

RUNNING HEAD: CHANGING CONCEPTIONS

## **Changing Conceptions of Effective Teacher Education**

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## Abstract

In this paper, my personal professional “story” as a novice pre-service instructor is shared and examined (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As an autobiographical form of self-study research in teacher education, “nodal moments” are revealed that raise and reflect the tensions I experienced and the challenges I encountered in becoming a teacher educator (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). I suggest that teacher educators in general and part-time instructors in particular, be supported in examining how to facilitate candidates’ “uncoverage” and potential restructuring of their teaching beliefs, with self-study research groups recommended as vehicles for this support (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Loughran, 2007; Zeichner, 2005). Additionally, the importance of field placement experiences where teacher candidates are encouraged to implement practices advocated during methods courses is highlighted.

## **Changing Conceptions of Effective Teacher Education**

“Why do so many beginning teachers know so little about language arts instruction? What do they teach in pre-service language arts courses?” These questions are ones that I now admit sheepishly to having posed to my colleagues while working in a school board curriculum department, prior to entering a PhD program as a “seasoned” teacher with over twenty years of experience. Having provided system-level professional development on a full-time basis for four years, I accepted with confidence the offer to teach two sections of a pre-service language arts course. In fact, I welcomed the opportunity, believing that I possessed the knowledge and skills that would enhance pre-service candidates’ abilities to enter the teaching profession with a solid understanding of how to provide effective language arts instruction. My self-confidence diminished when as part of my doctoral studies, I discovered how little I knew about the conceptual change process, and its importance with respect to teacher education. While I once questioned beginning teachers’ knowledge, I now recognize that I was unaware of important insights they may have held.

In this paper, my personal professional “story” as a novice pre-service instructor is shared and examined (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As an autobiographical form of self-study research in teacher education, “nodal moments” are revealed that raise and reflect the tensions I experienced and the challenges I encountered in becoming a teacher educator (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). I suggest that teacher educators in general and part-time instructors in particular, be supported in examining how to facilitate candidates’ “uncoverage” and potential restructuring of their teaching beliefs, with self-study research groups recommended as vehicles for this support (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Loughran, 2007; Zeichner, 2005).

### ***Self-Study Methodology***

Researching one’s teacher education practices provides opportunities to uncover

understandings about the complex relations between learning about teaching and putting this knowledge into the practice of teaching teachers (Loughran, 2007). However, in order to enhance understandings, self-study research must move beyond the self, illustrating how and why personal conceptions have been challenged or altered and extending these insights to the broader community of teacher educators (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Loughran, 2007). Kamler (2001) emphasized that writing about oneself provides opportunities to analyze and critique experiences, which enables one to construct understandings that enhance the possibility for relocation through personal and social change. Autobiographical self-study is a vehicle through which to examine one's storied experience and relocation as a teacher educator, with an eye towards reflecting educational issues in attempts to improve teaching and learning (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Through narrative inquiry, I have explored understandings acquired over a three-year period during which I was concurrently a doctoral student in the cognition and learning field of study, and a novice pre-service instructor, at the same Ontario university. I have told, retold, examined and reexamined my story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2002). Data sources consisted of many forms of correspondence written during this period. These included personal journal entries written once or more each month during this three-year period, course manuscripts, pre-service course syllabi, email correspondence, as well as, artifacts collected from pre-service candidates.

These artifacts included the generic Faculty of Education course evaluation forms for the first two of these three years, on which candidates rated 26 items on a seven-point ordinal scale and provided general anecdotal comments. The ordinal items elicited candidates' perceptions of the course workload, organization, evaluation, and content, as well as, their perceptions of their own engagement (e.g., motivation, involvement) and their instructor's abilities and rapport (e.g., facilitation skills, responsiveness). Additionally, anecdotal "course planning feedback sheets"

completed anonymously by candidates at the end of each of these three years have been reviewed. These “feedback sheets” asked candidates to suggest modifications they believed would enhance the course in subsequent years. Question prompts were provided in each section of this two-page form that solicited candidates’ perceptions of the instructional value of the course readings, topics covered during sessions, instructional activities, assignments, and overall course delivery.

These data were analyzed through coding and categorizing as described by Creswell (2002). The resultant common units of meaning (i.e., themes) are presented in an autobiographical narrative that chronicles the challenges I encountered and the tensions I experienced in my journey to become a teacher educator. Four broad themes emerged. They included my awareness of my incomplete understandings of the knowledge teacher candidates required (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey, 2002; Woolfolk Hoy & Murphy, 2001), which was followed by my acknowledgement of the complexities of first facilitating, and later assessing, candidates’ reflective practice (Asselin, 2000; Pajares, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Murphy, 2001). The final theme was my appreciation of the support required for teacher educators to in turn, be able to facilitate teacher candidates’ reflective practice (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Zeichner, 2005).

### ***My Journey to Become a Teacher Educator***

I accepted a position as a part-time language arts instructor in a one-year Bachelor of Education program, aware of the importance of this role, excited about the challenges of providing pre-service education, and believing that I had the knowledge, skills and passion for teaching required to provide candidates with a solid understanding of how to provide effective language arts instruction. I was joining a team comprised of four part-time instructors and one full-time faculty member, who was the course coordinator. The faculty member suggested that I begin by familiarizing myself with the course text, as well as the syllabus the team had already developed for

the forthcoming academic year. Additionally, she provided an overview of the course rationale and the established assessment and evaluation tasks that included a knowledge-based quiz, a collaborative small-group unit plan and a small-group synthesis task. The coordinator expressed confidence in my instructional abilities, while at the same time encouraging me to contact her if I had any questions or needed any assistance. I recall feeling energized and excited as I left her office to begin perusing the course material. While I appreciated the support offered, I was at that time confident that I would be able to prepare independently to deliver the course as outlined.

The syllabus included the guiding questions to be explored during each of the twenty course sessions, together with the required readings to be completed prior to each session. Throughout the summer, when planning for the course I drew heavily on my prior experiences providing staff development sessions. I prepared materials that would enable me to provide teacher candidates with many of the “hands-on” learning experiences that I had used successfully during inservice sessions, as I believed these activities would enable me to model currently advocated instructional practices. Realizing that candidates would enter this program with varied educational and experiential backgrounds, I prepared a two-page information sheet that would enable me to learn more about their prior literacy related coursework and teaching or volunteer experiences. In retrospect, I had boundless enthusiasm, confidence, and subject-specific knowledge, while at the same time unbeknownst voids in my understandings of the key components of effective teacher education.

### ***Incomplete Understandings of the Knowledge Teacher Candidates Required***

During the first months of the pre-service year, my self-confidence ensued and I was energized by teacher candidates’ engagement during course sessions. While the fulfillment I derived from this role and my commitment to providing the most enabling instruction I can has persisted, my confidence in my instructional abilities diminished near the end of my first term as an instructor

when I discovered during a doctoral course that I held incomplete understandings of the knowledge candidates required. Specifically, I was unaware of the origins and impact of teachers' beliefs.

During the doctoral course, I acquired understandings that had eluded me throughout my teaching career. I was surprised that pre-service candidates enter teacher education programs with strong beliefs or preconceptions about teaching derived from biographical educational experiences as students and/or as parents (Asselin, 2000; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Murphy, 2001). Collectively, these preconceptions form "folk theories" that reinforce "status quo" rather than "state of the art" practices, and influence negatively teachers' instructional decisions and willingness to implement new practices throughout their careers (Asselin, 2000; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Pajares, 1992). Moreover, these understandings become increasingly robust over time, with long-held beliefs those most resistant to change (Gregoire, 2003; Pajares, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Murphy, 2001). Nonetheless, it was heartening to learn that although time consuming, teacher educators can facilitate conceptual change by supporting teacher candidates' abilities to become reflective when presented with information refuting their existing beliefs (Nierstheimer, Hopkins, Dillon, & Schmitt, 2000; Olson & Singer, 1994; Pajares, 1992; Vosniadou, 2003). However, educational researchers have cautioned that such challenges and reflection might be insufficient to alter teachers' beliefs (Clark & Hollingsworth, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Pajares, 1992; Patrick & Pintrich, 2001). Rather, changes in teachers' beliefs have been shown to be more likely to occur when teachers modify their instructional practices and attribute students' subsequent learning gains directly to these modifications (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey, 1986, 2002). Collectively, these insights provoked me to acknowledge the inaccuracies of my conceptions of the knowledge pre-service candidates required, as well as, the limitations of the instruction I was providing.

*... I had little understanding of the complex multi-dimensional construct of teachers' beliefs and/or conceptual change theory and their importance in teacher education. Through the*

*preparation of this paper I have learned that pre-service is the optimum time to focus on teachers' beliefs about reading instruction. Regrettably, I have devoted little, if any, teaching time to doing so this year (Journal, December 2004).*

Perhaps more personally concerning was my awareness that this knowledge alone was insufficient.

In order to enhance the potential for teacher candidates to examine and where necessary work towards changing their beliefs, I needed to alter my own instructional practices.

*While I have learned an enormous amount throughout this course, if I am not able to apply the knowledge creatively and wisely to effect change, will I really have accomplished anything of value. As Sternberg (2003) states, "the future of the world perhaps hinges on having experts who are wise as well as intelligent and knowledgeable" (p.8). Although I have acquired a great deal of knowledge in this course, do I have the wisdom required to turn knowledge into action? (Journal, December 2004)*

### ***Acknowledgement of the Complexities of Facilitating Candidates' Reflective Practice***

This pivotal revelation led me to conclude that although the language arts course syllabus was overflowing with content, it was necessary to devote course time to exploring teacher candidates' instructional beliefs. Armed with an increased understanding of the influence of teachers' beliefs throughout their careers, I began the second term resolved to spend some instructional time providing teacher candidates with opportunities to examine, discuss and potentially refine their beliefs about language arts instruction. As beliefs are socially constructed (Bendixen, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Pajares, 1992), I speculated that candidates might be able to discern their existing beliefs through dialogue with their colleagues. Since beliefs are often tacit rather than explicit knowledge (Pajares, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Murphy, 2001), I questioned whether candidates' abilities to recognize the influence of their beliefs might be limited without structured opportunities for dialogue intended to explore the relation between instructional practices and beliefs. As teachers' beliefs about language arts may influence their program implementation decisions (Asselin, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), I wondered if exploring their beliefs might enhance candidates' abilities to implement evidence-based strategies. Moreover, I understood that

activating candidates' explicit understandings of their teaching beliefs was a vital first step towards conceptual change (Gregoire, 2003; Pajares, 1992).

*The conceptual change process involves changing old beliefs to be consistent with new information through recognizing that new information is anomalous; believing that the new information should be reconciled with existing beliefs; wanting to reduce the inconsistencies among beliefs; and perceiving past efforts to assimilate the information as unsuccessful (Bendixen, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). (Course manuscript, December 2005)*

Consequently, I devoted a portion of instructional time during many of the remaining eight course sessions to relating the topics covered to candidates' field practicum experiences, examining the language arts instructional practices of candidates and their associate teachers, as well as, deconstructing how these practices reflected beliefs about teaching and learning. For instance, after I presented particular instructional practices, candidates worked in small groups discussing their field practicum experiences in relation to the advocated practices, and their interpretations of the teaching beliefs (e.g., all students can learn, dialogue is important in facilitating learning) reflected in both the advocated practices and alternative instructional practices they or their associate teachers had used. These focused small group discussions were then shared and deconstructed by the entire class. During these sessions, I was surprised when candidates shared beliefs about instructional practices that were incongruous with approaches to literacy instruction recommended currently.

*...although an interactive, balanced approach to literacy instruction was advocated in the literature (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Tompkins, Bright, Pollard & Winsor, 2005), some candidates shared their perception that top-down (i.e., whole language) instructional practices, or alternatively, bottom-up (i.e., skills-based) instructional practices were used predominantly in their field placements. More concerning, some teacher candidates indicated their support for, and belief in, use of these approaches predominantly. ... I cited the literature (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Tompkins et al., 2005) to challenge inaccurate conceptions. Although this provided fuel for engaging dialogue, I discovered that exploring underlying teaching beliefs without being judgmental about the practices and beliefs of associate teachers, and/or teacher candidates, was akin to walking a slippery tightrope. Although it was essential to make tacit beliefs explicit and present contradictory evidence to facilitate conceptual change (Bendixen, 2002; Gregoire, 2003; Pajares, 1992), it was also crucial to create a "safe" environment for teacher candidates to*

*share their beliefs. Thus, it was important to be understanding of the practices and beliefs of all candidates and their associate teachers. (Course manuscript, December 2005)*

In addition to providing a forum to discuss their diverse beliefs and experiences, these reflective discussions prompted candidates to engage in thought provoking dialogue about the interconnected complexities of instructional strategies, accountability and classroom management.

*... time was devoted to discussing the proportion of instructional time candidates and/or their associate teachers spent developing students' reading comprehension skills through "discussions", and the proportion of time spent developing students' reading comprehension through worksheet completion. Teacher candidates then shared their rationales for the prevalent use of worksheet activities. This, in turn, prompted teacher candidates to discuss the real or perceived need for paper products as "hard evidence" for teacher accountability. As well, candidates considered time constraints that may cause teachers to use expedient worksheets in lieu of time-consuming discussions. Candidates also considered the need to teach students explicitly the skills (e.g., actively listening to others, acknowledging alternative perspectives) required for productive group discussions (Tompkins et al., 2005). Additionally, candidates acknowledged that teachers required strong classroom management skills to be able to facilitate student discussion groups. Through these reflective discussions, some came to recognize incongruence between their teaching beliefs and their teaching practices. For example, some candidates articulated that requiring students to work independently to construct understanding of text precluded the opportunity to scaffold students' understanding through dialogue and discussion. (Course manuscript, December 2005)*

Encouraging candidates to reflect critically on their teaching beliefs also provoked me to reflect on my own beliefs and theoretical orientation.

*...I found it so difficult not to be openly judgmental and critical of some of the practices described as advocated by associate teachers and students' support of these practices. I think of myself as one who holds a constructivist theoretical stance. Yet, if I am really a constructivist, why did I want my students to construct understandings that are in line with my personal conceptions of literacy instruction? (Course manuscript, December 2005)*

Additionally, devoting class time to exploring candidates' conceptions, in turn, meant that there was less instructional time available to cover course content. This prompted me to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in modeling constructivist oriented teaching practices.

*I feel that there is still a great need for "practical" experiences using advocated methods, but there is also a need to explore "why" these methods are effective. Although spending time deconstructing the "why" of "what" we did each week seems to have worked well, I*

*know this has detracted from the number of strategies and approaches that were actually used, as opposed to the number of practical experiences I provided during the first term. Is this the best way? Have we balanced “coverage” and “uncoverage”?* (Journal, April 2005)

Although my self-confidence was diminished by my increased understandings of the scholarship of teaching, my teaching practices were affirmed by candidates’ positive perceptions of the course as reflected in their course evaluations and “course planning feedback sheets”. The mean score for each item on the Faculty of Education course evaluation form was above six on the seven point ordinal scale. Additionally, candidates’ comments consistently reflected their appreciation of the resources, ideas and “hands-on” activities.

*I really enjoyed this course and learned a lot about teaching language arts. Thanks for the great ideas and resources for teaching.* (Evaluation form, March 2005)

*I learned a lot and I hope that I can implement at least some of the many ideas we implemented in class.* (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2005)

*I am walking away from this class with a solid foundation in language arts and lots of practical ideas!* (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2005)

Irrespective of teacher candidates’ positive perceptions of the course, I was aware that I had not consistently allocated sufficient time to enhancing their reflective abilities.

Throughout the duration of my second year as an instructor, my attempts to enhance candidates’ abilities to reflect critically were more consistent and intentional. For example, during the first course session, I shared the rationale for engaging in these reflective discussions, as well as the importance of our collective professionalism for all to feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perceptions. Throughout the year, I modeled reflective practice by sharing my own reflections about our class sessions and my prior classroom teaching experiences. While deconstructing candidates’ field placement experiences and exploring their instructional beliefs, the issues and dilemmas raised during my first year were once again brought forth repeatedly (i.e., inconsistencies between field placements and coursework, interconnectedness of management and instructional

strategies). In addition to wondering how some candidates would ever be able to change conceptions without the provision of field experiences during which they were provided with opportunities to experiment with advocated practices (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey, 1986, 2002), I began to wonder if the in-class dialogue was enabling and/or sufficient for all.

*When teacher candidates discuss their beliefs during class time, are all students “voices” really heard or am I appealing primarily to the “extroverts” in class who are eager and willing to share their knowledge and experience? How can I ensure all students are reflecting critically? (Journal, March 2006)*

At the conclusion of my second year, the overwhelming majority of the feedback I received from students continued to be positive with the mean score for each item on the Faculty of Education course evaluation form once again above six on the seven-point ordinal scale. Comments on both the course evaluation and course planning feedback forms continued to reflect candidates’ appreciation of the inclusion of many “hands-on” practical activities. Additionally, new within candidates’ comments this instructional year, was their appreciation of the opportunities for reflection and dialogue within a non-threatening environment.

*An exceptional job of making the environment receptive, fun, and interactive. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2006)*

*Participation activities helped us to fully understand the concepts. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2006)*

*Thanks for always being available, helpful, encouraging and creating a safe place for us to vent our problems, concerns and questions. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2006)*

*Terrific reflective process as we have reflected a great deal this year. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2006)*

While teacher candidates’ comments affirmed the increased emphasis I had placed on reflection, one comment raised the issue of whether my assessment practices were exemplary.

*We are always encouraged to assess process as well as product. I did not see this in this course. No process was taken into account. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2006)*

This comment provoked me to consider whether the assignments within the course were predominantly “assessment of learning”, without sufficient emphasis on “assessment for learning” or “assessment as learning” (Earl, 2003). More specifically, I had reservations about whether the knowledge-based quiz assessed the understandings I hoped candidates acquired, with these insights including increased understandings of the importance and benefits of critical reflection.

Consequently, I explored the literature documenting teacher educators’ experiences facilitating and assessing teachers’ reflective abilities (Asselin, 2000; Bean & Patel Stevens, 2002; Long & Stuart, 2004; Mueller & Skamp, 2003). Although written journals are used widely (Cochran-Smith, 2003), there were differing opinions with respect to the extent to which written forms of reflection affected candidates’ teaching beliefs (Asselin, 2000; Bean & Patel Stevens, 2002). For instance, while Asselin (2000) asserted written journals were effective vehicles to alter teacher candidates’ inaccurate conceptions about language arts instructional practices, Bean and Patel Stevens (2002) found that electronic journals helped teachers to articulate, but not alter their beliefs. I was particularly interested in the work of Long and Stuart (2004) who implemented a pre-service course designed around the interconnectedness of teacher candidates’ experiences, knowledge, skills, and beliefs. The course included field experiences interwoven with the curriculum course content, with a substantial portion of class time devoted to candidates’ reflections on their previous and recent experiences as students, and the connections between these experiences and their field experiences. Additionally, students kept written journals documenting their reflections. Analysis of their beliefs and practices supported that this course enhanced students’ abilities to reflect critically, as well as, alter their instructional beliefs and practices (Long & Stuart, 2004). These insights supported my practice of exploring candidates’ beliefs through in-class dialogue, and motivated me to consider the use of a written reflective journal assignment.

### ***Acknowledgement of the Complexities of Assessing Candidates' Reflective Practice***

I speculated that relating course experiences to their placements through written journals, in conjunction with engaging in reflective dialogue during course sessions, might better support candidates' reflective abilities. As I pondered potential changes, I attended conference sessions where other teacher educators shared their experiences. Collectively, these insights prompted me to suggest changes to the knowledge-based assignment used within the language arts course.

*I attended a session at CSSE that was presented by language arts instructors from another university who used a "literacy soul story" to access their students' prior knowledge... I am wondering about how we might use an evolving "reflective portfolio of growth as a L/A [language arts] teacher" as an assignment (in lieu of the quiz). This portfolio could include an initial reflection about how candidates became literate and how they believe students should be taught literacy when they enter the L/A [language arts] course. This could be followed by a reflection on their evolving understandings of how to teach L/A [language arts] after they complete their first teaching block, and a final reflection at the completion of the L/A [language arts] course. I think that this would enable the candidates to see more clearly, what their initial conceptions of literacy and literacy instruction were and how these understandings have evolved over the duration of their L/A [language arts] course and practicum experiences. Each of these reflections could be completed in a variety of formats (e.g., written paper, concept web, multi-media presentation) and the students could be given "prompts" with which to complete their reflections. I am eager to explore this idea with you in greater detail and get your input on whether it would be something you would be interested in exploring further. (Email communication to course coordinator, June 2006)*

During a subsequent meeting the language arts instructional team discussed the benefits and drawbacks of this and other forms of knowledge-based assignments. These included the time required for instructors to model exemplary practices by providing thoughtful written comments in response to candidates' written reflections, as well as, the balance of content knowledge, practical, and reflective experiences to be provided and assessed within the pre-service program. As our well-supported opinions were diverse, the course coordinator suggested that each instructor determine independently the knowledge-based assignment they would use for the coming year, and explore the effectiveness of the assessments implemented. While I was interesting in using a reflective journal assignment, I later had second thoughts when I acknowledged the complexities of putting

this task into practice.

*...I believe that the assessment criteria must be objective and transparent. We must emulate exemplary assessment practices for our students, yet is it really possible to assess objectively the reflective abilities of another and will I be sure that these teachers know the content covered if I am using this form of assessment? (Journal, July 2006).*

*I keep thinking about the "knowledge-based" assignment and to be honest, I am really torn between having students complete the reflective journals and having them complete the quiz. ...I think the reason that I have this tension is that I feel so strongly that there is "content" that students must know and understand in order to be able to teach language arts well. (Email communication to course coordinator, July 2006)*

*I understand your dilemma and agree that content knowledge has a place in the course as well. Perhaps there might be a way to combine reflection and content if you get creative. (Email communication from course coordinator, July 2006)*

Throughout the remainder of the summer, I wavered about whether or not I would alter my assessment practices, while at the same time exploring how to structure a journal assignment to assess both candidates' content knowledge and reflective abilities. I sought the advice of a pre-service faculty member with expertise in assessment who shared sample rubrics she had developed to assess teacher-candidates' reflective journals. I also drew upon my classroom teaching experiences using reading responses to assess elementary students' reading comprehension. In attempts to develop and assess multiple levels of understanding (i.e., knowledge, application, evaluation), I decided to assign a series of "retell, relate, reflect" journals.

*This individual assignment focuses on your development of the knowledge required to be an effective Language Arts teacher. It is intended to enhance your understandings of "what you know", "how you know", and "what you need to learn next". You will be asked to "retell" the prior knowledge you bring to the class, and the knowledge you acquire subsequently throughout the duration of the course from attending classes, participating in class activities, and reading the text and session handouts. You will then "relate" your formal knowledge base to your practical teaching experiences. Additionally, you will be asked to "reflect" upon your knowledge and experience teaching Language Arts, and identify how you will use these understandings in your future teaching practices, as well as, identify areas for your future growth as a Language Arts teacher. (Course syllabus, August 2006)*

Whereas the retell section in each of this series of three journals required candidates to synthesize

the content knowledge they acquired, the relate section required them to focus on how this knowledge was or was not reflected in teaching practices during their placements. The final reflect section was devoted to candidates' perceptions of how the knowledge and experience they had derived thus far had affected their beliefs about literacy instruction, and would affect their future teaching practices and professional learning goals. Detailed question prompts, together with assessment rubrics that outlined the content to be synthesized, related to teaching practicum experiences and reflected upon, were provided for each of these journal entries.

The first journals, submitted during the second course session, focused on candidates' prior educational experiences, current definitions of literacy, and memories of becoming literate. Reading these journals made me aware of the superficial understandings of candidates' prior knowledge that I had acquired previously.

*....I believed that the in-class activities together with the candidate information sheets I asked students to complete during their first class were effective vehicles to do so [access prior knowledge]. I now realize what a limited view of my students' prior knowledge these provided. Some have extensive understandings provided by many courses and personal teaching experiences, while many others have a very narrow view of literacy (reading and writing). Most view literacy as extremely important and as a result hold trepidations about teaching this subject. Some shared "raw and disturbing" personal reflections of experiences they or their children had learning to read, citing how these experiences motivated them to become teachers, yet made them doubt their own abilities. I need to be very careful not to overwhelm these students and diminish further their already fragile sense of self-efficacy. I also may need to change my syllabus for the weeks prior to the first teaching block so that I will be able to explore the needs of struggling readers and reading assessment more extensively than I had intended, as these topics are those mentioned most often [by candidates] as "concerns", "needs" and "fears". (Journal, September 2006)*

When returning these journals, I shared some of my reflections about them with the teacher candidates. We then discussed potential alterations to the course outline in response to their identified needs and collaboratively modified the course syllabus. While I had not necessarily intended it to do so, this enabled me to model for teacher candidates the importance of getting to know their students, which in turn, would enable them to begin instruction with their students needs

and pre-existing understandings. Although it was time-consuming to read and respond to the journals, the insights I derived from doing so enabled me to provide responsive instruction.

*I appreciated that you were flexible enough that when we asked about a topic that wasn't being covered you were willing to devote a session to it. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*Arlene was very flexible in what we discussed. She was sure to ask us if there was anything we wanted to cover and even discussed assessment before our first block when she hadn't plan to do this until afterwards.(Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

Whereas their first journal entries focused on the knowledge candidates acquired prior to their pre-service year, their second entries focused on the knowledge and experience they developed throughout the first term, which included a four-week teaching practicum. As part of this cumulative assignment, candidates were asked to reread their first journal entries, which were resubmitted with the subsequent entries. Additionally, this reflection required candidates to include their perceptions of whether their initial thoughts about literacy instruction had been altered or affirmed, by their pre-service experiences. The second series of journals revealed barriers to effective pre-service education in general, and completion of this assignment in particular.

*...A key difficulty for some students seemed to be relating their placement experiences to their coursework. I was surprised to learn that many of my students were not provided with any block one language arts teaching experiences. In some instances, this was because students taught predominantly specific subjects such as math or physical education on rotary. In other cases, the associate teachers did not provide their teacher candidates with opportunities to teach language arts because they perceived that it was too important to release control in this subject area. The lack of exposure some candidates had to teaching [language arts] made the relate portion of this journal very difficult for them to complete. Additionally, once again some students saw many teaching practices that were inconsistent with advocated practices including "round robin" reading.... Although students indicated that these practices were those they would not emulate, I wonder when or if some candidates will actually see practices they should emulate... while the vast majority of teacher candidates did a wonderful job of synthesizing and summarizing the course 'content' in the retell journal segment, a few did not. This makes me echo my summer concern. Is this always a better way to assess content knowledge? Perhaps the quiz would have been a more effective way to ensure that all candidates had acquired the requisite content knowledge. (Journal, December 2006)*

I viewed the limited language arts teaching experience some candidates had during their first placements as particularly problematic, as this teaching block was their only field placement throughout the duration of our course. Once again, I wondered how candidates would be able to restructure their beliefs about effective language arts practices during pre-service education, without the opportunities for professional experimentation required for conceptual change (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Long & Stuart, 2004). In order to scaffold understandings and make the insights derived by candidates who were able to implement advocated practices available to all, the majority of the class session during which these journals were returned was devoted to discussing their diverse placement experiences, and perceptions of exemplary literacy instruction. The complexities of enhancing candidates' understandings without being judgmental, that I had uncovered throughout my previous experiences deconstructing instructional beliefs and practices, were again ever-present. Additionally, as occurred following submission of their first journals, we negotiated course syllabus modifications to address the areas of need outlined within their journals.

Throughout the ensuing course sessions as we continued to explore the beliefs reflected in advocated practices, I was acutely aware that limited exposure to teaching language arts was a barrier to the abilities of some candidates to relate theory to practice, with this also affecting their abilities to complete the final reflective journal assignment. Indeed the abilities of all candidates to complete the third journal entry were affected by their first teaching block in November providing their only practicum experience throughout the duration of the twenty-week language arts course.

*One suggestion I have is to have an alternate assignment for those that do not teach language arts. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*The journals were actually valuable for us to see our growth and how far we have come. However, the third journal was too repetitive-similar to the second reflection, as I was reflecting on the same experience again. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*I think the third journal was difficult to write because we did not have any new experiences*

*to reflect on. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

Nonetheless, most of the final journals affirmed my positive perceptions of this assignment, as did candidates' "course planning feedback sheet" comments that indicated reiteratively how it supported their growth.

*Most [teacher candidates] have done an outstanding job of synthesizing their evolving knowledge and beliefs, as well as reflecting upon their growth over the course of the year. Students' individual learning styles were reflected in the forms of representation they used, which included academic "APA style" papers, pictorial displays, and in one instance a complex and insightful "choose your own adventure" story... there were a few instances (3 of 45 students) where students did not appear to complete this assignment to the best of their abilities. Nonetheless, the incredible growth demonstrated by most students, makes me believe that while imperfect, this is an effective assignment. (Journal, March 2007)*

*An excellent series of assignments that allowed students to express what they know, make personal connections and reveal beliefs one may not know they have. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*I found these to be really useful! Throughout the year, I feel as though we have been "reflected to death", but they [other reflections] were just based on the readings we have done. It was nice to be able to reflect on our own growth as a pre-service teacher. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*At the time I was working on writing the journal entries I felt, "Oh no! Not another reflection!" But as I read the 3 entries at the end of the year I felt they showed all the growth and learning I've undergone/gained and the little "pain" felt writing them was well worth the long-term gain. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*These were great! They not only helped me reflect and review the material but they also helped me to make new connections and learn more! This was a real and relevant way to check for understanding. Thank you for "practicing what you preach" and evaluating us the way you are teaching us to assess and evaluate our students. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

While candidates' comments supported my revised assessment practices, I was taken aback by two comments with respect to how the course should be delivered.

*I learned a lot in this course, but I would have liked more hands-on activities. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*I would like to see more sample activities. (Course planning feedback sheet, March 2007)*

*I wonder if the pendulum has swung too far. This is the first time in past three years that any of my students have indicated they would like more practical experiences using strategies during our class sessions. Interestingly, the abundant provision of practical experiences was noted by students as a “strong suit” of this course the first and second year that I taught it. (Journal, March 2007)*

Yet again, I am deliberating the optimal balance of practical and reflective experiences required by teacher candidates. Although I have traveled far throughout my three years as a pre-service instructor, determining how to meet teacher candidates’ needs is an iterative process. The thoughts I expressed when I first became aware of how little I knew about providing effective teacher education, continue to be relevant and meaningful.

*The question of what I will do with what I have learned is predominant in my thoughts....Perhaps the most important personal “learning” has been realizing how little I know, and acknowledging the importance of continuing the journey of learning. (Journal, January 2005)*

### ***Support Required for Teacher Educators to be able to Facilitate Candidates’ Reflective Practice***

Collectively, my experiences have made me more cognizant of the importance of learning about teaching teachers, through self-study (Loughran, 2007). I now acknowledge more fully the importance of learning from and with the teacher candidates I instruct. Whereas I once believed that I possessed the skills required to provide pre-service education, I now realize that I initially perceived this to be a process of sharing my knowledge with students, rather than enhancing their abilities to reflect, connect their course knowledge with their practical experiences and refine or reconstruct their understandings. My awareness of the limitations of the pre-service instruction I once provided has prompted me to not only recognize the merits of collaborative self-study, but also lament the lack of formal opportunities available to part-time faculty within which to explore how best to facilitate teacher candidates’ growth (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Zeichner, 2005).

Despite consensus acknowledging the importance of teacher education, my experiences have supported that teacher-educators in general and part-time faculty in particular, typically receive little

formal preparation for their teaching roles (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Mueller & Skamp, 2003; Zeichner, 2005). My lack of preparation included, but was not limited to, how to develop beginning teachers' reflective abilities, despite widespread recognition that fostering these abilities is a key component of effective teacher education (Bean & Patel Stevens, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Mueller & Skamp, 2003; Zeichner, 2005). Throughout my self-directed efforts to enhance candidates' reflective abilities, I was encouraged and supported by faculty members in general and the course coordinator in particular. Nonetheless, the insights I acquired into the importance of conceptual change during pre-service education were the result of "happenstance" rather than requisite prior knowledge or planned opportunities for growth as a part-time teacher educator.

*I was hired based on my knowledge of literacy development. An understanding of the potential of teachers' beliefs to impede or facilitate curriculum implementation was neither required prior to appointment, nor subsequently developed within this role. (Course manuscript, December 2004).*

*Dialogue amongst teacher educators about how to facilitate teachers' reflective abilities, as well as, overcome the limitations presented by incongruities between instructional practices used during candidates' field experiences and those advocated during university methods courses, has been recommended (Mueller & Skamp, 2003; Toll, Nierstheimer, Lenski & Kolloff, 2004; Zeichner, 2005). However, in my experience structures such as planned meetings or focus groups to provide forums and opportunities for these discussions have not been in place. I view this as particularly problematic for part time teacher education instructors, who like myself, may enter the role with limited understandings of the complexities of providing teacher education. (Course manuscript, December 2005)*

While recognizing the limitations of this self-study exploring the experiences of one individual, it is also important to acknowledge that although courses within faculties of education are frequently taught by adjunct or part-time instructors (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Zeichner, 2005), there are few, if any, studies documenting the experiences of this large group of teacher educators (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Do other part-time teacher educators possess the knowledge and skills required to provide effective teacher education? Have voids in their knowledge restricted growth in a manner similar to the ways I perceive my own lack of knowledge might have affected my

students' growth?

*Prior to providing pre-service education, I believed that effective teacher educators required subject-specific declarative (what), procedural (how), and conceptual (why) understandings. Although I continue to hold these understandings are essential, I now believe they are, in and of themselves, insufficient. Additionally, in order to make these insights accessible to others, teacher educators must possess sound understandings about how to both “cover” subject-specific understandings and “uncover” teachers’ prior knowledge and beliefs about advocated practices. Moreover, I now contend that without the abilities to reflect upon and relate instructional beliefs to classroom practices, teacher candidates may be as ill prepared for their teaching careers, as I was initially for pre-service teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Mueller & Skamp, 2003; Zeichner, 2005). (Course manuscript, December 2005)*

The importance of teacher practitioner professional learning communities engaged in reflective exploration of common problems in attempts to improve student learning has been underscored (Dufour & Eaker, 1999; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Would not the implementation of these structures within faculties of education also be beneficial? In order to provide on-going opportunities for teacher educators to explore and share successful practices accessing teacher candidates’ prior knowledge and supporting their reflective abilities, self-study research projects could be undertaken investigating the effectiveness of professional learning communities established for this purpose, with part-time instructors included in these groups. Such opportunities may not only support the development of teacher-educators’ abilities, but also provide insights with respect to the learning and unlearning of part-time faculty whose experiences are unexamined in the teacher education literature (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

In addition to heightened awareness of the need for teacher educators’ support and self-study, my own conceptual change process has enhanced my understandings of the importance of professional experimentation, in conjunction with acquiring and reflecting on new information.

*The insights acquired through providing pre-service language arts instruction while concurrently exploring conceptual change through doctoral studies, highlight the synergistic effect of applying academic understandings in teaching. Analyzing these experiences through the lens of the “interconnected model of professional growth” (Clarke*

*& Hollingsworth, 2002) demonstrates the mediating processes of reflection and action within my personal conceptual change experience. Although the stimulus for change was knowledge acquired through doctoral studies, pre-service teaching provided the domain of practice for professional experimentation. That is, teaching provided me with an opportunity to “walk the talk” – an experience that was requisite to my own conceptual change. The domain of practice also presented challenges (e.g., time constraints, lack of congruence between candidates’ course and field placement experiences) that may have jeopardized my conceptual change process. However, the salient outcomes of candidates’ increased understandings of the complexities of providing constructivist oriented instruction and the importance of relating their teaching beliefs to classroom practices, represented the domain of consequence. (Course manuscript, June 2006)*

The complexities of my personal conceptual change process have caused me to question whether teacher education programs can support teacher candidates’ conceptual change, without consistently providing a domain of practice (i.e., field placement) in which candidates have opportunities to implement advocated practices (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Despite the efforts of teacher educators to foster their reflective abilities, without practical experiences using advocated methods, beginning teachers may implement alternative instructional practices they have used during field placements, in lieu of practices advocated during curriculum courses (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Pajares, 1992). The continuous cycle of acquiring new understandings during pre-service course sessions, implementing advocated practices during integrated field placements and reflecting upon the complexities of doing so upon return to pre-service course sessions, may represent the most effective way in which to facilitate sustainable changes in teacher candidates’ beliefs and practices (Long & Stuart, 2004). Further research may be warranted that explores the effects of implementing curriculum courses that are directly interwoven with related field practicum experiences.

### ***Conclusion***

It is ironic that studying about conceptual change was the discrepant event that precipitated my own conceptual change (Gregoire, 2003; Pajares, 1992). The insights acquired through doctoral studies transformed my pre-service instructional and assessment practices, and heightened my

awareness of the importance of enhancing teacher educators' abilities to foster teacher candidates' abilities to reflect consciously and critically. Pre-service education is of short duration during which it is critically important for teacher candidates to explore their teaching beliefs (Bean & Patel Stevens, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Mueller & Skamp, 2003; Zeichner, 2005). However, conceptual change resulting from these explorations may be superficial or unsustainable in the absence of teachers' continuous commitment to revisiting and refining these understandings (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Long & Stuart, 2004; Zeichner, 2005).

Throughout their careers, teachers will have the responsibility of accepting, or rejecting, many advocated changes. Teachers' abilities to make the best possible decisions may be dependent upon their capabilities to develop an understanding of the beliefs on which their decisions rest. Pre-service education that supports and develops teacher candidates' abilities to become reflective practitioners may enhance their potentials to make the most informed decisions. The provision of these opportunities may, in turn, be dependent upon the preparation of teacher educators to facilitate such reflective explorations (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Zeichner, 2005).

### *Educational Significance*

My experiences may provide fruitful discussion about how to develop and enhance the teaching abilities of teacher educators, with particular attention to novice and part-time instructors. This may foster the development of future planned opportunities for teacher educators to deconstruct their practices and deepen their understandings of the key components, as well as, the complexities of providing effective teacher education.

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