



A collaborative retrospective analysis of becoming teacher educators

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Abstract

This self-study describes two junior teacher educators' retrospective analysis of stories they told themselves and others during the first years of their practice. Using the tools of narrative analysis and a Living Theory framework, we engaged in a re-analysis of our reflective journals and our students' anonymous feedback in order to interrogate our current concepts of self and practice in relationship to those we espoused as we entered the academy. Our re-analysis showed our early perceptions have shifted, informed by our growing understanding of our roles and contexts. Reconsidering early student feedback illuminated consistencies and contradictions between the stories we told ourselves and our students' perceptions. This study has significance for novice teacher educators and others who find themselves in new academic positions. Reanalysis and reflection of this nature can increase teacher educator efficacy. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of collaboration and the value of self-study as tools for the development of emerging teacher educator-researchers.

Keywords: Narrative Inquiry; Teacher Education; Student Voice; Collaboration

Background

We, Valerie and Laurie, met and became friends during our doctoral work at a large Western university in the USA. At that time, nearly 10 years ago, Valerie had been a junior high language arts teacher for 12 years and had recently transitioned to a position as an elementary school principal. Laurie had been teaching middle school language arts for nine years and had just begun teaching a course at the university for prospective teachers. In 2008, Valerie began her tenure track position at a small, private liberal arts institution in the Northeast. Her students are elementary education undergraduates who are predominately female, white, upper middle class, of traditional college age, and from the Northeast. In 2009, Laurie became an assistant professor at a moderately large state institution in the Southeast. She works with undergraduate and master's level middle level education students, the majority of whom are also female and white. While nearly 85% of Laurie's students come from within the state, there is a wider range of socioeconomic diversity and age, particularly among the graduate students.

As novice professors starting our respective university positions, we decided to systematically examine our initial experiences and reflections as we navigated our new professional identities. At the time, we committed to sharing with one another our experiences and reflections through online journaling and extensive student feedback/evaluation. Mutual trust enables us to be honest with one another about inconsistencies between our ideals and actions as educators and to challenge each other's experiences and 'stories' (Berry & Crowe, 2009; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, & Kennard, 1993; Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005; Taylor & Coia, 2009). We saw this relationship as an opportunity to research our shared commitment to improving our practice as teacher educators and to involve our students in that process (Walton, 2011). Students' voices, we believe, should be a key component to our analysis, and we endeavored to involve them in a "partnered practice" and as an integral part of our "feedback loop" (Berry & Crowe, 2009, p. 86; Samaras, 2011, p. 93). Three years later, we began the process of re-analyzing all the data from our novice years, investigating our lived experiences, shared reflections, and student feedback from our current perspective.

Two questions guide this inquiry:

- What were the stories we were telling ourselves initially and how do they compare to those we tell now?
- How did/do they compare to how our students have seen us?

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we unite the research traditions of self-study, narrative inquiry, and living-educational-theory. Self-study research emphasizes identifying, examining, and reframing teacher education practices in an effort to improve pedagogy (LaBoskey, 2004). Self-study is often conducted in collaboration; as teacher educators challenge their understandings about teaching and learning and develop identities as teacher educators, they do so with the help of trusted colleagues and friends (Schuck & Segal, 2002; Taylor & Coia, 2009). Williams, Ritter, and Bullock (2012) provide an overview of 60 self-study teacher education researchers who have

