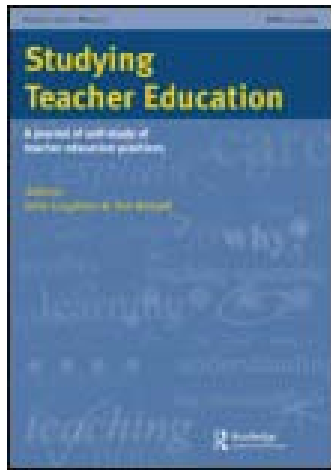


This article was downloaded by: [Appalachian State University]

On: 17 July 2012, At: 10:39

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Studying Teacher Education: A journal of self-study of teacher education practices

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cste20>

## Supporting One Another as Beginning Teacher Educators: Forging an online community of critical inquiry into practice

Laurie A. Ramirez <sup>a</sup>, Valerie A. Allison-Roan <sup>b</sup>, Sandra Peterson <sup>c</sup> & Susan E. Elliott-Johns <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Appalachian University, USA

<sup>b</sup> Susquehanna University, USA

<sup>c</sup> Dixie State College, USA

<sup>d</sup> Nipissing University, Canada

Version of record first published: 04 Jul 2012

**To cite this article:** Laurie A. Ramirez, Valerie A. Allison-Roan, Sandra Peterson & Susan E. Elliott-Johns (2012): Supporting One Another as Beginning Teacher Educators: Forging an online community of critical inquiry into practice, *Studying Teacher Education: A journal of self-study of teacher education practices*, 8:2, 109-126

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2012.692976>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings,

demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Supporting One Another as Beginning Teacher Educators: Forging an online community of critical inquiry into practice

Laurie A. Ramirez<sup>a\*</sup>, Valerie A. Allison-Roan<sup>b</sup>, Sandra Peterson<sup>c</sup> and Susan E. Elliott-Johns<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Appalachian University, USA*; <sup>b</sup>*Susquehanna University, USA*; <sup>c</sup>*Dixie State College, USA*; <sup>d</sup>*Nipissing University, Canada*

(Received 2 November 2011; final version received 2 March 2012)

Four novice teacher educators working at different universities in the USA and Canada used online journaling and dialoguing combined with feedback from their students to explore their practice and new roles as teacher educators in new contexts. Their priorities included modeling critical reflection and enacting democratic practices. They chronicle their struggles and successes over the course of an academic year. The authors' online community provided a viable and valued venue for self-study. Findings include insight into their taken-for-granted assumptions, how their instructional efforts were interpreted by others, and the impact that their collaborative efforts had on each researcher's professional development. The authors include implications for universities and colleges regarding the format and structure of mentoring of junior faculty.

**Keywords:** critical reflection; online collaboration; mentoring

When individual professors within an organization practice critical inquiry, they engage in a solitary process fraught with potential for inadvertent self-delusion and misunderstanding. For that reason, Valerie and Sandy, two novice assistant professors from colleges at separate ends of the USA, spent their first year journaling and giving feedback to one another, while also soliciting feedback from students as they attempted to create democratic classrooms. Both found additional, and occasionally painful, insight by opening their teaching practices to the scrutiny of others. In the second year of their practice, they invited two other relatively new professors, Laurie and Susan, into their self-study project, choosing teacher educators working in different universities in the USA and Canada. Their goal was to cultivate further inquiry with others who were like-minded in their commitment to critical dialog, transformational inquiry, and democratic classroom practices. They wanted their new colleagues to also be in the early stages of their careers as teacher educators because of the unique nature of the problems and issues experienced by novice professors. The initial collaboration between Sandy and Valerie grew out of a longstanding friendship. An invitation to Laurie, Valerie's classmate from graduate school, was extended when she accepted a tenure-track position. Susan was invited to

---

\*Corresponding author. Email: ramirezla@appstate.edu

participate after meeting Sandy and Valerie at the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting in San Diego in April 2009, where the three discussed their commonalities and self-study interests.

The decision to go beyond the walls of our organizations and transcend geographic boundaries in search of a support system was intended to overcome taken-for-granted beliefs and values in our individual institutions (Brookfield, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994), introducing new ways of thinking to help us recognize our own cognitive distortions and reinterpret our beliefs and practices. Many learning organizations intentionally and explicitly seek out feedback and change, and each of our universities does this in distinct ways, yet those efforts are somewhat bound by each organizational context. According to Katz and Kahn (1978), "the organizational context is by definition a set of restrictions for focusing attention upon content areas and for narrowing the cognitive style to certain types of procedures" (p. 277). While we did not realize so at the inception of our collegial community, our intent and efforts mirrored those of earlier pioneers in self-study (the Arizona Group, as discussed in Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Like the Arizona Group, we engaged in self-study to support each other in our socialization as junior university faculty members and in our development as teacher educators, two interconnected aspects of our work that are equally important and difficult (Hamilton & Guilfoyle, 1998). Contextual, institutional, and personal influences created a sense of disequilibrium and vulnerability, yet our common struggles were tempered by critical conversations and honest reflections (Guilfoyle, 1995; Pinnegar, 1995).

Our intent was to open our initial inquiry to others who might introduce new ways of thinking to help us as we helped them. We committed to regular online journaling and honest, thoughtful responses, collaborating as critical friends over the academic year. The following research questions framed our collaborative self-study:

- (1) What does it mean to have a community of practice without geographic boundaries?
- (2) How can we support one another and our shared quest to be models of democratic teaching and critically reflective practitioners for our students?
- (3) How are our individual efforts to be critically reflective practitioners, and to enact democratic principles in our teaching while in the midst of trying to navigate through new terrain as assistant professors, perceived and evaluated by our students?

### **Theoretical Framework**

We were guided by social constructivism and critical social theory literature. Social constructivists view knowledge as constructed through interactions with others. This construction takes place against a backdrop of context, including "historical and sociocultural dimensions" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Consequently, knowledge is neither static nor neutral. Rather, it continually evolves and reflects the ideologies of those who participate in its constructions.

This view of knowledge is taken up and furthered by critical social theorists. Critical social theory is concerned with uncovering the taken-for-granted or hegemonic practices and ways of thinking serving the dominant class in silencing and dehumanizing those identified as "other" (Blake & Masschelein, 2003; Brown, 2004). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) characterized critical social theory as optimistic regarding the potential of human beings to engage in ideological critiques resulting in "action to bring about a more just, free, and equitable society" (p. 347).

Educational theorists have argued that critical reflection is the hallmark of reflective practitioners and at the heart of effective educational practices (e.g. Larrivee, 2000; Walkington, Christensen, & Kock, 2001). Ideals of critical reflection and collaborative inquiry are foundational to this self-study. As Childs (2005) posited, “probably the single most important aspect of a self-study is its use of critical reflection” (p. 144). Critically reflective teachers strive to examine their own beliefs, assumptions, values, biases, and experiences. It must be acknowledged, however, that the influence of an educator’s social and institutional surroundings creates a solid context within which even the most honest reflections are often firmly rooted. For the four of us, our professional and academic pasts and recent journeys to new communities could not help but influence our efforts. We were not only attempting to be critically reflective of our fledgling practices but also doing so as newcomers in established contexts and communities. Valerie had accepted a position at a small, selective liberal arts institution while Sandy began at a small state college. Laurie and Susan were new faculty at larger state/province institutions offering a broader scope of undergraduate and graduate degrees. Complicating our efforts to examine our practices and to model principles of democratic classrooms were our (mis)understandings of our new contexts and cultures and our situated membership as newcomers.

The practice of critical reflection is central to this investigation and our ongoing professional development as teacher educators (Samaras, 2002). Because we have positioned our interpretation of what it means to be critically reflective among divergent meanings (Fisher, 2003; Gore, 1987; Loughran, 2002; Rodgers, 2002; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), it is worthwhile to outline how we operationalized the term. *Reflection* is conceptualized as the systematic, cognitive activity of reviewing one’s experiences for the purpose of gaining a clearer understanding of actions in context. We consider reflection to be *critical* when it is motivated by the desire to be more just, fair, and compassionate, not simply more effective and efficient (Brookfield, 1995). We conceptualize critical reflection as including the following components:

- *Open-mindedness*: Suspending judgment about experiences and actions. Being open to alternate ways of believing and acting. Considering the rationales undergirding what is held as natural and right (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1938; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).
- *Withitness*: Actively seeking knowledge and perspectives challenging one’s own (Fisher, 2003). Questioning incongruities between goals and outcomes that may be the result of misconceptions about learners and the learning community (Brookfield, 1995; Freire, 1998; Rodgers, 2002).
- *Consideration*: Considering the consequences of professional practice for individual learners’ self-concepts and intellectual developments (Zeichner & Liston, 1996), for the goals and values held for undergraduate teacher education, and for the potential influence on the social and political context (Brookfield, 1995).
- *Responsiveness*: Acting to disrupt the status quo and alter the conditions, actions, and mindsets that are obstacles to a learning environment that is simultaneously emancipating, just, fair and compassionate (Brookfield, 1995; Loughran, 2002; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Like critical reflection, the term *democratic principles* has been subject to divergent conceptualizations. Support for democratic education stems from classical democratic theory espoused by Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, James Mill, John Dewey and others (Rainer & Guyton, 1999). Many educators have made a connection between democratic theory and schooling. In the spirit of Dewey, Apple and Beane (1995) assert that:

“if people are to secure and maintain a democratic way of life, they must have opportunities to learn what that way of life means and how it might be led” (p. 7). Cunat (1996) offers the following perspective:

The overall purpose for democratic education is to engage individuals in a process that will help them develop the skills and attitudes necessary to become people who can and will contribute to the making of a vital, equitable, and humane society. (p. 130)

Roche (1996) identifies components of democracy, including genuine participation in decision making, and the broader issues of power and control that must be present in educational experiences if students are to be prepared to participate in a democratic society. This vision of democratic education is embodied by what Walton (2011) identifies as a *participative view of reality*, one in which life is inquiry, we are all teachers, we are all learners, and each contribution contains value and significance not bound by roles or positions mandated by the institution. Rolheiser and Glickman (1995) state that: “just as schools must be places where practicing teachers live the democratic process, teacher education programs also must be places where democracy is modeled and explored” (p. 205). Beyer (1996) describes this type of teacher education as: “creating educational practices aimed at social justice rather than stability, participation rather than silencing and exclusion, liberation rather than domination, equity rather than exploitation” (p. 10).

At the outset of our efforts, we made assumptions about what we meant when we discussed our ideal to enact democratic principles in our teaching practices. It was only after much time and correspondence that we came to appreciate the need to articulate and investigate how we each interpreted and used this term. Eventually, we coalesced around the definition offered by Brookfield (1995):

As critical educators such as Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) have pointed out, teaching democratically does not mean that we cease to speak authoritatively or that we pretend to be exactly the same as our students. Teaching democratically is not to be confused with creating a *laissez-faire* atmosphere of intellectual relativism, where anything goes. Neither does it mean an abdication of a teacher’s responsibility to judge the merits of what students do. What it does mean is that we make an effort to create conditions under which all voices can speak and be heard (including our own), and in which educational processes are seen to be open to genuine negotiation. (pp. 44–45)

### Methods and Data Sources

The systematic study of our teaching has been conceived as a form of educational research. In other words, the two activities of teaching and research were woven conceptually into a reflective and responsive practice to be regularly shared with each other and our students. Reflection and self-disclosure, and the aims and values implicit in them for improving practice, are a cornerstone of our work with students. We viewed students as partners in our research and realized that while we influenced their learning, they also influenced ours.

Reflective journals kept by the four researchers served as the backbone of our self-study. The content of our journals included our personal reflections, perceptions, impressions, thoughts and questions. Using Blackboard, an online conferencing tool, we shared our journals biweekly. We read and responded to one another, creating a four-way dialog about our experiences and reflections. Additionally, we each periodically shared with our students selections from our own journals. These selections served as springboards for discussion with students concerning their suggestions for the improvement of our practice and led to students’ reflections on their own teaching and learning. Making public and transparent the gaps between instructor goals and practices



allowed us to view our work as collaborative researchers lessening the evaluative role and helping students explore similar gaps in their own fledgling practices.

Our goal was to establish a mutually self-disclosing context with one another and our students, free to ask and answer questions, compare our own practice with others, and probe for deeper understanding of complex issues. Jourard (1968) noted that when we remain in authentic contact with a participant, “consistently in dialogue, [we] may actually lead him to the edge . . . clearing the way for the emergence of a new self” (p. 124). Journal keeping over time allowed us to look back at our own practices, the “self in action” (Elliott, 1989) over the course of the year, to monitor our professional and personal development. Placier, Pinnegar, Hamilton, and Guilfoyle (2005) advocate this type of open dialog, suggesting that it is not so much about the conversation itself but what our language ultimately reveals about our understanding and knowledge of teaching and learning. These types of dialog can support us, revitalize us, lead us to action, and help us reconceptualize our ideas into new ways of seeing the world and our work.

In addition to journaling and dialoguing with one another, we each solicited anonymous written feedback from students through periodic course feedback forms and through end-of-course evaluations (see Appendices 1 and 2). Instruments incorporated items adapted from feedback instruments developed by Brookfield (1995) and were used with permission. Prior to collecting student data, consent forms were collected and students were given the option of not participating. Results from feedback instruments were compiled by each of us and shared with one another and with our respective students. In many instances, the sharing of compiled feedback sparked additional dialog about our goals and our students’ perceptions of our efforts and their learning.

Progressing through the academic year, we engaged in a non-linear, iterative process of reading and re-reading our journals and feedback received from students. As we systematically engaged with our individual data-sets, we identified codes, emergent patterns, and questions for consideration that we then shared with the group. Collectively, we then immersed ourselves in the larger data-set and began to identify the broader patterns and divergent themes as they related to our guiding research questions (Samaras & Freese, 2006). While our institutions vary in geographic location, size, and student demographics, we found significant similarities in our experiences as new teacher educators. As we neared the end of the study, we each considered our valuing of the community we had created. How did we each appraise the experience and its influence on our aspirations to be critically reflective practitioners and enact democratic classroom practices? What impact did this collaborative community have on our socialization into the professorship and our development as teacher educators?

## Results

Prior to embarking into our professorships, our thinking had been grounded in our experiences as graduate students and a common conceptualization of what a professorship would entail. While we anticipated that the distinct contexts would have significant influence on our development as teacher educators, our collaborative study focused primarily on the commonalities that we experienced as novices in the academy.

Through journaling, dialoguing online, and soliciting feedback from students, we gained insight into our taken-for-granted assumptions, developed greater awareness of how our efforts were interpreted by others, and acquired understanding of how our thinking might be shaped by the characteristics of our contexts and relationships with others. Additionally, the community we developed with one another served to strengthen

our resolve to maintain our efforts to be critically reflective and to enact democratic principles. Finally, this online relationship provided an important arena for exploring our vulnerabilities in our fledgling professorships, thereby helping to alleviate some of the anxiety inherent in beginning new careers in new communities and forging new identities as teacher educators.

### *Democratic Classroom: Assumptions and issues*

We agreed that we were committed to democratic classroom practices: creating classroom communities in which students and professors communicate openly, respect one another, and engage jointly in critical inquiry intended to inform and transform practice. Discussions in this collaborative community often centered on challenges in conducting classrooms that are democratic. As we sought students' feedback, we noted some difficulty in having genuine, non-coercive dialog because of the inherent power differences between teacher and student. We identified differences between non-traditional (older) and traditional (younger) students. Non-traditional students were more willing to participate in these critical conversations, offering constructive feedback that was useful and could improve our courses. Younger students were more often less willing to offer substantive feedback and seemed to experience more discomfort in doing so. Some did not immediately see value in the process and wanted us, as the ones in charge, to give them explicit directives rather than work collaboratively on developing and improving the course.

Despite commitment to an engaged pedagogy and our intentions to include all students, we each had isolated but difficult encounters with students who ranged from unresponsive to hostile. Like first-time parents, we assumed our good intentions and caring attitudes would evoke positive attitudes and behaviors in our charges. We anticipated that students would be excited by the prospect of exploring educational issues, questioning, unearthing biases, bearing witness to gaps in traditional thinking, and creating new ways of thinking. Many were positive and supportive:

You really had me thinking on my drive home about spelling and the use of the games vs. worksheet and test. Oh wait, I mean reflecting <Grin> on the many things we do in education out of habit or false beliefs. Thanks, I like to challenge conventional thinking! (Valerie's student, Fall 2009)

It is refreshing to be treated as an equal, and I have to say in what you teach us and our assignments. There are professors here who still treat us like we are five and we can't change anything about it. They frustrate me because I feel like they treat us how we are being taught never to treat students. (Sandy's student, Fall 2009)

I appreciate that you are adapting to the students in the class. I can tell you are trying to read them/us and adapt your teaching style. (Susan's student, Fall 2009)

The assigned readings have presented situations and posed questions about things I could sense but not articulate. I found myself considering things about myself as a teacher about the experiences of my students as I had not before. (Laurie's student, Spring 2010)

However, some students were confused and frustrated by our failure to provide formulaic responses to their questions:

Explanations are O.K. but having concrete examples as to what to do in the classroom is more helpful. (Sandy's student, Fall 2009)

I thought it was going to be more content and less about how to plan for classroom instruction. (Susan's student, Fall 2009)



I don't understand how [our text] relates to literacy or how the book is going to help us be better teachers at all. (Valerie's student, Spring 2010)

We were responsible for our own learning... Some of my colleagues complained they weren't learning anything and I told them that was because they weren't working for it. (Laurie's student, Fall 2009)

Some students wanted clear, precise, and infallible answers to thorny issues. When none were forthcoming, or when questions were turned back to them for further examination and analysis, a few became hostile and frustrated. Guilfoyle's (1995) students reacted similarly as she tried to stretch them to think for themselves and accept responsibility for their own learning, forcing her to question her philosophy and practice. We collectively questioned our own theories and practices, recognizing that our novice status, combined with an expectation of expertise, contributed to feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt (Pinnegar, 1995). Our experiences mirrored Berry's (2007), who described the tension that teacher educators must navigate between positions of confidence and uncertainty:

I learnt that my understanding of confidence differs considerably from that of my students. To me confidence means being open to exploring new possibilities for one's teaching, willingness to listen to the ideas of others and preparedness to make changes to teaching in order to facilitate more meaningful learning... This notion of confidence carries a somewhat different meaning when considered from the perspective of a beginning teacher. Many see teaching as an uncomplicated act of telling students what to learn – a consequence of years of uncritical observation of their own teachers at work. (p. 64)

Our initial reactions to students' frustrations and uneasiness were sometimes defensive. Our first and easiest responses tended to blame students and/or their previous educational experiences. According to students, most of their learning experiences have been in behaviorist-oriented, traditional classrooms. Teachers dispensed wisdom and students received it. Characteristically, much of their college program also followed that format. According to Ritchie and Wilson (2000), "education programs... are dominated by an orientation that breaks learning into skills and then focuses on methods to teach mastery of those skills" (p. 36). What we hoped to enact in our practice was an alternative paradigm of teaching and learning, congruent with Walton (2011, p. 569): "Learning is not transmitted from teacher to student, but is something the students have to create for themselves."

While moving students out of their comfort zone might have accounted for some of their upset, we knew, and gradually confessed to one another, that we held some culpability. Our attempts at establishing an engaging pedagogy were less than perfect. We fell back on what we knew, what we had experienced as students, and what was more typical in our departments. We began to question ourselves, as Berry (2010) did, wondering if perhaps our teacher selves and instructional styles were more about who we are and what we are most comfortable with, rather than what our students need. Although we claimed a commitment to democratic practices, and although we had operationalized the definition and description of democratic classrooms, the actual enactment often fell short in our budding practices:

**Sandy:** I want each of my first class sessions to focus on the shared responsibilities of students and instructor in making the class meaningful... the notion of shared responsibility is really foreign to our college culture. (21 September 2009)

Implicit in this comment and in many of our conversations was the notion of culpability. Someone is to blame for students' lack of engagement and commitment in our classrooms. Sometimes we found ourselves lacking; many times we found fault with

students. Our conversations were replete with examples of our frustrations with ourselves and students:

**Sandy:** I'm trying to say the difficult things and push my students to new levels. If I am asking for and accepting their critiques, I want it to be a two-way street. Can't wait to see my end-of-semester evaluations. Well, maybe I can. (6 November 2009)

**Laurie:** I want to try to create that space and support them through a potentially difficult time in which they might resist the ideas and opinions foreign to them. I look forward to the challenge and, at the same time, worry about the fall out of continually pushing students to examine themselves when they are resistant or uncomfortable. (21 August 2009)

**Susan:** Group discussions and activities seem more successful and, for some, perhaps less "threatening" in terms of having to participate and talk? But I still need to keep working in this area to support/develop/involve all. Thinking of reframing discussions as "inquiry," e.g. "what do you want to know about?" For myself, I know I'm trying really hard to navigate clarity vs. misunderstandings; clearer answers to questions posed. (8 October 2009)

We were excited, yet apprehensive, about asking for written, anonymous feedback during the course and moved tentatively into exploring responses with one another and with our students:

**Laurie:** Honestly, I'm a little nervous about their responses, but I'm committed to the learning process here and will do as Valerie did and compile them into a document I share with my students and with all of you! Scary as that seems. (19 October 2009)

We struggled with how to use feedback so that students understood that we valued their voices and were willing to adapt to their needs. We struggled with balancing our roles as experts with our commitment to democratic processes in designing and implementing coursework. This learning to "see practice through others' eyes" (Loughran, 2002, p. 33) was difficult at times, prompting us to more consciously consider our institutions' expectations and our pre-planned agendas in order to incorporate student voices:

**Valerie:** Again, I'm faced with what to do with their feedback. I want to be responsive, but I'm not sure I can. They don't want lectures, but they want a little less group stuff. The large group discussions seem to leave a lot of folks out. I have a need to make sure they actually do the readings and have something to grade them on. A test would really feel out of place. (4 October 2009)

**Laurie:** My students overwhelmingly hated the text I chose . . . I think this effort to find a new text is a really good, if simple, example of how we are taking our students' comments, needs, perspectives, and wishes into consideration as we look to improve our courses. (9 April 2010)

**Sandy:** Last year I developed an exit survey for our graduating seniors . . . One of the major themes is the lack of relevance of so many assignments. That has made me look carefully at all of the assignments I'm requiring. Can the students see the relevance? IS there relevance? Are there other assignments they can suggest that might be more meaningful? (21 August 2009)

**Susan:** I'm finding I can increasingly use the feedback in order to better read misunderstandings/misperceptions that occur in class – in terms of what/how I think I'm presenting and the disconnect that sometimes occurs in students' experience. I've been re-visiting comments collected in the fall to reflect and assess, "O.K. Where are we now?" (15 February 2010)

Students sensed, and we acknowledged, the unequal power in the classroom. It would be difficult to deny that the professor is situated in a privileged position. We issue grades and recommendations for teaching positions. We hold a positional power that is obvious to our students. Within our online community, we acknowledged our instinct to revert to positional power when students criticized us or presented challenges to our authority:

**Laurie:** The lessons I have planned have not yet once gone as I planned them . . . I had to totally shut down [a] conversation and had to try to stop the train from completely derailling . . . Should I shut down these conversations that seem to me to be asides or irrelevant? Or should we, in our efforts at creating democratic classrooms, allow these conversations to occur? (26 May 2010)

**Sandy:** You always have the final say. I don't think my grade was fair. Others in the class agree with me, but we have no way to challenge grades. (Student evaluation, 10 May 2010)

In writing on critical pedagogy, Giroux (1983) suggests that experience must be situated within a theory of learning. Professors must respect the way students feel about their experiences and allow them to express those feelings in the classroom. Situating their experiences within a theory of learning is the next step, requiring time, patience, and finesse on the part of the instructor. It is tempting to abduct students' experiences and "tell" how they relate to learning theory. We struggled with the myth held by many prospective teachers, "that will be told how to teach . . . so that they, in turn, may teach their own students by 'telling' them" (Berry, 2007, pp. 45–46). Although this tension between telling and growth is ever present, our vision is that teacher education is a process best engaged in cooperatively, so that each student, along with the teacher, becomes a valued voice within the classroom's discourse. While we were unwilling to provide pat answers to their questions, we were eagerly interpreting their experiences rather than encouraging them to do that for themselves.

Recognitions of unequal power presented opportunities to question our idealistic notion of a democratic classroom in our reflections and conversations with one another – and with students. Dialog served as a foundation for self-critique and as a foundation for relationship building within our collaborative group and with students. Turning the lens directly upon ourselves as individuals, and collectively as colleagues, enabled us to grapple meaningfully with some of the tensions, anxieties, and vulnerabilities inherent in our roles as "new" teacher educators. Our examination of the tension between perceived and actual democratic classroom practices has continued.

### *Responding and Balancing Feedback*

At the heart of this collaboration was our genuine willingness to investigate our efforts to be critical reflective practitioners who endeavor to enact democratic principles in our classrooms. As new professors, the tenets of self-study pushed us to study our teaching as perceived and evaluated by our students – taking their feedback into account in efforts to continuously improve practice. We sought to gather feedback that delved more deeply into understanding students' perceptions of course content and our approaches to teaching than the usual end-of-course evaluations distributed for tenure and promotion purposes. The processes of actually collecting the data resulted in further questions, "soul-searching," subsequently resulting in supportive, thought-provoking responses from others in the group:

**Valerie:** I asked for feedback, they gave it to me, I shared it with them, and invited them to discuss it with me. Now what? As a critically reflective practitioner who claims to want to make her practice more transparent, what am I supposed to do next? (24 September 2009)

**Sandy:** I was impressed with feedback from your Literacy group . . . my impression was they feel actively engaged and they are learning a great deal. What more can you want? Why the mixed feelings . . . ? (24 September 2009)

**Laurie:** Talking with other new faculty here and the job candidate made me realize again how important this collaborative community has been for me in my first semester. You have all inspired me, motivated me, and taught me many lessons. (21 January 2010)

“Seeing ourselves through our students’ eyes” was another consistent thread through discussions related to feedback as well as more “informal” responses resulting from day-to-day interactions on campus and in classrooms:

**Susan:** I found myself wondering ... when (did) I “lecture” in class? ... fascinating how perceptions of what I think I’m doing, and how teaching behaviors are perceived (differently) by students... all the more reason for gathering valuable feedback of this nature.... (18 November 2009)

Patterns in the analysis of feedback collected for our own purposes gradually began to highlight students’ needs and helped us realize the issues they were questioning, thereby informing our practice and programs. As an example, Laurie talked about explaining the purposes of the study to a class group who then made it clear they were supportive of her efforts:

**Laurie:** They have very strong opinions but tend to be more productive and constructive, less critical and “rude” about their program ... they are eager to help the program improve and willing to share their experiences and frustrations.... (2 December 2009)

Along with our collaborative discussions, data from the questionnaires have been catalysts for self-questioning and reflections, further shaping and reshaping our teaching, interactions with students, and ongoing planning and presentation of responsive course content. Thus, teaching had become a catalyst for learning (Walton, 2011). While the bulk of our study and work has been in response to student questions and feedback intended for our improvement, positive and affirming comments from students also influenced our learning. When students’ feedback demonstrated their learning and transformation, it influenced our learning as well:

Something about the class that has surprised me the most is the fact that we have a lot of class discussions where two sides of a topic are presented and then the decision as to which is best is left up to us to decide. (Valerie’s student, Fall 2009)

I’ve learned the importance of honesty in my teaching from you. I think I’m going to be a far better teacher because I’m not afraid to say, “I don’t know.” Thanks for not knowing everything. (Sandy’s student, Fall 2011)

This has been, by far, the most powerful class I have had. It has given me a different lens to view the world from. Surprisingly, since I thought I was in a good place, but obviously I had a lot to learn. (Laurie’s student, Fall 2011)

These student responses allowed us to see student growth and learning and how connected they were to our own; in addition, this affirmed that our commitment to democratic principles, transparent practice, and critical reflection was influencing not only our practice but also our students’ practice.

### ***Community***

The experience of participating in a collaborative self-study resulted in a range of outcomes for each of us. The following statements are excerpts from our individual reflections near the end of the 2009–2010 academic year; these statements highlight the significance of a community of practice without geographic boundaries:

**Laurie:** Being part of this collaborative community provided me with a “safe space” in which I could question my teaching practices and the institutional practices in which I am now immersed. Often, my colleagues in this community provided the support and mentoring I was not afforded as the only new faculty member in a long established, nationally respected

program. . . . Simply knowing it is not “just me” affirmed my commitment and renewed my passion for teacher education.

**Sandy:** I have felt a certain sense of isolation in my fledgling professorship and a concern about rocking the boat in a well-established department. I am struggling with both improving my own practice and making a contribution to my department. With so little experience with other universities, I’m not sure how to gauge some taken-for-granted policies and practices and am hesitant to initiate controversial conversations with my college peers. The collaboration group provides a safe space to ponder and question and test ideas.

**Susan:** Re-visiting my own critical reflections, I recognize increased abilities to identify and unpack assumptions and efforts to better frame problems of practice as a teacher educator. The opportunity to have colleagues (albeit “virtual colleagues”) with whom to filter “problems of practice” encountered was a vital part of this experience for me – personally and professionally. While it seems ironic that such a rewarding collaboration, for me, was forged with colleagues far from my university campus, similar opportunities were just not a part of my early experiences as a teacher educator and member of faculty.

**Valerie:** Our community provided me with a space in which I could think “aloud” about my practice. Not always for the purpose of soliciting input; sometimes, simply to organize and analyze my own thoughts. Others’ responses to my musings provided opportunities to see my practice through different lenses and prompted me to consider further my taken-for-granted assumptions.

Our community was a safe space in which we could question, examine, enhance, and develop our practices as teacher educators, providing support and critical friendship. The potential for feeling isolated and under pressure as new professors has been reduced by the opportunity for self-study and collaboration with others facing similar dilemmas in other locations.

### Significance

The significance of this study is threefold. First, there was substantive benefit for us as novice assistant professors working together to better understand the challenges we face and questioning our practice, so that we ultimately improve and better meet the needs of our students and our communities. Second, we believe that there was significant value in the modeling we were providing for our students, both in collaboration across contexts and in critical reflection. Research overwhelmingly suggests that critical reflection does not typically occur without sustained support and modeling from mentors and/or teachers (Bullough, Young, Hall, Draper, & Smith, 2008; Garmon, 2004; Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, & Flowers, 2003). By involving students and making our goals and struggles transparent, we demonstrated a different teaching approach, thereby dispelling the notion of teachers as all-knowing and above question. Third, this research and our collaboration around an emerging scholarship perspective offer an opportunity to initiate a shared discourse with the potential to further understanding in the broader self-study community. Sharing our results of utilizing critical reflection and innovative research methods may encourage and support others in examining their practices.

Ultimately, we believe that our initiation of transparent practice, ongoing questioning, and reciprocal and dynamic reflection with one another and our students has helped us evolve as teachers. Additionally, we have demonstrated that *teaching as research* can be conducted by novice professors alongside preservice teachers with the goal of modeling and inspiring collaborative relationships and reflective practice.



Sergiovanni (1994) contended that an expansive collegial learning community requires a new kind of relationship between and among community members, transcending the physical proximity that tends to contain thinking within the confines of shared institutional and local norms. Sharing and support of teacher researchers living and working across the continent produced for us effective professional collaboration beyond our own institutional boundaries. Aristotle spoke of a *polis*, a bond of friendship embodying a shared recognition and pursuit of a good. We believe this sharing and equality among four novice assistant professors working and learning alongside novice teachers, all of whom are embarking on new careers, is foundational to the formation of a more open and reflective teaching-researching community of learners.

### Conclusion

As we have now progressed beyond our first years and have more firmly established ourselves in our institutions, roles, and communities, we continue our work as researcher-practitioners who are committed to democratic classrooms in which students' voices and feedback inform and improve our educational practices. Moving forward, we see how dialog and collaborative reflection have transformed our practice in important and distinctive ways and changed the way we approach our work and how we interact with students:

**Laurie:** As I look back at the collaborative journal entries, it is interesting to see my own growth as a teacher educator and a researcher. On May 26, 2010, I wrote, "It was difficult at first, as a new faculty member, to 'put myself out there' and ask for help, advice, feedback, and discuss successes and challenges. I am coming to realize the group I work with is not only talking the talk of professional learning communities . . . , they are actually walking it as well." This is ever more apparent as we grow into our individual positions and begin to forge our own research paths. We have empowered each other and are growing into reflective practitioners whose collective voice has potential for positive change within ourselves, with our students, and in our respective institutions.

My growth as an educator and as a researcher aside, the collaborative group has been an immensely positive personal support. Knowing they were there to support me and offer advice, condolences, or a listening ear in times of personal difficulty was a gift I did not expect. The community has been essential and I know they will continue to be colleagues and friends for years to come. (July 2011)

**Valerie:** The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues I trust at other institutions has been invaluable as I have learned about my new context and my role as a teacher educator. I have known I have an avenue for asking questions and exploring shortcomings in myself and my new community. Sometimes it was simply about having a safe place to "vent." At others, our virtual community encouraged me to pause and reframe my thinking. Without Sandy, Laurie, and Susan, I would have felt intensely isolated and likely would not have persisted in my efforts to model reflection for my students and enact democratic principles in my teaching.

Finally, my virtual friends have supported me not only in my emergence as a teacher educator; they have provided a lifeline that buoyed me as I faced challenges associated with making a new life for myself in a community and culture that at times felt foreign and unwelcoming. Their cheerful emails and online posts have lifted my spirits when I felt overwhelmed personally and professionally. (July 2011)

**Sandy:** Collaboration has become more of a mindset and a habit for me. Our on-line reflections provide a safe space for questioning my practice but, as a result of our work together, I have also tried to become more collaborative with colleagues in my department. I want to be open to criticism from students and from peers, to be less defensive, to invite colleagues into my classroom, and to value the feedback of students. I share the results of my evaluations with students now and ask them for alternatives to practices they feel are not helpful. I find my students have insights that help me to see my "blindspots." Students are far



more receptive to criticism from me as well because they see critical reflection modeled and instructor practice changed as a result of honest and thoughtful critique and reflection. (July 2011)

**Susan:** Notes and reflections from my journal present insights into the transformation of my own global practice as a teacher educator and researcher (Elliott-Johns, 2011). In my own experience as a new member of faculty, opportunities to work with others and to collaborate on research and writing were not easily found. I was somewhat envious of colleagues in other locations who would talk about how they had “lucked in” to like-minded colleagues and/or mentors (and appeared, to me, to be writing up a storm as a result). I am encouraged as I do see some long held and often less than positive attitudes towards “collaboration” gradually changing. This, for me, is a very welcome direction in which to move and I am now involved in two collaborative research projects at my university . . . so perhaps it also just takes time?

Threads of critical reflection and democratic principles continue to weave throughout our individual and collective research and teaching. Relationships, both personal and professional, forged through this collaborative effort have been significant and will probably endure for many years to come as we continue our respective professional paths. Throughout our collaborative research efforts, we have seen many commonalities and have gained strength and wisdom from our commitment to one another and this project. We have also begun to see how our roles differ, based on the uniqueness of our respective institutions. Thus our research is beginning to diverge into areas where we see individual import, yet we are each anchored and revitalized by our shared experiences as a community of learners.

### **Significance for the Broader Self-Study Community**

Individually and collectively, engagement in this research has had great personal significance, as the preceding section demonstrates. We also believe that our work carries significance beyond our small collaborative community. Almost inadvertently, the study carries implications for how we mentor, or fail to mentor, junior faculty.

Mentoring in higher education does exist, but “not in high numbers, despite a pressing need” (Miller & Thurston, 2009, p. 35). Mentoring has traditionally been defined as “a relationship between two people who differ in age, experience, and status” (McGuire & Reger, 2003, p. 56). It is typically structured as an apprenticeship or transmission model, in which the older, wiser mentor passes on his or her knowledge, in a one-way direction, to the protégé. Ambrosino (2009) likened this relationship to a journey in which the senior faculty member is a traveler who “has gone farther up the road already and come back to share valuable experience,” while the junior faculty member is a traveler “at the edge of a long, unknown road” who does not know what “obstacles or vistas may appear on the road, and wants to avoid potholes” (p. 31). This analogy positions the junior faculty member as lost, unknowing, and a non-contributing partner in the relationship. This type of one-way mentoring, while better than nothing, is not always effective. It too often becomes what Collins, Slough, and Waxman (2009) call “pseudo mentoring” in which the senior faculty mentor pokes into the mentee’s office occasionally to ask how things are going, while rushing off to a meeting, class, or elsewhere, leaving the mentee to journey onward without the promised guidance. In their experience, they note that senior faculty do not share the same lived experience as junior faculty, as times and traditions in academia have changed over the years. Thus these types of mentoring seem to be “relics of an earlier era” and individuals and institutions might benefit from seeking new ways to mentor and be mentored (Maher, Lindsay, Peel, & Twomey, 2006, p. 26).

As we began our journeys into the uncharted territory of the teacher education professorship, we sought out each other as mentors to fill gaps at our respective institutions. Miller and Thurston (2009) found that voluntary and informal mentoring was more valued by junior faculty than mandated, formal mentoring programs. Mentoring relationships, according to their findings, must include four important factors: friendship (emotional support, advice, and so on), collaboration in research and career development, information about policies (e.g. tenure and promotion), and intellectual guidance. Our collaborative community fulfilled these four factors when our institutions did not. Miller and Thurston's study also found that voluntary, informal mentoring was more highly valued than formal, involuntary mentoring. Maher et al. (2006) studied mentoring of female junior faculty in particular. They found that peer mentoring with fellow junior faculty (as opposed to hierarchical mentoring with older, more established faculty) had greater benefits for females in academe, including shaping their research agendas, career development and advancement, and information sharing about the norms of the institution. Like our collaborative community, the women in their study formed a group through pre-existing professional and social networks. Like them, our collaboration, mainly intended for research, had unintended and beneficial outcomes far beyond initial expectations.

During the progression of this study, we began hearing our work compared to a group that had formed a similar collaborative community nearly 20 years before. The Arizona Group consisted of four junior faculty members who had met during their doctoral work at the University of Arizona. They too encountered a transmission model in teacher education, one that carried over into mentoring. They sought out collaboration with like-minded others in the same stage of their careers, individuals with whom they had a connection, a sense of trust, and a safe space for open dialog. Like our experience, their collaboration enabled them to, "see that issues in our individual community were not idiosyncratic . . . In dialogue we began to understand the larger cultural themes being played in our individual contexts" (Placier, Pinnegar, Hamilton, & Guilfoyle, 2005, p. 62). Delving into the work of the Arizona Group, we noted parallels between our collaboration and theirs. Their work began to give new meaning to ours, offering us perspectives on our experiences that we had not previously considered. For example, their use of Polkinghorne's (1988) levels of narrative (living, telling, and interpreting experience) is reflected in our work, both in our professional development and research as well as in our personal growth and collective learning.

Having trusted others with whom to tell experiences and to collaboratively interpret those individual and shared experiences is a valuable way to approach mentoring. As Hamilton and Pinnegar (2006, p. 118) aptly state, "in the torrent of academia, we provide shelter when needed or a good push if appropriate." This give and take in our collaborative efforts is what has made our co-mentoring experience so powerful. Each of us shared responsibility for our collective learning and professional growth, navigating the new terrain of the professorship, and maintaining a balanced personal life. As we have mentored each other through our difficult first years as teacher educators, we have seen many benefits and we encourage other individuals and institutions to consider using co-mentoring among junior faculty. The Arizona Group attested, upon looking back, that they "had to learn how to survive in order to transform" (Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, & Placier, 1996, p. 99). As we look back, we see ourselves transformed into stronger teachers, researchers, and individuals as a result of this collective self-study of our practices as new teacher educators.

## References

- Ambrosino, R. (2009). Mentors as fellow travelers. *Adult Learning*, 20(1/2), 31–34.
- Apple, M.W., & Beane, J.A. (1995). *Democratic schools: Lessons in powerful education*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Berry, A. (2007). *Tensions in teaching about teaching: Understanding practice as a teacher educator*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Berry, A. (2010). Navigating the public and the private within myself: Experiencing a “disorienting dilemma” as an opportunity for professional growth. In L.B. Erickson, J.R. Young, & S. Pinnegar (Eds.), *Navigating the public and private: Negotiating the diverse landscape of teacher education*, Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (pp. 29–32). Provo, UT: Brigham Young University.
- Beyer, L.E. (1996). Introduction: The meanings of critical teacher preparation. In L.E. Beyer (Ed.), *Creating democratic classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice* (pp. 1–26). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Blake, N., & Masschelein, J. (2003). Critical theory and critical pedagogy. In N. Blake, P. Smeyers, R. Smith, & P. Standish (Eds.), *The Blackwell guide to the philosophy of education* (pp. 38–56). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Brookfield, S.D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brown, K.M. (2004). Leadership for social justice and equity: Weaving a transformative framework and pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), 79–110.
- Bullough, R.V. Jr, Young, J.R., Hall, K.M., Draper, R.J., & Smith, L.K. (2008). Cognitive complexity, the first year of teaching, and mentoring. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(7), 1846–1858.
- Childs, K. (2005). Just where do I think I’m going?: Working with marginalized and disaffected youth and their self-study. In C. Mitchell, S. Weber, & K. O’Reilly-Scanlon (Eds.), *Just who do we think we are? Methodologies for autobiography and self-study in teaching* (pp. 142–153). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Collins, T., Slough, S., & Waxman, H. (2009). Lessons learned about mentoring junior faculty in higher education. *Academic Leadership*, 7(2). Retrieved from <http://www.academicleadership.org/316/lessons-learned-about-mentoring-junior-faculty-in-higher-education/>
- Cunat, M. (1996). Vision, vitality, and values: Advocating the democratic classroom. In L.E. Beyer (Ed.), *Creating democratic classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice* (pp. 127–149). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Elliott, J. (1989). Educational theory and the professional learning of teachers. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 19(1), 81–100.
- Elliott-Johns, S.E. (2011). Reclaiming a writing voice as a new teacher educator: SoTL as portal. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 5(2). Retrieved from [http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstotl/v5n2/essays\\_about\\_sotl/Elliott-Johns/index.html](http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstotl/v5n2/essays_about_sotl/Elliott-Johns/index.html)
- Fisher, K. (2003). Demystifying critical reflection: Defining criteria for assessment. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 22(3), 313–325.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach* (D. Macedo, D. Koike, & A. Oliveira, Trans.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Garmon, M.A. (2004). Changing preservice teachers’ attitudes/beliefs about diversity: What are the critical factors? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(3), 201–213.
- Giroux, H.A. (1983). *Theory and resistance: A pedagogy for the opposition*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Gore, J.M. (1987). Reflecting on reflective teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(2), 33–39.
- Guilfoyle, K. (1995). Constructing the meaning of teacher educator: The struggle to learn the roles. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 22(3), 11–27.
- Guilfoyle, K., Hamilton, M.L., Pinnegar, S., & Placier, P. (1996). Navigating through a maze of contradictions: A conversation on self-study and teacher education reform. In J. Richards & T. Russell (Eds.), *Empowering our future in teacher education*, Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England (pp. 96–101). Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University.
- Hamilton, M.L., & Guilfoyle, K. (1998). The tyrannies of tenure: A longitudinal self-study of two women at a border crossing. In A.L. Cole & S. Finley (Eds.), *Conversations in community*,

- Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (pp. 17–20). Toronto, ON: OISE/University of Toronto.
- Hamilton, M.L., & Pinnegar, S. (2006). Creating representations: Using collage in self-study. In D.L. Tidwell, M.L. Heston, & L.M. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Research methods for the self-study of practice* (pp. 155–170). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters (Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Jourard, S.M. (1968). *Disclosing man to himself*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R.L. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Larrivee, B. (2000). Transforming teaching practice: Becoming a critically reflective teacher. *Reflective Practice*, 1(3), 293–307.
- Loughran, J.J. (2002). Effective reflective practice: In search of meaning in learning about teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 33–43.
- Maher, J., Lindsay, J., Peel, V., & Twomey, C. (2006). Peer mentoring as an academic resource. *Australian Universities Review*, 48(2), 26–29.
- McGuire, G.M., & Reger, J. (2003). Feminist co-mentoring: A model for academic professional development. *NWSA Journal*, 15(1), 54–63.
- Merriam, S.B., & Caffarella, R.S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, T.N., & Thurston, L.P. (2009). Mentoring junior professors: History and evaluation of a nine-year model. *Journal of Faculty Development*, 23(2), 35–40.
- Milner, H.R., Flowers, L.A., Moore, E. Jr, Moore, J.L. III, & Flowers, T.A. (2003). Preservice teachers' awareness of multiculturalism and diversity. *The High School Journal*, 87(1), 63–70.
- Pinnegar, S. (1995). (Re-)experiencing beginning. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 22(3), 65–83.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M.L. (2009). *Self-study of practice as a genre of qualitative research: Theory, methodology and practice*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Placier, P., Pinnegar, S., Hamilton, M., & Guilfoyle, K. (2005). Exploring the concept of dialogue in the self-study of teaching practices. In C. Kosnik, C. Beck, A.R. Freese, & A.P. Samaras (Eds.), *Making a difference in teacher education through self-study* (pp. 51–64). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing in the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Rainer, J., & Guyton, E. (1999). Democratic practices in teacher education and the elementary classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(1), 121–132.
- Ritchie, J.S., & Wilson, D.E. (2000). *Teacher narrative as critical inquiry*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Roche, E. (1996). The bumpy bus ride to the democratic classroom. In L.E. Beyer (Ed.), *Creating democratic classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice* (pp. 27–40). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Rodgers, C. (2002). Defining reflection: Another look at John Dewey and reflective thinking. *Teachers College Record*, 104(4), 842–866.
- Rolheiser, C., & Glickman, C.D. (1995). Teaching for democratic life. *Educational Forum*, 59(2), 196–206.
- Samaras, A.P. (2002). *Self-study for teacher educators: Crafting a pedagogy for educational change*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Samaras, A.P., & Freese, A.R. (2006). *Self-study of teaching practices primer*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Schwandt, T.A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 189–214). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sergiovanni, T.J. (1994). *Building community in schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Walkington, J., Christensen, H.P., & Kock, H. (2001). Developing critical reflection as a part of teaching training and teaching practice. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 26(4), 343–350.
- Walton, J. (2011). A living theory approach to higher education. *Educational Action Research*, 19(4), 567–578.
- Zeichner, K.M., & Liston, D.P. (1996). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.



### Appendix 1. Course Feedback Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to respond to the questions below. They have been adapted from Brookfield's (1995, p. 115) text, *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*, and are designed to help me understand your perceptions of the course to this point in the semester in an effort to refine my practice. This activity is strictly voluntary and anonymous. Please *do not* put your names on your papers.

1. At what moment in the class meetings to this point in the semester have you felt most engaged with what was happening?
2. At what moment in the class meetings to this point in the semester have you felt most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class have you found most affirming and helpful?
4. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class have you found most puzzling or confusing?
5. What about the class has surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reactions to an experience in the class, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you.)

### Appendix 2. Course Evaluation Form

This evaluation form is intended to help the instructor gain a clearer understanding of how to assist future students' learning and how her actions as a teacher have been perceived by students this semester. Please answer the items candidly. The evaluation is anonymous and your participation is voluntary. [Items 1–4 and 6–9 are taken directly from an evaluation form created by Brookfield (1995, pp. 268–269). The form and purpose of the instrument are modeled largely on Brookfield's.]

Please complete the following statements:

1. What most helped my learning in this class was:
2. What most hindered my learning in this class was:
3. What most helped me take responsibility for my own learning in this class was:
4. What most prevented me from taking responsibility for my own learning in this class was:
5. I believe the instructor's goals or objectives for this course were:

Please respond to the following statements by checking one of the boxes and answering the question that follows:

6. In this course, I found that:
  - many different teaching approaches were used.
  - some different teaching approaches were used.
  - very few teaching approaches were used.
 What are your feelings about the teaching approaches used?

7. In this course, I found the instructor to be:
  - always responsive to students' concerns.
  - sometimes responsive to students' concerns.
  - rarely responsive to students' concerns.
 What are your feelings about this level of responsiveness?

8. In this course, I found the instructor:
  - consistently tried to get students to participate.
  - sometimes tried to get students to participate.
  - rarely tried to get students to participate.
 What are your feelings about the amount of participation by students in this course?

9. In this course, I found that:
  - I regularly received information about my learning.

- I occasionally received information about my learning.
- I rarely received information about my learning.

What are your feelings about the frequency with which you received information about your learning and the quality of that information?

10. In this course, I found that the instructor enacted democratic principles in her teaching and work with students, modeled being a reflective practitioner, and strove to make her practice transparent:

- regularly.
- occasionally.
- infrequently.

What do you believe to be indicators/markers of educational practices that are built on democratic principles?

What does it mean to you to be a reflective practitioner as an educator?

What should an instructor do to make his/her practice transparent to students?