of class time to challenge preservice teachers' conceptions of teaching. What I did not realize then was that conversations were only part of helping preservice teachers make sense of teaching. I had experimented with interactive classroom experiences since I began teaching, although I still could not identify the theory I was employing.

I am a firm believer that professors should practice what they preach and, in my case, connect theory to practice. I have striven to make my theory about teaching explicit and useful to myself and to others and have insisted my students do the same (see Samaras, 1994). While my classroom experiences continued to shape my own teaching, so too were my academic experiences. As a doctoral student, I studied Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of socially mediated learning. I came to understand my learning and teaching through the guidance of others. It has not been a singular constructive process.

I continued adjunct teaching in four colleges of education. Upon arrival at each university, I previewed department syllabi and took an anthropological-like walk down hallways, examining the culture of instruction for teacher preparation. I observed that most professors were lecturing and collaboration was superficial. I did not receive any pressure from my supervisors to conform, even though I felt like I was going against the grain. (Adjunct teaching carries a great

deal of anonymity and invisibility.) My pedagogical knowledge grew stronger from supervising student teachers, conducting research in elementary schools, and experimenting in a Vygotskian approach. I began experimenting with instructional formats adapted from ideas gleaned from professional conferences, which I saw as fitting the Vygotskian model (e.g., roundtable discussions, symposia, and poster sessions) and received positive student feedback. The location of Vygotskian theory became solid in my teaching with learning experiences continuously validating my theory usage.

Work Context

Self study in using the Vygotskian approach became strained by my entrance to full-time academic work, although I struggled desperately to align the exploration of my teaching and research-not a popular notion at a research institution. After teaching one year as a visiting assistant professor and serving as coordinator of the elementary program, I was promoted to an assistant professor, appointed as the director of teacher education, and continued in my role as coordinator of the elementary education program. I also became the coordinator of academic advising, coordinator of the non-degree program, teacher certification officer, chair of the Teacher Education Committee, and chair of a Special Accreditation Committee for our first joint National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification visit.

My experience somehow reminded me of our family restaurant where, as a 13-year-old bus girl and later as a junior waitress, I noticed how the senior waitresses strategically positioned themselves for the premier tipping zones and work distribution loads when training junior waitresses. One faculty member commented that she never knew I was an early childhood specialist and saw me as whatever the department needed. Another faculty member introduced me to a student as the one who takes cares of student teachers. My voice as mother continues. I still search for a balance in what Ardra L. Cole (I 995) describes as a tension between duty to self and duty to others. The tyranny of what I should do for others is rooted in my very traditional upbringing and gets replayed continuously in my personal and professional life. I received the support of a self- appointed mentor who invited me to share and develop her research, which I did, although I persisted in articulating my own research agenda.

Serendipitously, as I drudged away with my own reflective inquiry, national accreditation efforts bound the department in a serious self study. I attended numerous conferences and meetings, gathering information on the procedures for accreditation. I listened to the confusion and discord of professors and deans from across the country who demanded to know exactly what they were suppose to submit to NCATE. It was analogous to when students ask "Will this be on the test?" I empathized with accreditation specialists, struggling to explain that accreditation was a constructive, long-term, and ongoing study that is periodically reported and shared with others. Two issues became clear to me: (1) an imposed large-scale self study that demands the construction of professors' personal practice, albeit crucial to teacher education reform (Myers, 1995) is usually not understood or appreciated; (2) the process of inquiry must first begin with ourselves. We, teacher educators, have not been encouraged to perceive self study as improving our practice. We typically do not model or teach self study to our students. We have been trained only to study the practice of others. I thought about my teaching. My teaching assignments included two sequential teaching methods courses and practicum seminars, required of all undergraduate and graduate early childhood and elementary education majors. Each semester, my class enrolls about fifteen to twenty junior-year students who have been

accepted into the teacher education program as well as a few Master's degree students. The heterogeneous ability grouping proves valuable in creating a cognitively dissonant atmosphere with students sharing their multifarious learning experiences and conceptions of teaching. In the fall semester I teach a methods course in curriculum and instruction. Course work is aligned with students' field experience in one of two practicum school sites and a practicum seminar where students share their journal entries of dilemmas observed in field placements. Students concurrently complete courses in children's literature and class- room management which also draw upon the practicum experience for students' contextualized learning of subject content. In the spring semester I teach the same cohort of students in a social studies and science methods course and practicum seminar. In the second professional semester students complete a field experience in one of two practicum school sites, which are not the schools used for the first professional semester, in order to provide experiences in alternative social contexts. Students also take methods courses in reading and language arts, mathematics, and physical education and health. Through modeling I strive to convince my students that collegial and social support expand our effectiveness as teachers because each of us brings a gift to the collaboration endeavor. J.H. Westerhoff (I 987) makes the important point that:

> We are at our best when we make our lives and our search for meaning
> available as a resource for another's learning. To be a teacher means
> more than to be a professional who possesses knowledge and skills. It
> is to have the courage to enter into a common search with others. (p. 193)

During the year together, my students observe my collaboration with other professors and educators.

For example, each semester, I plan with the professors from the reading and language arts and the physical education and health methods courses in a shared course assignment of an integrated teaching unit. Also, I have worked closely with the kindergarten teacher at our university day- care center and the professor of the physical education and health methods course to develop a model of integrated teaching including movement in the context of actually working with young children (Samaras, Straits, & Patrick, 1998). My students have observed me working with an art teacher in our class to demonstrate how teachers can utilize visual arts to teach about such issues as diversity, historical time, and the role of women (Samaras & Pheiffer, 1996). Additionally, I sought out education specialists for class field trips such as a software curriculum developer at the National Geographic Society, a science curriculum designer at the National Science Resources Center, and museum educators from the Smithsonian Institutions. My roles as coordinator of the elementary education program and director of teacher education have offered me an opportunity to seek authentic application of a conceptual framework developed by The Catholic University of America faculty in a three-year U.S. Office of Educational Reform and Teacher Education Improvement Project (Valli & Blum, 1988). Within the dynamics of this exemplary reflective program, teacher education candidates are guided in deliberative reflection, although I use more of a relational approach (see Valli, 1990). Beginning in their first year, preservice teachers are asked to consider educational dilemmas in specific contexts, use research to inform but not direct practice, and get into the habit of viewing a situation and a solution choice from multiple perspectives. Throughout the teacher education program, preservice teachers' course work, practicum seminars, and multiple and varied field experiences are interwoven-a key factor in authenticating the learning experience. Preservice

teachers are taught the practice of reflection and self study in each education course with an accompanying field experience, which culminates in an action research project during the student teaching experience. Faculty, too, struggle with dilemmas in practice and model action research for their students. I feel at home in a department that considers the implications of reflection for continuous program development. I constantly revisit and examine our program goals through student exit interviews and alumni questionnaires. One collaborative project involved evaluating program changes in the junior year internship to bring practice closer to the theoretical goals that characterize our teacher education program (Taylor, Samaras, & Gay, 1994). It supported the contention that reflection is not enough. Reflection must be placed in action and look backward and forward to make choices about educational dilemmas. The self study I report on here has been a major component of this program change and is based in a Vygotskian perspective of learning and teaching.

A Theoretical Perspective for Teaching Teachers

As the translated works of the Russian theorist became available in English (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978, 1981, 1987), a sociocultural perspective of learning gained world-wide popularity. In his short life, Vygotsky had many research agenda, which were not easily understood or translated from his writings. The complexity of his work has unfortunately made his work greatly misconstrued (see Samaras, 1990). In my doctoral research I found support that shared activity is a powerful context for young children's problem-solving in computer contexts (Samaras, 1991). As I became a teacher educator, I considered the implications of Vygotskian principles to teacher preparation.

There has been a wealth of valuable research investigating the Vygotskian approach in teaching elementary-age children (see Berk & Winsler, 1995 for a review); however, fewer researchers have explored modeling the Vygotskian approach in teaching elementary preservice teachers who will be teaching young children. John 1. Goodlad (1990) asserts that teacher education programs" be characterized in all respects by the conditions for learning that future teachers are to establish in their own schools and classrooms" (p. 59). Some researchers have found Vygotskian theory useful in teacher education reform efforts, emphasizing the role of dialogue in establishing a sense of community among learners (see Craig, Bright, & Smith, 1994; Kowal, 1994; & Pugach & Johnson 1990).

Two recurring questions surfaced in my self study within the teaching methods courses I teach. First, if I believed so strongly in self study, why did I not require it of my students? Preservice teachers come into programs of education with the very expectation of receiving a set of techniques to make teaching efficient and effective, and exit with little practice in self study. The very terminology of methods implies that teaching is a set of prescriptive principles. Traditionally, the focus of methods courses has been how to teach specific content to a generic set of children, with few opportunities or time for preservice teachers' experimentation (Sarason, Davidson, & Blatt, 1986).

Second, as a Vygotskian researcher, I asked myself-. What interactive classroom experiences would enhance my students' self study? Teaching and teacher preparation programs make relatively little use of peer intellectual interchanges and socialization processes employed in other fields of professional preparation, breeding an isolated individualism (Goodlad, 1990; Lortie, 1975). 1 wanted to use collegial experiences that would guide preservice teachers as they constructed personal knowledge about teaching. I wanted to create a classroom aura that prompted students to work at the rough edges of their competence and understanding. I had

envisioned an environment of cognitive dissonance in which students' notions of teaching were challenged by moral and intellectual discussions with peers, cooperating teachers, and professors, and where students were permitted to make and share their mistakes.

There are far too many Vygotskian notions to present in this chapter, so I will speak of those I have found most helpful and relevant to my university teaching: (1) Vygotsky (1978) believed that cognition is always socially mediated or influenced by others in social interaction (e.g., for preservice teachers that could include knowledge of pedagogy, such as mediated notions of teacher planning, and knowledge of self, such as becoming a teacher professional). Higher mental functions, like memory, attention, self-regulation, occur from a shared task definition between individuals. "All higher mental functions are internalized social relation-ships" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 146). They are socially shared cognition. Socially shared cognition is based in the Vygotskian (1978) tenet that effective instruction includes a concern for the learner's potential development and that learning, thinking, and knowing arise through collaboration with others (see Hadean & Inagaki, 199 1); (2) Instruction should be aimed at the learner's zone of proximal development, that is the gap between the learner's actual level of development and the level of potential that may be achieved during an activity with guidance and collaboration with more capable peers (e.g., learning can be enhanced through peer, professor, and cooperating teacher support); (3) Social context impacts on how and what students think (e.g., many of my students attended small, suburban, middle to upper class, Catholic elementary and high schools and now, as college students, are placed in urban, poor, public or Catholic elementary schools for practicum and student teaching field experiences); (4) Learning occurs during situated activity or real settings (e.g., methods course assignments are implemented in practicum classrooms. Learning occurs during the problem-solving and activity with others).

Within a Vygotskian vein, course work was carefully aligned with the practicum experience. Course assignments required preservice teachers' to work with others, exchanging interpersonal knowledge about teaching (i.e., sharing between people) to enhance their intrapersonal knowledge (i.e., within the person; internalized to use later independently; see Wertsch, 1985). 1 resisted the more customary teaching patterns of recitation and direct instruction and used instructional formats of socially-shared cognition.

Description of instructional Formats of Socially-Shared Cognition

The instructional formats of socially-shared cognition that I employ involve audience relationships to make dialogue the central medium for learning, reflecting, and personal theory building about teaching. Students examine their past schooling experiences and beliefs about teaching, and negotiate and reconstruct meanings about teaching after embodying the voices of others. There are both teacher and peer formative assessments of course projects linked to the practicum elementary classroom. For each assignment, detailed assessment rubrics are given at the beginning of the semester and require the integration of learning and theory from prior education work.

One example of a self-study assignment is the education-related life history (adapted from Bullough, 1994). This assignment asks students to write about the following: how they came to the decision to be a teacher, their notions and doubts about teaching, important people and critical incidents that influenced their decision to teach, and implications of their school experiences for their notions of teaching. I open the class discussion by talking about my early schooling (e.g., I talk about being an immigrant's daughter in a large, Greek family who held education and community as the highest of ideals. I heard stories of my great grandfather who

traveled by donkey throughout the villages of Cyprus to teach). I ask students to share the highlights of their stories. My objectives for this self- study assignment are twofold: (1) to get to know my students by learning of their past schooling; and (2) to bring those past observations for students to a personally cognizant analysis which may serve to counteract their unreflective duplication. I recognize that students often have acquired inadequate apprenticeships through the observation of their own teachers (Lortie, 1975). At the least, this public presentation of our schooling allows us to acknowledge and hear about our past schooling collectively while looking at ourselves.

I use assignments to build a professional relationship with others in group or partner projects. For example, students who are placed in the same practicum school are asked to investigate their practicum school ethos or the common set of values, beliefs, and ways of doing things (see Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979 for a discussion of school ethos). The assignment asks students to examine the implicit, explicit, and hidden school curriculum, and the stated and actual practicum school philosophy. Students work together out of class to synthesize the information they collected from school artifacts, observations, and interviews with students, teachers, parents, and administrators. They present their conclusions to the rest of the class in a symposium format. To counteract the cliques that inevitably evolve out of the practicum school cohorts, I also work at nourishing a whole-class collegiality through other interactive projects. I use a distributive intelligence model of a jigsaw activity (a strategy developed by Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, and Snapp, 1978), where students teach each other about teaching models (e.g., direct instruction, cooperative learning, presentation, etc.).

The research skill objective for the course involves preservice teachers in the identification and literature review of a schooling dilemma observed in their practicum placement. Early in the semester they meet to discuss their personal search questions, rough outlines, and early research findings in small dialogue groups or roundtable sessions. They practice the strategy of Present, Dialogue, Refine (PDR), a peer review process I developed that is rooted in the Vygotskian model. Peers take turns presenting their initial and revised drafts of research papers, listening for each other's writing purpose, making requests of clarification, and helping to refine the writing intent through summarizing. Other examples of course work include peer coaching of lessons implemented in the practicum schools and a micro-teaching lesson-a lesson using a segment of information from their research paper, applying a teaching model learned in the jigsaw activity, and peer and self evaluation. Some choose to team teach with a peer who has researched a related topic.

At our final class session, preservice teachers share their initial and revised notions of teaching in a concept map or a visual representation depicting the relationships and characteristics generated from their knowledge of curriculum (see Novak & Go in, 1984). They compare this map to their earlier notions of teaching described in their education-related life histories and to their first lesson planning. I hold a debriefing session or group synthesis and course closure (adapted from Rates, 1987). It is an opportunity for us to conceptualize in a web, chart, or story format what we have come to know about teaching during the semester. We embrace in a premature yet temporary closure of self study. During final exam week, each preservice teacher meets with me in an oral exit interview conference that includes a portfolio defense of course work, a written paper of their perceptions of professional growth, and goals for the next semester.

In the spring, our class projects continue to center around each student's development as teacher with extensive and continuous opportunities for self study. We gather

again, now in the social studies and science methods course, which is designed to introduce students to conceptualizing and experimenting with the integration of the sciences with other content areas. An integrated teaching unit project, with numerous assignments, structures the center of our dialogue. Students are paired in a practicum classroom where they plan, implement, and evaluate an integrated unit together while receiving guidance from peers, cooperating teachers, and university professors. Using electronic mail has expedited the feedback.

One example of an assignment embedded in the unit, that emphasizes the social dimensions of learning, is the author's chair activity. Each preservice teacher presents a first sketch of his or her integrated unit with peers asking questions for clarification, and providing suggestions. An- other assignment is the cooperative search, where pairs investigate personal questions generated from field observations in social studies and science instruction (e.g., How do I design an equitable science fair? In what ways can I utilize the community and local art museums in my social studies unit on China?). In a poster session, students share pre and post concept maps of planning and submit a written paper of their metacognitive notions of planning the integrated units they implemented.

In addition to peer guidance, students are encouraged to seek out resource teachers at their practicum school (e.g., art teachers, special educators, computer and science specialists). For example, preservice teachers shadow and interview science teachers about their thinking about planning before, during, and after a science investigation lesson. At the end of the semester, we collectively discuss the linkages students have made and celebrate their reconstructed knowledge about planning and teaching. A second exit interview conference is held and goals are written for the student teaching experience. 1, too, reflect on course goals with the insights I gain through my students' comments. I look back through the assignments they have given me permission to use in order to assess my own teaching. I recall my excitement when video tape recording presentations and I appreciate their willingness to reveal their thinking. When I sat down to review the stacks of data I had collected, I heard their voices and not just my own.

My Self-study and Research: Appraising the Process

I have carefully aligned my self study of teaching with research, collecting class assignments since 1992. Although I have far more data than I find time to analyze, the process has nevertheless allowed me to view patterns over time. The voluminous, multiple data source bank includes students' education-related life histories, temperament in teaching scores, reflective journals on electronic mail, peer-coaching evaluations, microteaching feedback, end-of-semester Progress reports on field experiences, research Papers, planning papers, integrated teaching units, science shadow papers, critiques of cooperative searchers, individual audio-taped semi-structured exit interviews, student and cooperating teacher interviews exploring program goals, Professional growth papers, videotaped presentations of students' planning poster sessions, and my personal field notes.

Returning to the questions that served as a focal point for my research, I thought about the conditions for learning I structured in my methods courses and what students came to know differently about themselves as teachers as they worked with peers in my courses over a year's time. Below I share a small segment of my research from the 1994-1995 cohort.

Methods

During the fall semester, 1994, 1 taught a course on curriculum and instruction in the

elementary school and led the accompanying practicum seminar. In the spring semester, 1995, I taught the same students in social studies and science methods course and its accompanying practicum seminar. The field experience in the fall semester included a full-day, one- day-a-week field placement and the spring semester provided for a half- day, three-consecutive-day-a-week field experience. The cohort consisted of 15 preservice teachers; 14 women and one man. Two of the women were graduate students and the man was an undergraduate student.

The data sources for this research are drawn from students': (1) Professional growth papers from the fall semester, (2) Professional growth papers from the spring semester, and (3) written self reports on the planning and teaching of their integrated teaching units from the spring semester. The professional growth papers asked students to comment on: (a.) the quality of work, Participation, and effort for the semester; (b) a view of self as teacher at this stage of Professional development, including those things that changed or remained the same and any influence of past schooling; (c) how the insights described were gained; and (d) future Professional goals. The planning papers of students' metacognitive notions about planning an integrated unit included: (a) a pre and post concept map of notions of planning; (b) the development of understanding about short-term and long- term planning of the unit implemented; (c) support, directions, helpful resources received; (d) examples of curriculum decisions made; and (e) any related issues, such as teaching as an art or science, classroom management, motivation, assessment, and classroom organization.

I read and re-read the data many times, making marginal remarks and memos. I used first-level coding and then pattern coding to group overarching themes or constructs of students' perspectives and to cluster perceptions across participants (Miles & Huberman, 1984). I also coded sub-themes of the major themes from units of data. Perspectives held by students is one coding family drawn from the multi-data source collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Findings: Emerging Themes

Three overarching thematic categories with sub-categories tended to characterize the cohort's perspectives of professional growth and planning: (1) the process of self-study (i.e., constancy and continuity; mistakes as feedback); (2) collaboration (i.e., cognitive, affective, and collegial support); and (3) empowerment (i.e., interpersonal knowing, intrinsic learning, and differentiation of individual empowerment).

(1) The Process of Self-Study

Constancy and Continuity. Preservice teachers reported that they were willing to view themselves critically by thinking about their actions to improve their teaching and their pupils' learning. They noted how much more experience it takes to become a good, special, or expert teacher. The self study process required constant and continuous effort. It was new, difficult, and time-consuming as is noted in the following statements:

- In all of my years of schooling, I have never spent so much time and thought in completing assignments and reflecting on my outcomes, to analyze where I could improve.
- In my journals, I spent as much time thinking about my performance as I did actually writing my entries. It took some practice, but I began to see what you can discover about your own performance and ideas.
- Strange thing is, even though I was really prepared, the lessons were still not perfect. This

taught me that teaching is an ongoing process.

Goals were seen as forever changing and learning as a process without end. Constant reflection was viewed as essential. At the end of the first semester together, students had set new goals to continue learning and gaining experience and to put themselves in challenging situations to learn from them.

Mistakes as Feedback. Mistakes were sanctioned as a part of a continuous learning process, their own and that of their pupils'. Preservice teachers improved not only by seeing what to do, but what not to do. They understood that it was all right to feel scared, to take risks, and to know things were not exactly as they should be as evident in the following statements:

- Each classmate reminded me somehow that I was not alone. Everyone was in the process of learning how to become a teacher and everyone makes mistakes.
- One of the greatest strides I have made concerns reflection of my own performance and the environment around me. I have been very shaky in this area, and though I felt it was valuable, I never felt I was doing it correctly or finding its potential.
- I needed to give myself a chance to continue learning and remove some of the pressure I was placing on myself. As I did so, I continued progressing and I began to gain confidence in my abilities and my future. I became scared because I did not know if I was worthy of the elevated title teacher. I now realize that I am.

(2) Collaboration

Cognitive Support. Students worked together with peers, cooperating teachers, and professors discussing, experimenting, and reflecting in shared activities throughout the year. The misconceptions in students' thinking became more explicit and accessible to alteration. For example, students reported that the author's chair activity allowed them to listen to other people's ideas and straighten out their own. Sharing units with peers generated new ideas. Examples of statements are the following:

- I feel that I benefited and related to many of the stories within the class, and possibly someone may have benefited from my personal insight.
- Peer coaching brings in opinions and eyes from the outside and helps to see other ideas or options for conducting the lesson.
- Talking with others at the roundtable was helpful. I feel like I have uncovered a ton of information! I was given valuable input concerning how I should/could focus my paper.

Preservice teachers learned from both positive and negative field experiences:

- My cooperating teacher served as a constant sounding board and really helped us to develop our lessons more thoroughly and in the correct succession.
- By observing my practicum teacher, I have learned everything I will not do as a teacher. I simply do not like her controlling style. It was a daily occurrence that my partner and I would discuss the methods she used in the classroom and how we might have done things differently.

Affective Support. Students stressed the importance of peer feedback and the emotional value of peer support in planning their integrated units. They repeatedly discussed the support in affective terms such as:

- My peers gave me confidence, my professors gave me logistical guidance for the unit, and my cooperating teacher offered me materials and her own knowledge.
- To work with others and succeed is the best feeling in the world. I learned more than ever How much support is needed. My peers helped me every step of the way!
- The encouraging words, which I received from them, are always considered a comfort as well as an inspiration.
- The classmates in my education, class provided me with a sense of strength,

Collegial Support. There was support for getting through the tough times by problem-solving collaboratively, which may have contributed to building practicum school subcultures of struggle and survival. Students had to work very hard and they had to work together. They gathered often in campus eating lounges, becoming known to some as the education major clique. Students exclaimed:

- I believe your course was fair. It required a tremendous amount of work, and it seemed something was always due. It was encouraging that my struggle throughout the semester was not alone. It was shared with many of my peers.
- Throughout the semester, I gained a lot of helpful insights from my peers. I can't think of time where I felt as though I was on my own.
- There is no reason to fight help from others. It's O.K. to get help and resources. The teacher does not work alone.

Although peers were part of this process, students commented on an individual style that they came to know:

- My peers have provided me with excellent questions and comments. I have found insight through them, especially during my presentations and was not expecting to rely on my classmates for input. It has been a welcome source of knowledge and support.
- Through the constant support from my peers, I was able to see my own professional development.

(3) Empowerment

Interpersonal Knowing. Students' comments reveal a subtle sense of empowerment in finding one's role as teacher by reflecting upon and developing a personal philosophy of teaching over time. Note students' changed conceptualizations of teaching in the following comments:

- Slowly, I find myself growing as a teacher. Personally, viewing myself as a teacher is a frightening and realistic look at my maturation. This was the first semester that school has taken on a different aspect.
- There are a lot of things that I need to figure out for myself, beliefs and proper actions. I have learned that I had very naive ideas about teaching. I guess I never really gave it much thought but only assumed that one could just teach.

- I understand dilemmas and feel I am learning about myself as a teacher, and the kind of school model that I believe. It has shown me now I can find some of my own answers in whatever situation I am in.
- I have grown more professional by forming my own philosophy of teaching and emphasizing my beliefs through my practicum and assignments. Teaching now makes sense to me and all of my misconceptions from first semester fit together like pieces of a puzzle. I now feel that I have a direction, a philosophy, and a knowledge of teaching which did not exist previously.

Intrinsic Learning. Students felt empowered when they saw learning as its own reward. Making the grade and receiving the credit became secondary to making sure their pupils were learning as exemplified in the following comments:

- I began to develop a vested interest in perfecting my efforts through revision and reflection. I did not wish to merely complete an assignment that filled the requirements or that would get a high grade. I wanted to prepare the best unit I could.
- Good grades are great, but I want to apply all that I have learned so that I feel I am doing something important in the classroom. I may not be a certified teacher, getting paid, but I am a teacher. I evaluate myself more harshly because these kids need to learn from me.

Differentiation of Individual Empowerment. Students sought out and received varying degrees of support. There were situations and problems that differentiated and diminished students' sense of empowerment. One example was a personality clash between a practicum student whose cooperating teacher, a practicing Quaker, told her that she was "too cosmopolitan." Another problem was when a student, who struggled with classroom discipline, felt overshadowed by her practicum partner who had less difficulties in that area. Students internalized support in different ways. A student shared: "Although always listening and taking in the ideas and theories of both you [the professor] and my peers, I never really shared anything of personal reflection of myself to the class." There was also variability in students' developmental readiness towards professional growth. A student, unable to acknowledge the value of indirect support from her cooperating teacher, notes: "When I asked my cooperating teacher how I was doing she would only say, 'How do you think you're doing' and I wanted more."

Implications for Teacher Education

Teacher educators recognize that professional development is an ongoing and evolving process for all teachers, preservice and inservice. Fewer teacher educators, however, have acknowledged through experience that self-study is legitimate research towards that professional development, not only for school-based teachers, but also for themselves. I have come to believe that inducting preservice teachers to the self-study process, and practicing it myself, is my ethical responsibility to the teaching profession. It seems fair to suggest that teacher educators should begin to practice what they preach. We must begin to investigate the implications of our theories in our teaching. Nothing has been more powerful in convincing me of this than listening to my students' professional growth. I found that when preservice teachers experience socially constructive learning activities, it is likely to affect their perceptions of the importance of self

study, collegial activity, and teacher empowerment.

Within the Vygotskian framework, students used the mental tools of others in activities of socially shared cognition. I begin with their education-related biographies. I ask them to negotiate their understandings of teaching with their peers. The practicum field context enables them to try out and align their notions of teaching and course material in a situated context while reflecting on their actions. I observe students shaping an internal schemata for planning in classrooms while using the concepts and instructions of others as tools for structuring and controlling later independent behavior. Students formulate their own hypotheses and make decisions using theory and reflecting upon their practice with the support of others. Peers serve as cognitive and emotional anchors by offering encouragement and insights in dialogic settings. They build each other's confidence in the mutuality of learning about the difficult task of teaching. Motives move away from just making a course grade towards a professional responsibility of assuring their pupils are learning. Students appear to move into an inner world of finding out who they are as teachers, developing personal philosophies and styles of teaching which are continuously reshaped through their sanctioned mistakes.

My students discover in their brief self study with others that teaching is not a recipe trade. It is a laborious, time-consuming, and reflective process. Teaching and learning are more than technical and intellectual pursuits. I believe they are social, personal, and culturally transmitted. As one of my students concluded, "There is more to teaching than simply having children memorize the alphabet and then correcting papers. Teachers arc involved with personal and academic growth."I want to model the sociocultural aspect of teaching and learning for my students. It may be argued that the internship of preservice teachers is a more culturally-based process than we have previously understood. Teacher and peer formative assessments which occur during preservice teachers' practicum experiences may better contribute to an understanding of teaching than the traditional summative assessment conducted during the student teaching experience.

I have written about my self study to offer a representative anecdote of how self study can serve teacher educators and their students. Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective of learning has elucidated for me the importance of self study through a collaborative process in teacher preparation. I acknowledge that my present interpretations are subject to revision and further study. The thoughts I shared here are from my action research embedded in my theoretical understandings of Vygotsky's work. Others must find their own personal style and philosophy of teaching. I have lived Vygotskian conceptions through my doctoral program advisement and teaching experiences. Other teacher educators must find their own way through deep reflection, through their pedagogical experiences and research orientations, and by making choices committed in action. This writing is but a small marking on my road; a place where I stopped to think about where I was and which way I was going and if it was making any difference in my students' learning about teaching.

Note
1. I use the words self study as a component of reflection expressed within The Catholic University of America's reflective teacher education program where students [and I add faculty] are asked to critically examine their actions and the context of those actions for the purpose of a more consciously-driven mode of professional activity, as contrasted with action based on habit, tradition, or impulse (see Taylor & Valli, 1992).

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