Editorial:

Teachers as Bridges:
Educating for a Better Tomorrow

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In *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barrack Obama*, David Remnick (2010) interprets the future president’s appeal as that of a bridge bringing together different constituencies. He describes candidate Obama as someone who “would make his biracial ancestry a metaphor for his ambition to create a broad coalition of support, to rally Americans behind a narrative of moral and political progress” (p. 4).

This image prompted us to think about the image of teachers as bridges for their students. Teachers link young individuals to the knowledge and traditions of society. Through their professional practice and dedication, they help students develop the skills to succeed in school and in the world. In their classes, teachers help students relate to each other across cultures, which is crucial to the development and vitality of civil society in a changing world. Dedicated teachers are bridges reaching out to exceptional students or to underappreciated subjects. Visionary teachers develop innovative approaches that offer hope of a brighter future for everyone. The articles in this issue of *Brock Education* all highlight different ways in which educators are bridges to a better tomorrow.

Rodriguez’s study brings to life the challenges facing minority teachers as they attempt to serve as bridges between cultures and as bridges to new opportunities for minorities. This powerful narrative inquiry into the experiences of a Latina teacher candidate highlights the negative images and stereotypes experienced by many minority and women teachers. More importantly, the story of Patricia’s creative resistance reminds us of the importance of hiring minority teachers and offers a path to educational progress for all.

Randall and Maeda, who were curious about the physical education knowledge and experiences of elementary teacher candidates, surveyed 54 teacher candidates to learn of their experiences. Interestingly, they discover strong links between participants’ past experiences and current beliefs. This article reminds us that some teachers may have limited or, even, miseducative experiences in certain subject areas. To serve as bridges between students and these domains of human experience, teachers need to find ways of resolving these potential impediments to student learning. The authors conclude by considering the implications for themselves as teacher educators guiding teacher candidates towards practices that encourage physical fitness among elementary students.

Associate teachers have a crucial role to play as bridges between teacher education and the field of teaching practice. Roland, recognizing the importance of collecting data in decision-making, surveys associate teachers. This article offers readers valuable insights into associate teachers’ views of field experiences. Interesting perspectives are offered on the implications for
collaboration and bridge-building among associate teachers, faculty advisors and teacher candidates.

The first years of teaching, Hinds and Berger recognize, are critical if beginning teachers are to steadily develop expertise. Professional development during the first five years can be an effective bridge between initial teacher education and ongoing successful practice. The authors explore the effectiveness of professional development in Ontario secondary schools (7-12). They make a strong case for a new model of professional development that builds on adult learning principles, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and new approaches to supervision.

Maynes, Julien-Schultz and Dunn observe that many teachers model primarily through direct instruction. In order to enhance the ways in which teachers act as a bridge between learners and the curriculum, they create a visual representation of the elements of instruction that can be used to plan effective direct-instruction lessons. They also identify structured and scaffolded practices that begin with teacher modelling then gradually shift responsibility for learning to students.

Whitley, Rawana, Brownlee and Rawana’s longitudinal study provides educators with much valuable information about students with emotional/behavioural difficulties. As these are not well understood, their learning needs are not addressed effectively. We are reminded of John Dewey’s (1938) description of educative experiences as ones in which the curriculum is organized in ways that foster learning for the individual learner. Effective teachers are able to use their understanding of learning and curriculum to bridge the gap and to improve learning. The information in this study provides a solid basis for building social acceptance, self-perception, and improved educational outcomes.

Teaching is complex and important work. In order to be bridges to a brighter future, educators—teachers, teacher candidates and teacher educators—need to be highly responsive to the diverse and changing world in which we live and work. We hope that the information and ideas in this issue of Brock Education will make meaningful contributions to your professional development and evidence-based practice as practitioners and researchers.

References


Resisting Negative Images and Stereotypes: 
One Latina Prospective Teacher’s Story

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Abstract
This article focuses on one Latina prospective teacher’s act of resisting negative stereotypes regarding attire imposed upon her by a white female principal. The event is embedded within a larger life history study that explores the experiences of bilingual Latino prospective teachers in the elementary education program of a large Midwestern university. The selected narrative is contextualized in relation to resistance narratives. Patricia Morales tells about her experiences in U.S. schools. It explores how Patricia’s life history is marked by experiences of discrimination, yet how her constructions of these events represent “counterstories” (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) through which she “talks back” (hooks, 1989) to distorted images and stereotypes. Patricia’s narratives are shown to constitute creative acts of resistance through which she negotiates a positive and affirming identity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) as a Latina prospective teacher.

Keywords: preservice teachers; teacher education; Latino critical race theory; narrative inquiry

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“I feel like sometimes people just get sick and tired of me challenging their thoughts. I always feel like everybody else is blue colored pencils and I’m the red one” (Interview, Patricia Morales, 12/04).

The above quote represents the perspective of Patricia Morales (names of people and places are pseudonyms), a Latina prospective elementary teacher enrolled in a large Midwestern university teacher education program from 2004-2006. Patricia’s case emerges from a larger life history study inquiring into the experiences of bilingual Latino preservice elementary teachers during their teacher education program at State University (Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto 2008a; 2008b). The stories Patricia tells of herself -- through her own writing and through the life history interviews generated during this study -- allow us to bear witness to her journey. This article focuses upon Patricia’s act of resisting negative stereotypes about Latina attire imposed upon her by a white female cooperating principal during her student teaching semester; it is situated in relation to other resistance narratives told by Patricia about her experiences in U.S. schools. I contend that Patricia’s narrative of the event represents a “counterstory” (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) through which she “talks back” (hooks, 1989) to distorted images. Further, it constitutes a creative act of resistance through which Patricia negotiates a positive and affirming identity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) as a Latina prospective teacher.

Why Study the Experiences of Latina Prospective Teachers?

In the U.S., increasing numbers of students, like Patricia, speak a language other than English at home and are foreign-born or first-generation immigrants (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Latinos are seen to form an emerging ethnic and racial majority who, as a group, are labeled “at risk” in social institutions (Garcia, 2005, p. 1) and experience higher rates of school failure than their white counterparts on many measures of academic achievement (Clark & Flores, 2001; Donato, 1997; Espinoza-Herold, 2003; Grant & Gomez, 2001; Nieto, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). An often-implicit understanding within the literature focusing on the “achievement debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) experienced by Latino students is that teachers are predominantly monolingual, middle-class, and White. The percentage of white teachers grew from 88% in 1971 to 90.7% in 1996 at the same time that the numbers of Black and those classified as “other” decreased (National Education Association [NEA], 1997, 2003).

The NEA’s racial classification of Latino teachers in the U.S. as “other” (i.e. not Black or White) reflects a conflicted history of marginalization (Perea, 2000, p. 346). For example, Donato (1997) documents the “other” struggle for equal schools during the civil rights era in which Mexican-Americanas in the Southwest organized in resistance to segregation and discriminatory policies. Classifying Latinos as “other” also points to the shifting nature of identity politics, a process that is often called “Hispanization” (Santos, 1997) or the construction of “Latinidad” (Valdivia, 2005). Suárez-Orozco and Páez (2002) emphasize that the term “Latino” has meaning only in reference to the U.S. experience and that “indeed, Latinos are White, Black, and indigenous” (p. 3).

The racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities of preservice teachers are important to consider because linguistic and cultural disparities between K-12 students and their teachers are understood as one factor affecting achievement (Walker, MacGillivray, & Aguilar, 2001). Researchers focus on the lack of critical consciousness, cultural understandings, and linguistic...
knowledge that white teachers often bring to the classroom (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002. Weisman and Hansen (2008), however, call for us to go beyond simply recruiting teachers with diverse backgrounds. Together with Monzo and Rueda (2003), they urge us to examine whether or not (and how) culturally and linguistically diverse teachers’ beliefs and practices actually differ from those of white teachers, especially if they are middle-class. I add that we must also examine the ways in which teacher education programs themselves support and constrain the successes of bilingual Latino teacher candidates (Gomez & Rodriguez, in press).

**Conceptual Framework**

**Narrative Theory**

Narrative inquiry is “a way of understanding experience….a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction…. [It] is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Gomez (1997) adds that narrative scholars hold in common a view that the stories people tell are “frameworks through which they impose order on and make sense of their own and others’ experiences” (p. x). The aim of narrative research is to “understand how people think and act as they do in the situated contexts in which they live and labor” (p. x). Narrative inquirers pay attention to “layers of narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). For example, this analysis spans resistance narratives located across Patricia’s life history and considers the larger socio-political contexts of what it means to be a Latina in the U.S. Embedded within it is my own personal narrative -- I position myself as a white, native English-speaking woman whose life experiences frame a situated interpretation. As a non-Latina who is part of an extended Puerto Rican family through marriage, I pursue this research because I am particularly interested in the experiences and education of Latino students and teachers in U.S. schools. At the time of the study, I was a graduate teaching assistant in the teacher education program who came to know Patricia through our shared experiences there.

**Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)**

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) names race as central to one’s experience and allows it to be prioritized as a social category while understanding that race is inextricably linked to other social categories like gender, sexuality, ability or socioeconomic class. López (2000) asserts, “[R]ace should be used as a lens through which to view Latinos/as in order to focus our attention on the experiences of racial oppression” (p. 375). Matsuda (1995) reminds us that critical race scholarship “looks to the bottom,” which means that “those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen” and suggests a “new epistemological source for critical scholars: the actual experiences, history, culture, and intellectual tradition of people of color in America” (p. 63).

According to Fernández (2002), narratives serve multiple functions within a LatCrit framework, including allowing the participant to reflect on her/his experiences; making public his/her story; subverting the dominant story; and raising consciousness of common experiences (p. 48). She emphasizes the imperative to study the “experiences of marginalized Latina/Latino
students” in order to “get a deeper understanding of how they are oppressed, but at the same time, use their personal agency to resist their social conditions” (p. 48). Within the field of LatCrit and central to this analysis, Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) and Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) provide models for understanding forms of resistance in higher education, including ways of examining relationships between the social, political, and historical contexts of participants’ lives and their interactions with white peers, cooperating personnel, and university staff.

Methodology

As mentioned previously, Patricia’s case study (Stake, 1995) emerges from a larger life history project conducted at State University between the years 2004-2006 in which 19 Latino prospective teachers participated (15 female/4 male). Life history was chosen as an appropriate methodology because, as Cole and Knowles (2001) have written, life history research is about “gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of others” within situated contexts (p. 11). The aim of the larger project is to better understand how Latino preservice teachers experience success in their teacher education program, and how they and others speak about their successes. The goal is to improve teacher education to be more receptive to their strengths and needs.

Setting

In 2005-2006, 805 undergraduate students identified as Latino -- a total of 3.4% of all undergraduates (State University Data Digest, 2006). Between 2004 and 2006, 19 Latino prospective teachers were enrolled in the elementary education program that admitted 75 students per semester. The majority of students were White and upper-middle-class—the mean income of State University families was $100,000 per year (State University Data Digest, 2006). There are 14 faculty members in the elementary education program, of whom the majority are White (10), with 3 African Americans and 1 Latina. Faculty broadly shares a vision of social justice education rooted in the belief that “schools in a democracy can and should prepare citizens to work actively and collectively on problems facing society” (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, p. 258). There is a strong focus on understanding students’ and teachers’ identities as significant factors in understanding what happens in schools. State University is part of Lake City’s community, a mid-sized Midwestern city with a population of 250,000 that enrolls 2,500 Latino students from a school population of 24,000 (City Schools Website, 2003). Like Patricia on campus, Latino students in Lake City are schooled with mostly Euro-American and English-speaking teachers and peers. In 2003, 9% of Latinos dropped out of school in Lake City, compared to 2% of Whites (City Schools Website, 2003). The cooperating teachers with whom the university collaborates are 88% White and most are monolingual in English (City Schools Website, 2005).

Data Generation

Patricia, like the other 19 teacher candidates who agreed to participate in the larger study, was sent a letter explicating its goals, consent forms, and life history interview protocols (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Mishler, 1999; Capps & Ochs, 1995; Linde, 1993) that asked about her experiences...
in family, school, university, and teacher education contexts. Over the course of three semesters, I conducted three semi-structured, formal interviews with her. I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed them, returning the transcripts to Patricia for any changes she wished to make. During the fourth semester, I observed Patricia for more than 30 hours in her 4th/5th grade student-teaching classroom. I wrote field notes and collected artifacts, including Patricia’s lesson plans and reflections, a classroom newspaper, and the email/letter that she sent to the chair of the elementary education program. I also asked Patricia to nominate university professors, supervisors, and cooperating teachers who could talk about her successes in the program. I interviewed her white female cooperating teacher, Barbara Barnes, and two of her university teachers (graduate teaching assistants who identified as white female and white male). I elicited these interviews as a way of triangulating data -- to help me better understand multiple and competing perspectives of Patricia’s stories of her experiences in the program.

Data Analysis

As part of the larger life history study, a research team that included me, another doctoral student who identified as African-American and Latina, and a Latina faculty member conducted the analyses. We also employed member-checks, shared emerging theories, and sought confirmation of our interpretations with participants. Our analyses are both inductive and deductive (Graue & Walsh, 1998). We first read and reread interview transcripts independently and sought recurring themes in the data. We then included those themes on which we agreed. We looked for themes that we expected might be present from three sources: from two researchers’ experiences of growing up Latina; from my relationships within a large, extended Puerto Rican family through marriage and through teaching experiences in Puerto Rico; and from our reading of the extant literature on Latino teachers. Examples of themes include those of immigration and meanings assigned to it; discrimination grounded in prejudices concerning language, ethnicity, or physical appearance; close family relationships; learning English; and pride in culture and its artifacts such as food and celebrations.

For this article, I approached Patricia’s life history from a holistic-content perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiac, & Zilber, 1998). The data that constitute the narrative of the event are discussed in relation to previous narratives emblematic of Patricia’s construction of herself as “resistant” and include the email Patricia wrote describing her response to the principal’s actions as well as both formal and informal interview data from Patricia and her cooperating teacher, Barbara.

Patricia’s Story: The Red Colored Pencil

Patricia emigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela with her family during political upheavals there between the years 1994-1995. She attended a private elementary school through third grade in Venezuela where she learned to read and write in English and Spanish. She positions herself as inhabiting middle-to-upper-middle-class socioeconomic status in the U.S. and upper-class status in Venezuela. Her parents are fluently bilingual and have earned advanced degrees in education and veterinary science. Patricia’s life history is one of movement and migration, yet one that is also centered in a secure sense of herself and her role in her family. When asked to compose a poem introducing herself, she wrote the following:
I Am From...
I am from the rich soils of coffee bearing fields,
And from the high peaks of the Andes Mountains.
I am from wherever the wind picks me up and drops me off.
Gainesville, Caracas, [Lake City],
Who knows where to next?
Doesn’t matter what I want, destiny decides.
I am from the familiar cooking smells of my mother’s kitchen,
Where she creates delicacies with her special ingredient: love.
I am from my father’s dream, where he wishes upon a star for a baby girl.
But lastly, I will always be from wherever my family is.
“Me voy” my mother announces,
We drop whatever we are doing, because where my parents are, we are home (Course assignment, 9/04).

Patricia’s account of her family’s emigration marks a defining point in her life history. According to Patricia, “[it] doesn’t matter what [she] wants, destiny decides” where she and her family will live. It is clear that she feels loved by her parents and will be “home” wherever they are. Patricia’s status as a native Spanish-speaking immigrant in U.S. schools also becomes a marker of her identity and informs her sense of herself as a student and a prospective elementary teacher. After her move to the U.S., Patricia entered fourth grade in a suburban Chicago public elementary school where she was identified as an ELL and was pulled out of the regular classroom. As she talks about herself as a student, Patricia reveals conflicting images. She states that she was “a very advanced reader” in Venezuela and that English was an integral part of the curriculum. She points to the quality of instruction as the reason she “skipped first grade” because “they [the teachers at her private school in Venezuela] had [her] writing, adding, and subtracting by the time [she] was out of kindergarten.” By this account, she learned “full-blown English” in the U.S. in “about three months” and was quickly mainstreamed into “regular classrooms” (Interview, Patricia Morales 12/04). In another episode during the same interview, however, Patricia compares her academic abilities to her teacher education cohort peers. She says, “I just kind of fell through the cracks into the [teacher education] program. All of [my cohort peers in the teacher education program] are straight ‘A’ students since they were in elementary schools…like all their lives…and they’ve never really had a challenge with anything. One of the students in our class had dyslexia and two of us had ESL.” The challenges of being a student of color in a predominantly white teacher education program are intertwined with the challenges of learning in another language and acquiring academic competence as a student and as a teacher. She continues:

I feel like a lot of the students just responded to the questions of why we should have multicultural classrooms and stuff like that. They know how to answer the questions, yet they don’t implement it. And a lot of the stuff that they say, whether they realize or not, and I call them out on it, and they get annoyed by me calling them out on it, that it’s racist. What they’re saying, the way they think, and they way they say it. It’s very infuriating for me, because out of the three people that are not White in the classroom, I’m the only one that identifies all the time as a student of color (Interview, Patricia Morales, 12/04).
In relation to her cohort peers, she states: “I feel like sometimes people just get sick and tired of me challenging their thoughts. I always feel like everybody else is blue colored pencils and I’m the red one” (Interview, Patricia Morales, 12/04). As the red colored pencil, she is the “corrector,” the one who points out the racism that she feels permeates classroom spaces that are filled with predominantly white perspectives and voices. She names her own voice as the resistant one, the “only one who identifies all the time as a student of color.”

Through such narratives, it is evident that Patricia constructs what Darder (1991) and Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2001) describe as “bicultural competencies” that become integral to her identity and serve as important resources. One of these resources is the resistance with which she responds to the negative images and stereotypes that are projected upon her by the “social mirror” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The following exemplar narrative portrays Patricia’s perceptions of her white high school peers after her family’s second move:

**The Whole Maid Thing**

People assumed “Hey! You just crossed the border!” [about my family when we first moved to the U.S.]. I don’t know if I’ve mentioned this before because when we moved to Georgia, by that time my dad was earning quite a bit of money. Like, we were pretty good. We had never been pretty good, you know, up to then, and actually, obviously, houses are cheaper in the South than they are up North, so we basically had like, a mini-mansion. We really did. It was a gorgeous brick house, you know? When we started making new friends, they were like, “Wait, you live here? Like, does your parent…do they WORK here? Does your MOM work here?” Or assuming the whole maid thing. And then the favorite was like, “Oh! So your dad must be a Colombian drug lord or something!” and I’m just like, “Oh, God. Thanks. Thanks” (Interview, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

In her story, Patricia is an adolescent who is anxious to make friends. She doesn’t call her “friends” on their mistaken assumptions about her and her family, but jokes along. However, the narrative is constructed to highlight their racist perceptions. Through her counterstory, Patricia resists negative stereotypes and reaffirms a positive sense of herself as someone who is well-traveled and well-educated in relation to her peers.

In such resistance narratives, Patricia’s peers are constructed as antagonists who reflect negative images and stereotypes upon her and her family. In other narratives, Patricia describes what she perceives as the racist actions of white educators. As a Latina student and ELL, Patricia must also work to construct her self as an academically successful student. For example, in the following story, Patricia’s white high school guidance counselor advises her not to apply to State University:

**In Your Face!**

He [the guidance counselor] just didn’t believe in me, and he was telling me to shoot for these dinky little schools, and it wasn’t really until one of my white friends said that she was applying to State, I’m like, “What kind of GPA do you have?” And she’s like, “I got a 2.8.” And I’m like, “Why are you applying? You’re not going to get in!” She’s like, “I gotta try.” And seriously, that got me thinking. That’s the one I wanted to go to in the first place, so I might as well give it a try. I got accepted the day I was doing the school visit, so it was actually just thrilling, and I just went up to the counselor, and I’m like,
“Guess what?! State University accepted me!” And he’s like, “Really? That’s a surprise.” And I’m, “OH MY GOSH!” This is the type of encouragement I have to deal with here in the United States from educators!” And it’s really a sad experience, and at the same time it’s what made me thrive and go through, ‘cause I’m like, “IN YOUR FACE!” Everyone thought I was going to end up being pregnant by the time I was 15, or in a gang, or…you know…just doing drugs, or something like that. Just because I hang out with the bad Latino kids and all the stuff like that, but seriously, my parents were on my ass the entire time! And I knew what I had to do. I knew what I had to do, and I did it, and I can’t believe I’m here today (Interview, Patricia, Morales, 12/04).

In her narrative, Patricia creates the powerful character of the white guidance counselor who embodies and expresses distorted images of the academic abilities of Latino ELL students. It is significant that Patricia responds vehemently to the advice of this person of authority who is supposed to be a supportive role model, yet who demeans and belittles her. The strength of her reaction is in proportion to his strength as a powerful figure who is representative of the views of the dominant society.

Darder (1991) clarifies that “[t]he role of the White educator in the development of the bicultural voice is…significant to this discussion…[in that] the White educator can become for the bicultural student the primary reflection of not only the public institutions, but also the society at large” (pp. 70-71). Her analysis captures the essence of the meaning about what happened between Patricia and her guidance counselor and helps us understand how Patricia constructs a sense of herself as agentive and powerful. The narrative serves to frame a situation that is a catalyst for Patricia’s sense of herself as a successful student, as persistent and determined, and as politically conscious. Within the contexts of these and other resistance narratives (and Darder’s imperative for white educators to assist bicultural students in “developing their voice” (p. 70)), I now move to analysis of the key incident during Patricia’s student teaching regarding her attire.

As mentioned earlier, I was graciously allowed to visit Patricia in her student-teaching classroom and conducted over 30 hours of observation that focused on her literacy teaching practices. Shortly after her placement began, Patricia told me that her white female cooperating principal reprimanded her for dressing “provocatively” (Patricia Morales, personal communication, January 9, 2006). Patricia shared with me an email/letter that she wrote to her university supervisor (a Korean male international graduate student) and to the chair of the education department (an African-American male) in defense of her attire and to attest to her feelings of discrimination. In her letter, Patricia narrates her perception of the event and tells how Barbara, along with other teachers in the building, supports her choice of attire. She speaks of the injustices she feels are being visited upon her by the principal and compares her experiences with other student teachers (all of whom are White) in the building. With three weeks left in her placement, Patricia asks that she be transferred to another school. After she sent the email, Patricia told me that her supervisor responded to it with mixed messages. She reported that he met with the principal and asked that the principal refrain from such criticisms, but he also reprimanded Patricia for writing the letter, calling her action unprofessional. While she finished the placement, Patricia’s experience left her with a negative view of the school, of her student teaching experience, and of the teacher education program in general.
In her letter, Patricia situates the principal’s comments about her clothing within the contexts of other “petty” criticisms that are not “constructive” and that “disturb” Patricia. She writes:

For example, at three distinct times this semester, she [the principal] has commented on my attire (all regarding the shirt choice) when everyone in the staff has assured me that I dress within perfectly acceptable boundaries. She continues to tell me that community members (I’m assuming staff and parents) are commenting on my dress, however, I don’t believe it to be true, since she did not give me specific names, and I cannot substantiate this (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

While narrative inquiry does not seek to prove or disprove the “truth” of an event (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995), it is important to understand the meaning of the event to Patricia, who perceives the principal’s actions as discriminatory. For example, I did not ask Patricia to show me the shirts that she wore on these occasions. She clarifies in the letter that she has sought assurance from other teachers in the building and is convinced that her choice of attire is “within perfectly acceptable boundaries.” Barbara adds further insights into what she perceives as Patricia’s “struggles” with the principal and her resources as a prospective teacher:

*You Have to Play the Game*

I thought her passion for teaching…her passion for kids…and just wanting to have fun [were her resources]. And I think that was a struggle for her here because she wanted to play with the kids. She wanted to make that connection. And sometimes, you know, she was made to feel that wasn't appropriate. And I think that it WAS appropriate. [For example,] she wanted to have a snowball fight with the kids after school. Well, you know, then there’s all these rules and stuff like that. But she was really connecting with them and getting on their level, and what they wanted to do was to have fun….I think that maybe some administrative rules were put into place or that…um…and I don't, she WASN'T breaking any of the rules. I think she was made to feel that she was, which was unfortunate. And I think on one hand, in a positive way, made her really learn about politics in school and how why even though you wouldn't think so in an elementary school you have to play the game, and there are hoops, and there are little politics that go on that aren't fun, but you have to kind of go through. It was unfortunate that she had to deal with it because I think you have enough when you're student teaching than to have to deal with that stuff, but she handled it in a real professional way, and she had such a great attitude about it where she was like, “Well, okay, everything's a learning experience” (Interview, Barbara Barnes, 1/06).

From Barbara’s point of view, the struggles faced by Patricia were the “politics” that go on in every school and part of the “game” one had to play to get along with co-workers and supervisors. In an informal conversation with Barbara about Patricia’s email, Barbara describes the principal in a different light. She reports that she has known the principal to have had conflicts with student teachers in the past and said that the principal “feels threatened by confident, successful people” (field notes, 1/9/06, p. 140). She also relates her perception that the principal resents Patricia and that she is “jealous of the kids’ affection” for her (field notes, 1/9/06, p. 140). Finally, Barbara shoulders some of the burden for the principal’s displeasure
with Patricia herself when she says that “the principal was after me at the beginning of the year” and so she is also critical of Patricia, her student teacher (field notes, 1/9/06, p. 140).

In the email, Patricia reiterates her feelings of discrimination by providing a third example and declaring her intent to provide evidence in her favor: “Last night [at Open House], she [the principal] addressed her concern with my attire once again. I would be more than happy to bring the peasant top I was wearing for you to see” (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06). A “peasant top” is not a cultural reference to folk clothing, but a popular kind of cotton blouse worn by many young women in the teacher education program. Patricia further constructs the principal’s actions as unjust because the principal will not provide the names of “community members” who are “commenting on [Patricia’s] dress.” Patricia thus sets up the principal as a conspirator, along with faceless and nameless others, who accuse her. Rather than constructing the principal as supportive or as someone who seeks to understand her experiences as a Latina prospective teacher, Patricia remembers her as another powerful white character against whose negative perceptions she must struggle. Patricia adds:

The third thing, which is what inspired me to write this e-mail, was that I have been approached two days in a row, with again, more unconstructive criticism. This morning she [the principal] came in and observed me while I was giving the weekly Math Fact Tests. She again criticized me for using this curriculum that I was asked to keep up by my cooperating teacher for consistency. I also feel I was attacked because she felt [I was] discriminating against my students, by letting the students who have passed out of all of the Math Fact Tests to be able to check off when the other students had finished the test. I have never been so appalled in my life! I feel of all the people in the world, a White upper class woman, should not be telling a Latina woman (who represents the second person of color in the staff) that she is discriminating against students (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

In light of earlier resistance narratives, Patricia’s story of her frustrations with her cooperating principal and her feelings of being “attacked” reflect narrative continuity within her life history (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). She draws attention to the fact that she is the second person of color in staff in a way that is reminiscent of her portrayal of herself as the “red colored pencil” in her teacher education cohort. Finally, Patricia implores her supervisor to find her another placement. With only three weeks left in her student teaching, she writes:

The fact is I am sick of all of the unconstructive criticisms I have been receiving from the Principal. I have been told by the staff time and time again that I take it so well, and that they cannot see themselves dealing with this as well as I have. I am the only student teacher being constantly badgered by her. I am writing to ask you to please ask her on the University's behalf, to back off, and let me be. I only have three more weeks to finish my placement here. If she is unable or unwilling to change her response to this in a positive nature, is it possible for me to finish my student teaching semester as of January in a different school? I have spoken to my cooperating teacher about this, and she completely understands my position, and is very supportive of this option if needed (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06).
Patricia’s tone and use of strong language alerts the reader to the seriousness of her intent. While she begins and ends the letter in formal language reminiscent of a professional business letter, her frustrations lead her to implore her supervisor to advocate for her in less professional language that is emotionally charged. She is “sick of all of the unconstructive criticisms” and feels “badgered.” She begs the University to ask the principal to “back off.” While we might not agree with her choice of language or her tone, it is evident that she is upset. Further, Patricia did not tell me if she ever attempted to talk to the principal directly or in what ways she might have attempted to negotiate her relationship with her. She invokes the support of other teachers in the building, including her cooperating teacher, to gain her supervisor’s sympathy.

Discussion

How does Patricia’s narrative and the letter she crafted around it represent creative resistance? Throughout her life history, Patricia characterizes herself as a “transcultural bicultural creative agent” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Such children are described by scholars as able to do well in school, see parental authority as legitimate, learn Standard English, and easily communicate and make friends with members of their own ethnic group as well as students, teachers, employers, and colleagues of other backgrounds (p. 113). For example, Barbara describes Patricia as a fun and friendly person who “connects well with kids” and who has a “great attitude.” Patricia, however, represents herself as someone who “resists,” who doesn’t get along well with her peers, and who often feels like “everybody else is blue colored pencils and [she is] the red one.” Through the construction of stories like “In Your Face!” and others, she narrates acts of resistance that add layers to perceptions of her identity. Her emailed letter defending her choice of attire serves as a counterstory (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) through which she positions herself as a creative agent with the confidence and skills to act on her own behalf (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). In a way similar to earlier narratives, the letter shows how Patricia resists the negative images that are projected upon her as a Latina prospective teacher. Like one of the “powerful characters” invoked in earlier narratives, the principal is the central antagonist who issues the challenges that Patricia takes up and struggles against (M. L. Gomez, personal communication, September 5, 2006).

The stereotype that Patricia resists in her letter is that of the “Hispanic woman” as a “hot tamale” or “firebrand” who dresses in clothing that is too “flashy” (Ortiz Cofer, 2008), especially for a teacher. Weber and Mitchell (1996) interrogate the power that images of teachers hold over our collective subconscious, citing that when asked to draw themselves as teachers, prospective teachers in their study employed “certain conventional ways of portraying [their] physical appearance and clothing [as] most often women with shapeless bodies and their hair tied up in buns, wearing skirts, pearls and glasses” (p. 306). Regardless of her attire, with her “phenotypically Latina features” (Lopez, 2002) and long, black curly hair, Patricia does not “fit” the traditional image of schoolteachers in the U.S. Similarly, Rolon-Dow (2004) draws upon the intellectual work of feminists of color who assert that images and representations about women of color are powerful forms of domination and control. She describes “the power that images created by and about Puerto Rican girls hold in shaping their schooling experiences” (p. 8). In her study of interactions between white teachers and Latina students in a public middle school on the East Coast, she finds that the teachers are unable to see the girls as academically successful,
in part, due to the teachers’ overriding emphasis on the girls’ sexuality, as perceived by the teachers to be expressed in their ways of dressing.

In a similar way, the principal’s comments about Patricia’s way of dressing can be interpreted as a form of control. From Patricia’s perspective, she focuses on “petty criticisms” of Patricia’s appearance rather than acting as a mentor concerned with helping Patricia to develop as a successful teacher. I am not suggesting that how teachers dress is unimportant, nor that conversations about professional attire are not necessary between teacher mentors and student teachers. However, such conversations require cultural sensitivity and care. Instead, the principal’s lack of socio-political awareness (or perhaps her conscious decision not to consider the effects of her reprimand in the contexts of Patricia’s experiences as a Latina) reflects for Patricia a “dysconscious racism” (King, 1991) that permeates their interactions. According to King, dysconscious racism “denotes the limited and distorted understandings” we hold about cultural diversity and reflects “an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs)” (pp. 134-135). I believe it is also significant that Barbara does not refer to Patricia’s accusations of discrimination by the principal regarding her attire. While it is not clear why Barbara chooses to ignore the principal’s reprimand (at least in her conversations with me, a white female graduate student and representative of the university), her story provides an alternative perspective. However, by not acknowledging that negative stereotypes might play a role in the principal’s reprimand, she is able to hold fast to a color-blind perspective that denies Patricia the right to feel that she has been discriminated against.

Implications for Teacher Education

As a qualitative case study, this inquiry seeks to interpret the meanings of lived experience. Through such a perspective, this single key event and the narrative crafted in its telling can be seen to highlight the complexity of Patricia’s experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Furthermore, it delineates the ways in which culture and power intersect in classroom spaces (Darder, 1991) and demonstrates an example of the struggles faced by Latina teacher candidates within teacher education. This analysis also makes visible the ways in which prospective teachers’ experiences may influence their feelings about their teacher education program and also their sense of themselves as future educators. As Capps and Ochs (1995) state, “Along a life’s span we become the stories we tell about our lives” and “through a storytelling process” we reshape these identities in keeping with who we feel or hope ourselves and others to be at the moment (p. 14). Acts of discrimination like those experienced by Patricia occur daily in the lives of prospective teachers of color who are confronted with distorted reflections in the social mirror (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Patricia’s experience seems opposite to what should be happening in a teacher education program committed to social justice. Her experience reveals that there is a disconnect between teacher education programs and the practice setting of the schools in which student teachers are placed. However, mere judgments about who is “right” and who is “wrong” are not productive. We must focus on translating a social justice approach into the existing systematic environments of schools and a more complex understanding about the ways that human relationships and our perceptions of one another are informed by personal, professional and social identities and life experiences.

Patricia’s story of her journey into becoming a teacher represents a success story, especially in light of the current contexts of education for bilingual Latino students in the U.S.
and the accompanying lack of cultural diversity in the teaching force. Within the debate focusing on the whether or not (and how) diverse teachers’ beliefs and practices actually differ from those of Euro-American, middle-class teachers, little attention has been paid to the potential resources bilingual Latino prospective teachers bring to the crafting of their teaching or to the ways in which their professional identities are informed by their life experiences, including their experiences of oppression within the teacher education program itself. The findings of this study contribute to this discussion by highlighting the voice of one Latina prospective teacher who reveals the sometimes overt and sometimes “passive” and “invisible” racism (Marx, 2006) that frames her experiences in U.S. schools. I argue that it is essential to focus on the resources preservice teachers like Patricia bring to U.S. classrooms. Their narratives highlight the challenges they confront, but also the powerful ways that they resist. Narrative inquiry from a critical stance helps make visible the creative resistance and resourcefulness of culturally and linguistically diverse teacher candidates and strengthens our work to make teacher education more responsive to their strengths and needs.
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Associate Teacher Perspectives of the Triumvirate Relationship in Teacher Education: The Role of Faculty Advisors

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Abstract

The literature suggests that teacher candidates identify the field experience as a valued aspect of their pre-service education. In field experience, associate teachers are significant contributors to the success of the triumvirate relationship (associate teacher/teacher candidate/faculty advisor). A study was conducted using an anonymous questionnaire to explore, from the perspective of associate teachers, potential strategies and/or recommendations that may strengthen this relationship. The findings of the study, specifically related to the expectations concerning the role of the faculty advisor to support associate teachers, are presented. Reflective practice is discussed in terms of its relevance to the triumvirate relationship. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings in terms of strengthening the triumvirate relationship in teacher education.

Key words: pre-service teacher education; triumvirate; experiential learning; reflective practice; community of practice.

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Introduction

The field experience component of teacher education provides teacher candidates with the opportunity to link the pedagogical theory gained through faculty course instruction, with practical experiences in the classroom, thereby transforming knowledge into understanding as a core aspect of experiential learning in teacher education. Teacher candidates apply pedagogical theory gained in university curriculum as knowledge in practice in the classroom – as their praxis. Roberts (2003), in discussing Dewey’s *Experiential Learning Theory* suggests that “knowledge is what students learn from their experiences” (p. 5), and of particular significance to pre-service teacher education, is that this knowledge may be then applied in later (future) ‘real life’ situations. This ‘real life’ application of knowledge gained through experience in the classroom is of critical importance to teacher candidate efficacy in developing their teaching practice, and what is purported by Osterman (1990), is also necessary for the development of reflective practice. Osterman indicates that reflective practice may be instrumental in encouraging ‘constructed’ ways of knowing created through a process that integrates reflection with constructed knowledge, this process developed by way of systematic observation and deliberate analysis on the part of the learner.

Webb (2003), in defining learning asserts that there are two principal definitions of learning in terms of outcomes – specific results (objects or states of being), and that of an “activity or change” (p. 7) within the learner. Furthermore, Webb opines that Dewey’s (1938) definition of learning suggests that knowledge, or the application of said knowledge, is acquired through personal experience and derived within a social context to create meaning and behavioural outcomes. This definition melds well with the concept of ‘praxis’ in the experiential component of teacher education often referred to as the field experience. Further, this definition suggests that the application of skills and abilities, or practical experience linked with theoretical knowledge, creates meaning in terms of professional practice for teacher candidates in teacher education programs.

Webb (2003) shares a perspective of experiential learning theory as experience-based learning involving “four sequential operations performed on experience” (p. 22). She asserts that there are four modes of operation performed on experience representing differing structures and behaviours, including affective (concrete experiencing), perceptual (reflective observation), symbolic (abstract conceptualization), and behavioural (active experimentation). Webb refers to experience as meaning transformed through processes mediated by personal perception, or as the reflective process of a learner generating meaning through introspection and reflective practice. Furthermore, she purports that a dialectic tension exists between each “oppositional pair of modes” (p. 22), suggesting that structures and behaviours move to greater levels of complexity as a result of the “creative tensions” emanating from the “choices the individual makes in their assimilation and accommodation of experience” (p. 22). These modes or operations are germane to the field experience component of teacher education, particularly, the aspect of ‘reflective observation’.

Osterman (1990) points out that teacher education programs have incorporated the concepts of reflective practice in an effort to effectively develop professional skills in teacher candidates. She provides a definition of reflection as the “mindful consideration of one’s actions, specifically, one’s professional actions” (p. 134), in a dialectic process that links thought with action to enhance professional practice. This perspective of professional growth developed through experience which is *mediated* through reflection to influence behaviour, closely mirrors...
the process of ‘reflective observation’ that Webb (2003) notes as a mode of experiential learning theory. Furthermore, Osterman states that:

Reflective practice redefines both the concept of learning, and the role of the learner in the learning process. By emphasizing the importance of both personal experience and ideas, reflective practice establishes the importance of theory, but counsels against the study of theory in isolation from practice. Recognizing that the search for knowledge begins with experience and that no learning takes place unless the learner is both involved in and transformed by the learning process, reflective practice also emphasizes that the practitioner is central to the learning process (p. 142).

Schön (1989) contends that learning in a professional context such as teaching requires that the learner or practitioner reflect on their knowing, or what he refers to as “reflect-in-action” (p. 6). And furthermore, Schön opines that reflective practicums, as an integrative approach to learning in a profession, would allow the learner the time to “unlearn initial expectations, to master the practice, and to shift repeatedly back and forth between reflection on and in action” (p. 9), or in other words, to become “proficient at a kind of reflection-in-action” (p. 8). This reflection of knowing in-practice has significance in terms of ‘praxis’ in teacher education which is the application of knowledge, skills, and abilities developed within a meaningful context or learning environment (the classroom), and facilitated through the mentorship and coaching provided by associate teachers. The associate teacher role may be defined as Clarke (2001) suggests, as a professional role that encompasses teacher education as part of its daily responsibility. Within the professional learning context of the field experience component of teacher education, the associate teacher plays a pivotal role as a member of a triumvirate relationship.

The triumvirate relationship in teacher education may be described as a learning partnership amongst three members: the associate teacher, the teacher candidate, and the faculty advisor. The success of this professional relationship may rest significantly on the facility of the associate teacher to coach, mentor, facilitate and supervise teacher candidates in their development as teaching professionals (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). However, it is also important to note Clarke’s (2001) assertion that there has been a significant shift in the academy in recent years towards the recognition of the importance of the “roles of teacher educator and scholar” as “one and the same” (p. 610) in the burgeoning field of study – teacher education. In light of this, it is important to consider Osterman’s (1990) contention that universities play an important function in fostering reflective practice in teacher education, and which may be argued, is an essential component in the development of a community of practice in teacher education.

Wenger and Snyder (2000) state that the purpose of a community of practice is to “…develop members’ capabilities; to build and exchange knowledge” (p. 142), and that furthermore, the dynamic nature of a community of practice involves a reciprocal approach to learning on the part of all the participants. Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman and Stevens (2009) assert that approaches to teacher education that integrate theory and practice through the pre-service experience, also assist in the development of the knowledge and skills necessary in a professional community of educators. Therefore, a community of practice in teacher education may involve aspects of co-learning in a teaching community which affords the members of the triumvirate (associate teacher, teacher candidate, faculty) with what Wenger and Snyder identify as an opportunity to actively share experiences and knowledge in creative ways. They indicate
that, “communities of practice generate knowledge, they renew themselves” (p. 143), which is congruent with Schön’s (1989) perspective of reflective practice as involving practitioners “knowing-in-practice” (p. 6), or reflecting on practice in the midst of doing. Therefore, as Johnson (2006) contends, learning in a community of practice is not the straightforward acquisition of skills and abilities, but rather a process of “progressive movement from external, socially mediated activity to internal meditational control by individual learners, which results in the transformation of both the self and the activity” (p. 238).

Although much research has been conducted regarding the practicum or field experience component of teacher education (Beck & Kosnik, 2000, 2002; Duquette, 1996; Faire, 1994; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Goodnough, et al., 2009; Joong, 2007; Macdonald, Baker & Stewart, 1995; Neil, 1993; Roth, Masciotra, Boyd, 1999), a study was conducted using an anonymous online questionnaire to investigate, from the perspective of associate teachers, how they would define their role, what supports the faculty could provide to them to meet the expectations of their role, and the benefits and disadvantages for associate teachers of having a teacher candidate in their classroom. This article will present the findings of this study relevant to what associate teachers’ perceptions are of the supports university faculty may provide the associate teacher in meeting the expectations of the associate/mentor role.

The Study

Participants

The sample population for the study was comprised of 947 associate teachers employed with three school boards; these school boards routinely participate in the field experience component of the faculty of education pre-service teacher education program by hosting teacher candidates in their schools. There were 134 respondents to the online anonymous survey questionnaire – approximately 14.2% of the sample. The sex of participants was identified by 67.2% of the respondents as 31.1% male and 68.9% female. The mean number of years of teaching experience was reported as 12.7 years by 67.2% of the respondents. Participation in the field experience component of the teacher education program was reported by 67.9% of the respondents as 60.4% (0-5 years of experience), 27.5% (6-10 years experience), and 12.1% (11 or more years of experience). Research ethics clearance was obtained from the university, as well as all participating school boards to conduct research using an anonymous online survey during the spring of 2008.

Method

An anonymous online survey, the Associate Teacher Feedback: Anonymous & Confidential Questionnaire, was developed to investigate associate teacher perceptions concerning their role as an associate teacher; the support that the faculty advisor may be able to provide the associate teacher, and finally, recommendations from associate teachers concerning strategies to strengthen the triumvirate relationship between teacher candidate/associate teacher/faculty advisor, from the perspective of associate teachers. The survey questions were developed and adapted from the studies conducted by Beck & Kosnik (2000, 2002), Duquette (1996), Faire (1994), Joong (2007), Macdonald et al. (1995), and Neil (1993).
**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was constructed in three sections to obtain associate teachers’ perspectives concerning: 1) the expectations of the role of an associate teacher; 2) the role of the faculty advisor to support the associate teacher in their role; and 3) the benefits/disadvantages for associate teachers of having a teacher candidate in their classroom. The survey instrument utilized a variety of questioning styles to encourage response from associate teachers including, open-ended questions that invited associate teachers to share their thoughts and insights regarding their role, questions that asked associate teachers to rank order variables in terms of importance and/or support, and questions that asked associate teachers to respond to 5-point Likert scale questions indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements. Associate teachers were given the choice of completing the whole questionnaire at one time or answering the questionnaire by sections and returning at a later time/date to complete the entire questionnaire. All associate teacher responses to this questionnaire were anonymous.

The next section of this article will present the findings of the study, specifically the second section of the survey in which the participants, associate teachers, reported how they perceived faculty advisors could support them in meeting the expectations of their role in the field experience component of the teacher education program.

**Findings**

The second section of the anonymous questionnaire was designed to inquire, from the perspective of associate teachers, what their expectations were concerning the role of the faculty advisor. The first question in this section was open-ended and asked associate teachers to elaborate on what their expectations were concerning the role of the university faculty advisor. The response from associate teachers to this question was categorized as three kinds of support: 1) that of the advisor as a counsel for the teacher candidate and/or the associate teacher, 2) the advisor as a liaison or intermediary in the triumvirate relationship, and 3) the advisor as an assessor of teacher candidate progress and growth as a future member of the teaching profession. In describing these categories of faculty advisor support I cited the associate teachers’ responses to provide a nuanced understanding, and to clarify the reasons behind their points of view.

The category of support identifying the faculty advisor as counsel for both associate teacher and teacher candidate is illustrated in the following statements shared by associate teachers concerning their expectations of the faculty advisor:

To support teacher candidate and associate teacher; to advise and counsel.

An advisor should be in consultation with the associate on strengths, weaknesses and next steps (more than once during a placement).

[To be] an anchor for the student teacher.

A person who guides and mentors the teacher candidate. Similar to associate teacher.

To work with teacher candidates that are having difficulty and provide more one-on-one time to get them ready for their practicum.
To observe a student teacher on behalf of the university, to be another set of eyes on the student teacher’s progress besides the associate, to offer advice to both the associate and student, to give the university’s perspective on the classroom.

The next category of support characterized the faculty advisor as a liaison or intermediary and is indicated in the following statements that were shared by associate teachers:

To oversee the evolution of the teacher candidate and to act as an intermediary should any difficulties in the associate/student teacher relationship arise.

The role of the advisor is to make sure everything is running smoothly between the associate and the teacher candidate.

To have regular contact with both candidate and associate, and support both.

The faculty advisor should have greater contact with the associate to address any issues immediately. They help identify if the candidate ‘fits’ into the teaching situation.

To guide and advise the candidate, but also to speak to me regarding what the advisor would like me to do to help the candidate. What areas need reinforcing? He or she may see something that I have missed.

To support and encourage the student teacher, giving feedback and pointers when needed. To listen to an associate teacher’s feedback and concerns, and when needed, to help the student teacher and associate to mediate and to set goals to improve the student teacher’s teaching prowess.

They need to be the middle ‘person.’ They need to know what the faculty expects and the associate teacher expects, and if for some reason the candidate isn’t getting that picture, the advisor needs to make it clear to them. I feel that the advisor needs to be close at hand to each associate teacher.

Associate teachers also identified a category of support characterizing the advisor as an ‘assessor’ evaluating the teacher candidate’s progress. The following statements were shared by associate teachers which illustrate this category of support:

The faculty advisor should observe the candidate teach a lesson and converse with the associate on the progress of the candidate. They should assess the candidate’s knowledge of the curriculum they are to teach.

…meet with candidates a reasonable number of times to discuss placements, give ideas and support, observe them in their placements, and discuss their progress with associates.
My expectations are that the faculty advisor is there to advise and evaluate the candidate based on the candidate’s performance with respect to what they have been taught at the faculty.

To be accessible should there be problems in the candidate’s placement. To observe the candidates in their teaching roles and provide relevant feedback. To assist those candidates who are struggling with certain aspects of their placement. To provide feedback to the associate and their expectations of candidates should there be a huge difference of opinion.

They [faculty advisors,] see their candidates in different settings and have a better idea if the candidate is weak or strong all the time or just in one specific setting. On the other hand, the advisor only sees the candidate one period of possibly a one month placement and should therefore find out what the classroom teacher has to say about a candidate. Sometimes a candidate may have a bad lesson or an exceptionally good lesson, and the advisor and associate should have time to share their opinions to come to a more accurate assessment of the individual candidate.

To assess the teacher candidate’s progress at specific points throughout the year.

I would suggest that these approaches to faculty advisor support for the associate teacher as counsel, liaison, and assessor, are indicative of supporting a mentoring/coaching model of consultation and collaboration in teacher education. It is important when reviewing the findings of this study concerning associate teacher expectations of the faculty advisor, to consider that associate teachers in this study indentified two conceptualizations of the associate teacher role as either that of a mentor, characterized as an associate who models, coaches and nurtures the success of teacher candidates in a reciprocal learning process, or that of an associate teacher as an experiential learning specialist who provides the teacher candidate, as an apprentice, with the opportunity to experience the ‘realities’ of the classroom by providing the candidate with the necessary pedagogical techniques and skills. These conceptualizations are somewhat similar to the broad conceptions Beck and Kosnik (2000) discuss as the “critical interventionist model” (p. 208) described as a reciprocal learning and team teaching approach which incorporates associate feedback and intervention for teacher candidate improvement; and the “practical initiation model” (p. 208) which suggests a practical initiation or apprenticeship model of teacher education. The orientation of associate teachers toward either a mentor/coaching model versus an apprenticeship model in the field experience component is significant, because as Goodfellow and Sumson (2000) suggest, field experience involves learning “how to be a teacher rather than simply learning to do the work of a teacher” (p. 247).

Associate teachers, in addition to elaborating on their expectations concerning categories of support, were also asked to rank the support that advisors could provide to them during the field experience component. Specifically, as listed below, associate teachers were asked to rank the following factors in terms of how supportive they were to associate teachers:

- faculty advisors collaborating with associate teachers to clarify the goals of the pre-service program;
• the availability of the faculty advisor for consultation, particularly when a teacher candidate has been identified as ‘at risk’;
• providing opportunities for associate teachers to become involved with initiatives that support school development;
• the faculty advisor providing timely correspondence along with contact information and a suggested schedule for classroom visits;
• frequent classroom visits by the faculty advisor;
• the faculty advisor stressing the importance of professional conduct on the part of the teacher candidate;
• providing opportunities for associate teacher involvement in the Bachelor of Education admission process; and
• ‘other’ factor(s) as identified by the associate teacher participant.

The findings of the study indicate the following as the two factors ranked as most supportive by associate teachers: the first factor was identified as the availability of the faculty advisor for consultation, particularly when teacher candidates are struggling; and the second factor identified as most supportive, was the faculty advisor ensuring that teacher candidates are prepared and knowledgeable concerning the need for professionalism both in the classroom and in the school community. Next, in rank order, associate teachers identified the need for advisors to ensure timely communication with them. This was clearly articulated in this associate teacher’s comment, “We need their [faculty advisor’s] contact information before students enter! We should not have to track them down. An introductory letter would help with a little bit of information about them.” Ranked fourth in terms of the level of support for associate teachers, was the need for frequent classroom visits on the part of faculty advisors. The ability of associate teachers to collaborate in the development of goals for the pre-service teacher education program was ranked next. The associate teacher participants ranked the following as the least supportive factors that advisors could provide them: associate teacher involvement in the admission process, and associate teacher involvement with initiatives that support school development.

In this study, associate teachers clearly articulated their expectations surrounding a need for stronger ties with faculty, for opportunities to consult and collaborate, particularly with faculty advisors. Roth and Boyd (1999) refer to ‘coparticipation in practice’ as a method that fosters competency in a teaching-learning environment and suggest that what makes practitioners competent in this context, is that the knowledge gained is done so through coparticipation with competent others, in a community of practice. The research conducted by Roth et al. (1999) underscores the importance of relationship building between university and school partners, emphasizing learning through co-teaching to build relationships based on mutual understanding and making the linkages between theory and practice as praxis in teacher education. Similarly, the findings of research conducted by Larson and Goebel (2008) stresses that co-learning opportunities developed through a partnership between the school and the university may facilitate the theory-to-practice connection for teacher candidates. Roth and Boyd claim that teaching, tied with the ‘in the classroom’ experience, makes possible the development of active knowlegeability, what they claim is, “…a form of embodied knowing acquired in praxis” (p. 65). The findings clearly articulate the need for consultation and collaboration amongst the members of the triumvirate, associate teacher/teacher candidate/faculty advisor. Of particular importance in strengthening this relationship was the need identified for closer ties between the associate teacher and the faculty advisor.
Discussion and Implications

The study findings indicated that associate teacher participants characterized the support of faculty advisors as that of counsellor for themselves as well as teacher candidates, liaison or intermediary in the triumvirate partnership, and that of an assessor of teacher candidates’ professional growth. Furthermore, the findings underscored this fact by confirming that associate teachers would welcome closer connections with faculty advisors in terms of more frequent visits to their classrooms, and greater opportunities to conference with advisors concerning teacher candidate progress as future members of the profession. Beck and Kosnik (2000) assert that there is a need to not only clarify the role and expectations of associate teachers (as investigated in the current study), but also a need to ensure that teacher education programs are working in concert with associate teachers in the field. By strengthening ties with associate teachers as partners in the teacher education process, connections between theory and practice may be better clarified for teacher candidates.

The connection and integration of theory and practice in teacher education may be facilitated by sharing ideas and insights through the development of a community of practice with members of the triumvirate relationship. This community of practice would support, value, and integrate the theoretical knowledge obtained by teacher candidates through university instruction, with the working knowledge (pedagogy) they gain in field experience (Viskovic, 2006). However, He (2009) cautions that while a community of practice in teacher education programs may create environmental conditions conducive to learning, the “mere presence in social activities does not guarantee learning to happen. Individuals have to elect to participate and construct their understandings through participation” (p. 154). Therefore, it may be argued that a professional community of practice in teacher education must involve the active engagement of all members of the triumvirate relationship in reflective practice.

Osterman (1990) refers to reflective practice as a process which promotes professional growth through change, involving not only reflective practice, but also agency as in the ability to take action and create change. She states that, “through reflection, professionals develop ideas about how to do things more effectively, and they transform these ideas into action” (p. 145). This reflective aspect of professional learning has implications for all the members of the triumvirate relationship in terms of the promotion of organizational leadership and educational reform brought about through processes that foster critical thinking and analysis. Osterman contends that reflective practice must emphasize the importance of theory and ideas, as well as experience and reflection:

….reflective practice challenges educators to become personally and actively involved in the creation of better schools. It challenges them to examine the ideas which shape schools and to actively engage in reconstructing that reality. Without restructuring the underlying mindscapes, restructuring of schools will not occur. (p. 151)

And yet, in her statement she counters that within the school structure, to facilitate educational reform, there needs to be greater support and valuing of the professional development of associate teachers:

We espouse the view that one becomes a skilled practitioner through an ongoing process of experience, reflection, and experimentation, but our actions contradict our
words….There is little open discussion of problems, and only a few instances of collaborative problem-solving efforts….Instead of recognizing that so many of the important problems confronted by schools are shaped by social reality, we continue to view problems as individual deficiencies. (Osterman, 1990, p. 147)

Given this, and as Osterman (1990) asserts, universities may play a key role in fostering reflective professional practice; reflective practice to create an environment that invites consultation and collaboration with which to critically examine the social reality of the classroom and then to transform ideas into actions. Consultation and collaborative initiatives between the university and their school partners may take the form of action research, professional development for associate teachers hosted by the faculty, in-service courses specifically related to defining the expectations of the associate teacher role, and online learning communities that provide information such as faculty pre-service curriculum as well as opportunities for discussion amongst associate teachers and faculty to jointly share ideas and insights.

Therefore within a community of practice, the triumvirate relationship in the field experience component of teacher education may provide an opportunity to encourage reflective practice, and to promote active consultation and collaboration between the associate teacher and the faculty advisor as a representative of the university, and between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate as the future generation of the teaching profession. As Viskovic (2006) asserts in discussing the concept of community of practice, “participation in a community has implications for understanding and supporting learning” (p. 326), and that, “for communities, learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members” (p. 326). These perspectives are congruent with the findings of this study in which an associate teacher stated that one of the expectations of the faculty advisor is, “to ensure our educational system is getting the best possible future teachers.” These perspectives highlight the need for adopting reflective practice and reciprocal approaches to learning in the field experience component of teacher education.

In conclusion, I would suggest that faculty advisors have a pivotal role to play in strengthening the triumvirate relationship through the encouragement of reflective practice amongst the members of this learning partnership. This relationship may yield benefits not only for the future of the teaching profession, but also for the educational system through the creation of a learning environment which actively and critically examines what constitutes effective and professional teaching practice.
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Pre-service Elementary Generalist Teachers’ Past Experiences in Elementary Physical Education and Influence of these Experiences on Current Beliefs

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Abstract

A lack of formal training in physical education leave pre-service generalist teachers little choice but to remember their past experiences for lesson ideas. Past experiences as elementary students may shape what and how pre-service generalists will teach. This study explored the past experiences of pre-service generalists teachers and the extent those experiences shape what they see as the purposes for elementary physical education. Findings indicate past experiences can influence current views. The implications for teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: elementary generalist teachers, physical education, teacher beliefs, past experiences
Pre-service Elementary Generalist Teachers’ Past Experiences in Elementary Physical Education and Influence of these Experiences on Current Beliefs

Elementary physical education has undergone a number of changes in recent years due in large part to financial constraints, the marginalized status of physical education by government and school officials, and lack of qualified personnel (Hardman & Marshall, 2000). More specifically, specialists in elementary physical education are not readily hired and more generalist teachers are responsible for teaching physical education (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2009; Cameron, Wolfe, & Craig, 2007; NASPE & AHA, 2006). This is often very difficult for generalists as they have little background in formal movement training. In teacher education programs the requirements range from no requirement to one required three credit hour methods and/or content course, or left as an elective (Ashy & Humphries, 2002; Faucette & Patterson, 1989). This is problematic because more generalists are teaching a subject area in which they are often ill prepared (DeCorby, Halas, Dixon, Wintrup, & Janzen, 2005; Morgan & Hansen, 2008). Hours of planning and in-service sessions may help to overcome this shortcoming (Faucette, Nugent, Sallis, & McKenzie, 2002) but such programs are not always available. Also, when provincial, regional, or government testing requirements focus on subjects such as math, language arts, and science, the classroom teacher is more likely to spend his/her limited planning time in the content areas for which there is more public accountability. With limited time available for physical education planning, and limited background knowledge in the subject area (DeCorby et al., 2005), the generalist teacher often has little choice but to attempt to recall his/her own past memories and personal experiences in physical education classes for lesson ideas (Barney & Deutsch, 2009).

Past experiences shape teachers’ beliefs about teaching, influence what they teach, how they teach, and what they believe their future students should know and be able to do (Pajares, 1992; Ryan, Bridges & Yerg, 2000). Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching and what teachers do are formulated several years before they even begin a teacher education program. From the moment students enter a classroom around the age of five, they begin a process known as ‘professional socialization’ (Pooley, 1975). Professional socialization refers to “the process whereby the recruit comes to learn about and internalize the culture of the profession he [sic] has elected to enter” (Pooley, 1975, p. 99). This period of time is also referred to as anticipatory socialization (Burlingame, 1972), the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), recruitment (Dewar, 1989), and pre-training (Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

Research examining the beliefs and socialization of pre-service teachers has been conducted in physical education teacher education for the past three decades. Early research found that a custodial orientation toward teaching is often present in that physical education majors are more likely to reproduce and preserve the physical education programs they experienced rather than attempt to change or transform them (Lawson, 1983). Later research found that physical education majors have established, well formed beliefs about teaching and teaching physical education (Doolittle, Dodds, & Placek, 1993; Placek, Dodds, Doolittle, Portman, Ratliffe, & Pinkman, 1995) and tend to select teaching physical education as a career choice based on past experiences (Hutchinson,1993). More recently, these findings have been confirmed (Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009).

The literature is replete with information regarding the beliefs about physical education held by pre-service teachers majoring in physical education; however little is known about the physical education beliefs held by pre-service generalist teachers. The importance of examining
the beliefs and prior experiences of future teachers is important (Barney & Pleban, 2006; Morgan & Bourke, 2008) because prior beliefs and experiences appear to strongly influence and perpetuate the reproduction of traditional programs, sidelaying or negating the potential positive influence that teacher education programs can provide (Ashy & Humphries, 2000; Curtner-Smith, 2007; Xiang, Lowy, & McBride, 2002). It could be hypothesized that pre-service generalists would also hold a similar custodial orientation of physical education. Indeed, with the number of generalist teachers expected to teach physical education it would not be surprising to learn that many of them base their perceptions of physical education on past experiences. Such perceptions can influence what they see as the purpose for physical education which can impact how they teach the subject. To that end, researchers have begun to more deeply explore pre-service generalists’ attitudes toward, and beliefs about, the purposes of physical education (Morgan, 2008; Ryan, Bridges, & Yerg, 2000).

Research (Randall & Maeda, 2003) has found that many pre-service generalist teachers reported having both positive and negative physical education experiences. When asked to recall past elementary physical education experiences, a number of participants vividly recalled fitness testing where only a select few excelled and enjoyed the experience, while a greater number failed and were publicly embarrassed by their performance. Few recalled any “teaching” but plenty of “playing”. Hence the continued perception by many that no learning occurs in physical education. Other researchers (Ashy & Humphries, 2000; Hart, 2005; Weinberg, Petrillo, Doering, Lund, & Rowe, 2000; Xiang, Lowy, & McBride, 2002) have examined the effects of an elementary physical education methods course on attitudes and beliefs about teaching physical education. All of the studies reported the effectiveness of one elementary methods course. Findings include, but are not limited to: raising knowledge of skills, heightened awareness about its importance, more appreciation for the demands of teaching physical education, and positively changing initial attitudes toward physical education. Concomitantly, though awareness for the importance and demands of teaching physical education were increased, participants were still hesitant in their willingness to teach physical education (Morgan, 2008; Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Xiang, et. al., 2002). Participants reported that they had no personal interest in physical education, felt incompetent and not confident about teaching good lessons, and considered the physical education environment to be undesirable. Faucette and Patterson, (1989) and Morgan and Hansen (2008) found similar findings in their research with in-service generalist teachers.

Though one methods course in elementary physical education can positively affect how pre-service generalist teachers view physical education, the influence of past experiences on current beliefs about the purposes of physical education has not yet been examined. Physical education (Doolittle, Dodds, & Placek, 1993; Hutchinson, 1993; Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Morgan & Hansen, 2008; Placek et al., 1995; Stran & Curtner-Smith, 2009) and general education (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Leavy, McSorley, & Bote, 2007; Pajares, 1992) researchers have reported that past experiences can influence pre-service teachers’ beliefs about subjects and teaching that subject, act as filters for all incoming information, and are difficult to change. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe the past physical education experiences of pre-service generalists teachers and the extent to which those experiences shape what they see as purposes for elementary physical education. Findings from this study may contribute to more effective use of limited instructional time by considering the current beliefs about the purposes of teaching elementary physical education held by pre-service generalist teachers, and attempting to replace or eradicate misconceptions.
Methods

Participants and Settings

Participants (N=54) were from two classes of elementary education pre-service teachers enrolled in a required three-credit physical education methods class (28 students in one class; 26 students in the second class). The course was the only exposure to physical education content and pedagogy pre-service generalist teachers would receive. It was specifically intended for generalist teachers and as such, the course was an introduction to both the content and basic pedagogical practices of elementary physical education. The degree students were completing at the time was a post-degree, two-year Bachelor of Education program offered at a university in Eastern Canada. Ethics approval from the university research ethics committee was received.

Informed consent was received from all 54 participants (13 males and 41 females). Participants ranged in age from 20-38 years. The mean age of the males was 26.25 years with a range of 22 to 38 years. All males were Caucasian. The mean age of the females was 24.58 years with a range of 20 to 43 years. One female was Asian and the remaining Caucasian.

On the first day of class, the instructor, also one of the study’s researchers, informed the participants of the study. Also in the room during this discussion was another instructor. This second instructor was a secondary methods instructor whom participants in the class would never meet in the program. After a description of the study was provided, participants were encouraged to ask questions about the study and were assured that their acceptance or refusal to participate would in no way affect their grade as the instructor would be unaware of who agreed to participate until after all grades were submitted. They were also informed they could withdraw their consent for use of their data in the study at any time simply by contacting the appropriate secretary. Once there were no further questions, the researcher left the room, and the second instructor passed out the informed consent forms. Students had another opportunity to ask questions with the researcher absent. According to the instructor in the room, no questions were asked. After students read the consent form one student collected the forms, sealed them in an envelope and gave them to the Associate Dean of undergraduate students’ secretary. This is the person whom faculty submit their grades at the end of term. At the completion of the term, when the instructor handed in the final grades for the course, the secretary provided the researcher with the consent forms. All students had signed the consent forms (100% participation).

Data Sources and Analyses

As part of their regular course work, class participants were required to complete the ‘Personal Reflections of PE’ questionnaire which was an assignment that asked participants to recall and reflect upon their past experiences with physical education and their concerns with having to teach physical education in the future. The questions had been pilot tested with two groups of similar students the previous year. Participants were first asked,

In the very near future, you will be responsible for teaching physical education to your students. What do you believe is/are the most important purposes of elementary physical education? That is, what do you think should be taught or what do you want your students to learn?

Once all participants had answered the question, they were then provided with a series of questions that asked them to recall their past K-12 physical education experiences. For example,
the first question asked participants to clearly explain and provide examples of their own elementary physical education experiences. They were asked to specify what stood out, who taught physical education, frequency and length of classes and if they were taught skills. Statements about feelings they had about their performance in relation to their peers were also requested. Participants were provided class time and were encouraged to talk with classmates to facilitate recall. Following informal, in-class discussion with classmates, participants were then given a week to provide detailed written answers to the questions. Pilot work revealed that the longer students had to respond, the more likely it was that class content influenced their answers. For example, during pilot work, the researchers noticed that following a discussion on appropriate games at the elementary level, participants’ comments mirrored statements found in readings and those provided in class. The one-week turnaround time was short enough to minimize the effect course content had on their memories and beliefs but long enough to allow for enough reflection to provide complete and detailed written answers.

Since the assignment was a course requirement, students were required to submit their work within one week of the first day of class. After an initial read and check of their work (graded as complete or incomplete) the assignments were returned and where necessary, students were asked to clarify or provide more complete responses, and re-submit. Following this, the instructor presented the commonalities and differences amongst the assignments. The content from this discussion served as an introduction to a number of course topics, for example, appropriate practices. Since it was unknown to the researcher which students had previously provided consent, these discussions could not be used as data but they did help inform the data during analysis.

After final grades were submitted, both researchers formally reviewed all of the data. Inductive analysis and constant comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used to analyze the data. Initially one participant’s data set was read multiple times by both researchers independently. At this point, the researchers independently began to identify key phrases, sentences and ideas. A discussion was held where the researchers would share their initial thoughts and findings. Loose categories of ideas were initially created. The same procedure was carried out with two more data sets. With each additional data set, the researchers began to further develop their categories and began to talk about recurring themes that were emerging. As more and more data sets were reviewed, the data were constantly compared between the emerging categories and themes. Throughout the process, categories were expanded and others were modified. After this initial process was complete, a lengthy discussion ensued whereby the researchers semi-finalized their themes and the categories of which each was comprised. Then an additional independent reading of the data occurred, the intent of which was to ensure the themes were representative of the data. This continued until the researchers were satisfied that the categories and ideas contained within them, reflected the data.

Other categories specifically developed included number of physical education classes per week, the length of class, whether participants were taught by a generalist or specialist teacher, type of assessment, and enjoyment of class.

Findings

The findings are based on the written responses provided by the participants. This section is divided into five themes: a) background experiences, b) memories of enjoyment, c) past
experiences, d) current beliefs about the purposes of elementary physical education, and e) influence of past experiences on current beliefs.

Background Experiences

The majority (72%) of participants in this study had a physical education specialist during their elementary school experiences. Most of the participants (95%) also reported having had regularly scheduled physical education classes. Classes ranged from once a week for 20 minutes to 3-4 times a week for 40 minutes. In describing why her classes were not held regularly, one participant stated, “I remember that if we were not quiet or did not lineup at the door correctly, our class was quickly taken away and we would do more math”. As another participant described:

I remember in elementary school, a specialist in the gymnasium taught us. All of our classes were co-ed for the most part. We covered units on: health, nutrition, stretching, gymnastics and the usual sports such as badminton, soccer, basketball, kick ball and obstacle courses. Phys.ed classes took place in the school gym and usually happened on odd or even days (3-4 times a week for about 40min).

Memories of Enjoyment

During the elementary years, many participants expressed having enjoyed physical education regardless of their level of competence. Below are two quotes representative of those participants who enjoyed their earlier experiences:

Throughout my elementary years I enjoyed gym class for the most part. I was not the “sportiest” but I did participate a lot and enjoy myself. I guess I would have been about average in relation to others in my classes.

Another student offered the following memory of enjoying elementary physical education:

I remember having Phys Ed practically everyday, either in the form of games, gymnastics, square dancing. It was more like organized play or a good way to release energy. I always thought it was fun and a good break from the regular sit down activities of school. I did not consider myself one of the most physically agile students in the class as I was small and younger than most.

Although many participants recalled positive experiences, there were some students who shared some negative memories. What was interesting was that written descriptions of their memories of the negative experiences were much more detailed and appeared more reflective in nature than those provided when participants shared their positive experiences. A male participant provided the following comment:

When I think of my elementary years, with physical education in particular, I remember a game of musical chairs. There were two of us competing for one chair, when the music went off, I lost. The class claps and cheers. I was raised not to "to push or to hit". I was taught not to be aggressive, and I find that sports require aggression. I was taught not to feel pride over another's loss. I sucked in Physical education. Sports takes aggressive people who do not mind winning over someone else's loss. As you have probably guessed by now, I did not like the competitive nature of physical education very much. But the ironic thing is, that, when I got home, some friends and I would play the same sports, baseball, hockey, soccer, tag, without all the pressure of winning and I enjoyed it. Don't
get me wrong, we enjoyed winning, but the pressure was not the same. We did not have the embarrassing moments of ridicule in a public forum. There were laughs and chuckles, and some embarrassing moments, but it was fun. We were not led by a coach scouting for skilled players for his/her team. Other than that I do not remember much about physical education.

The participants’ memories of their past physical education experiences ranged from positive to negative in relation to the extent to which they enjoyed their classes. The negative or positive experiences were independent of perceived ability.

Past Experiences

Four main categories of experiences emerged from the participants’ responses to questions about their past experiences. These included, play, skill learning, fitness and break. A frequency table of responses can be found in Table 1.

The largest category by far was the Play category. Here participants listed a number of games or activities they played, or wrote about playing various games with no indication that any instruction occurred. In one example:

Thinking back to my elementary experiences, I have to admit that I don’t remember a lot, it’s been a long time. But I do recall enjoying going to the gym. I liked my teachers and the chance to play. Phys. Ed. felt more like playing than anything. For example, we played tag and had a lot of free time to play whatever we chose. So it was more like a recess than a class.

The category Skill Learning includes comments where students specifically stated they were taught skills. The following are two examples of comments that fell into this category:

It was probably grades four-six before the teacher introduced basketball, baseball, volleyball and badminton. I remember learning to dribble the basketball and kick the soccer ball. We learned how to dribble in one spot, while moving, with our eyes on the ball and then away from the ball. When we actually tried to play a game of basketball, I always found it really hard and I never really enjoyed it. I think on it now and realize I probably had to concentrate on too many things happening in the game concurrently that were never practiced.

Another student recalled:

I remember learning various skills e.g., basketball-learning how to dribble; badminton-learning the handshake. I use to like to play badminton. I hated going over the serve, because I couldn’t serve properly. But I remember her encouraging to serve the proper way.

The Fitness category includes comments that specifically talked about fitness testing or fitness related activities. A number of participants reported participating in the Canada Fitness test. For example, one participant stated, “A big thing that stands out is attempting to complete those physical activity charts with the different tasks, and classifications depending on your outcomes in each event (gold, silver, bronze.).” Other participants recalled negative memories related to the same event, for example, “We would have to participate in Canada Fitness once a year, which I thought was awful because if you did not get a gold or an excellent everyone knew and it was embarrassing.”

There were several comments that related to physical education being about a ‘break’ from the regular day for another recess. The comment made by the following participant is a
representative example of the types of comments that can be found in this category: “My
overriding impression of elementary school physical education was that it was an extension of
recess where the girls played skip and elastics (no teacher needed) while the boys played
baseball.”

**Current Beliefs of the Purposes of Physical Education**

Current beliefs at the elementary level were investigated as this would be the level at which these
participants would be teaching upon graduation from their teacher education program.
Participants were asked a series of questions that probed what they believed were the most
important outcomes for elementary physical education. Here five categories emerged. These
were, social learning, lifetime activity, skill learning, safety, and enjoyment. A frequency table of
responses can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
*Past and Current Beliefs About the Purposes of Physical Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Experiences</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Current Beliefs</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill Learning</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Lifetime Activity</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Fitness</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Skill Learning</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Learning**

The largest category was the social learning category. Included in the ‘social learning’
category were statements that expressed the importance of encouraging students, teaching them
to work together, and teaching respect for one another. A representative example of statements
that were included in this category follows:

I think that some of the basic things that I would want to teach would be positive attitudes
towards exercise and learning, cooperation with others, and a sense of fair play. I think
that building self-confidence, self-esteem, providing opportunities for exercise and to
learn new skills are some of the main goals of physical education instruction. I think that
promoting a positive attitude and helping to build self-esteem are important because I
always had a low self-esteem…I really think that good sportsmanship (the ability to work
with others and a good sense of fair play) is something that should be instructed
throughout all grades. I think that as students get older it is important to emphasize this area to help make students feel comfortable regardless of their skill level.

**Lifetime Activity**

When recalling their past experiences many participants recalled memories about fitness testing, hence the category discussed in the previous section. Yet, when thinking about the future, participants never mentioned incorporating fitness testing into their lessons but rather about preparing students for a lifetime of activity. Thus, ‘lifetime activity’ is a broad category that includes fitness, not in the sense of a test, but as it relates to overall health and a lifetime of healthy activity. The following two quotes are examples of statements found in this category:

> Physical education has the potential to have a huge impact on people and how they decide to live their lives. For example, if a child is taught about the importance of physical activity and informed on the different ways of staying physically fit, this attitude will carry over outside of school and this child will grow up to be healthier and happier than a person who may not practice physical fitness.

Similarly, another student stated:

> It is a concern that all of my students live an active and happy lifestyle. In order for this to happen, I need to make my students aware of the benefits and how to maintain an active life. If more people are physically fit, it not only has an effect on that one individual, but also on everyone around them.

**Skill Learning**

A number of participants provided comments that specifically addressed the teaching of skills. Thus the category ‘skill learning’ is similar to the category in past experiences and its emergence under current beliefs suggests participants believed that skill development is an important part of physical education. The quote below is representative of the types of comments found in this category:

> For the most part, I would like to focus on building up solid skills (dribbling, throwing, catching, running, etc) with the children, as opposed to teaching them a little bit and then putting them in a game. I think that having solid skills in sports and a good knowledge of the rules is important because, if some kids don’t get it now, it’s only going to get worse for them later on in their physical education classes.

**Safety**

A fourth category was labeled ‘safety’. A number of participants were thinking ahead about their future students’ safety. A number of participants included comments related to building a knowledge base related to correct ways to move and how to carry out activities safely. The following is an example of the types of responses found in this category:

> The correct way to move (exercise) without doing damage to the body and the rules of the games. I do not want to get students to do activities that they will hurt themselves doing because they are doing them wrong. By knowing the rules then you can ensure that they start off knowing what they can do so that they can then build on these to better their game.

**Enjoyment**

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The final category was labeled ‘enjoyment’. This remained a separate category from social learning because there were so many comments that related specifically to the idea that physical education classes should be fun and enjoyable. Fun and enjoyable from participants’ perspectives suggested that the learning process was fun; it made learning skills and new activities fun.

The goals I would like to accomplish with my students would be for them to find pleasure in variety and trying new things. I think that a game should focus on skills development such as teamwork, good sportsmanship and motor skills however they should also be enjoyable for the student.

Another student stated:

We have responsibilities as a teacher to teach the students what is in the curriculum document, regardless if we think it is the right or wrong way. BUT, it is our duty to make it enjoyable for the students so that we do not make physical education a bad experience for them.

Influence of Past Experiences on Current Beliefs

One of the most striking findings to emerge from the data was the degree to which participants’ linked their past experiences to their current beliefs. Repeatedly, participants would make mention of what they thought was important to teach in a physical education class and justify their decision based on experiences they remembered from the past. For example one participant stated, “When I would teach a sport I would make sure everyone understood the rules and go over the skills numerous times. I did not do that much in elementary school. We just basically played the games.” Similarly, another participant provided a detailed rationale that clearly illustrated the feelings and sentiments of others. After describing a number of past experiences, he concluded with the following:

If I am teaching physical education, I will try not to repeat the past mistakes of my gym teachers. I want to make all my students feel that they can accomplish something if they keep at it. They may never be the best, but they will improve with practice. This was an important lesson that took me ten years of gym class to figure out. I want to teach my students perseverance and teamwork. I want them to understand that it takes patience to get to where they want to be, and this message stands up anywhere, whether it is on the basketball court or the real world.

Through the reflective writing assignment, participants were able to recall and describe their previous experiences in physical education classes. It became clear that their personal memories influenced what they believed were the purposes of elementary physical education.

Participants’ physical education experiences were both varied and similar. They are varied in that some had specialists and some did not; some had positive experiences while others were negative; some had structured learning programs whereas others described their programs as another recess or a free play period. They are similar in that they believe that physical education classes are about social learning, lifetime activities, skill learning, safety and enjoyment. Their beliefs about what a physical education program should be about is based largely on their past experiences as students in public school physical education classes.

Discussion
The results from this study suggest that the past experiences and previous beliefs of physical education by pre-service generalist teachers are not vastly different than pre-service physical education specialists (Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Placek, et al., 1995; Ryan, Bridges, & Yerg, 2000). Participants who distinctly remember having a specialist teacher recalled more regular classes with more of an emphasis on learning skills. On the other hand, it is interesting to note the impact the teacher has on student’s enjoyment and feelings of competence. It is nothing new to note the effect the teacher has on student learning and engagement. The voices of the participants here simply confirm that the teacher, the way he/she acts and talks to students, the way he/she selects and organizes content, and the way he/she treats students can impact students’ perceptions and experiences in physical education. Furthermore, the participants’ comments about their experiences (e.g., “sexist”, “too competitive”, “scared of the teacher”, “singled out”, “wasn’t put on display”, “my teacher was very fair and clear on his expectations”) highlight the variety of environments that were present in their physical education experiences and its lasting effect on their memories. These memories have remained with them for nearly two decades.

Relative to past beliefs, the ‘play’ category contained the most entries. This may have been because some participants were not sure or could not remember if they were taught skills in their early elementary years. Their memories seemed to become clearer as they thought about classes in the higher elementary grades, at which point many distinctly remembered being taught skills. With the majority of participants in this study having had a specialist at the elementary level, this finding may correspond to the idea of building a foundation for movement in the early elementary years. The instruction and delivery of skill learning early on in elementary school is to help children understand the concepts and skills necessary for later specific sport or physical activity use (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2010). More sport-related instruction tends to occur in the higher elementary grades. Further, developmentally appropriate practice relative to teaching suggests motor skills be taught to younger children through less direct teaching methods (Pica, 2010) which for children learning to jump rope, dribble, or skip may resemble play and not learning skills. For older children, instruction tends to be much more explicit and with more sport-specific skills being taught, this may have changed the way the participants viewed physical education.

Interestingly, the ‘play’ category did not exist when participants began discussing what they saw as the purposes of their future programs. This is an extremely encouraging finding and one that differs from previous studies (Placek, et al., 1995; Ryan et al., 2000; Xiang, et al., 2002). It appears that the perception of physical education as play may be changing, at least for this group of future elementary generalist teachers. It is encouraging that these participants, who are training to be elementary teachers, appear, at this point in their careers, to view physical education as a subject area with broader, educational outcomes other than simply another free play period.

For these participants, the influence of past experiences appears to also have influenced their current beliefs of the purposes for physical education. Participants’ current beliefs toward the purposes of elementary physical education were surprising when compared against their past beliefs. The top category to emerge that participants cited as being what they believed to be the purpose of elementary physical education was social learning. In recalling past experiences, no references were found to this category yet, as a current purpose, many participants mentioned it as an important aspect of physical education. Participants believed that elementary physical education should, “teach them [children] teamwork, how to play fair,” and “PE teachers should be teaching students how to play well with one another, not vindictively to simply be the best.”
A possible explanation for the difference is that upon reflection, many participants of all skill levels recalled either feeling embarrassed or left out at times, or commented that ‘although I was never picked last, it must have been awful for them’. Thinking to the future, the participants recognized that what they experienced was not necessarily the atmosphere they want to create and hence the focus on creating a more welcoming environment for all; an environment that begins with respect for self and others.

The skill learning category was the only category present in both past and current beliefs. This is an encouraging finding as students appear to recognize the importance of teaching skills in elementary physical education. Researchers (DeCorby et al., 2005; Faucette & Patterson, 1989; Morgan, 2008) have commented that generalists are ill-prepared for teaching physical education and often feel uncomfortable teaching this content. However, knowledge of skill and more confidence in teaching this subject area can be provided to generalists through a methods class (Hart, 2005; Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Xiang et al., 2002). Still, as a marginalized subject area, it is not unusual for little planning to go into lessons. In such cases teachers may rely on their memories of past experiences when planning or putting together a lesson. For these participants, though their play memories were strong many did recall being taught skills and many commented that they believed skill learning to be important. Again, their memories tended to be clearer in their later years of elementary school, typically around the time children learn more sport-specific skills. Perhaps the teaching of sport-specific skills tends to be covered in middle and high school and is more visible in the media so maybe they are easier for generalist teachers to grasp and teach due to their clear connection to sports. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the majority of participants had a specialist for elementary physical education. What remains unknown is whether their past play experiences are stronger than their desire or knowledge to teach skills in the future.

Participants’ memories of fitness being so focused on a test are discouraging. However, the memories, most of which were negative, were likely to have a positive effect in these participants’ future teaching. Participants saw the importance of fitness as a lifetime activity and have intentions to teach their students accordingly. Their past memories definitely influenced their desire not to repeat such practices with their future students. But also of influence here may be the larger social climate that currently exists. With news of increasing obesity rates and lack of activity regularly being reported in the news, on posters around campus, etc., perhaps students see the need to tackle the issue in their future classes.

A category that has not appeared in other studies but did appear here relates to ‘safety’. Many of the safety related comments were the result of participants recognizing their lack of knowledge and ability with respect to physical education content. Participants recognized this as a limitation and something they would have to work at improving.

It is not surprising to see ‘enjoyment’ as a separate category. It is surprising to note that enjoyment was not limited to participation only; that is, physical education as fun. For these participants, student ‘learning’ and ‘achievement’ contributed to an enjoyable experience. This is in contrast to previous research (Placek, et al., 1995; Xiang, et al., 2002) where entries in similar categories focused on fun as an outcome as opposed to this study where fun was a by-product of learning and being successful. Comments that often made it into this category used ‘enjoyment’ in conjunction with activity. That is, skill learning can be fun; fitness can be enjoyable. For those with negative past memories, this was particularly important. For these participants they did not want their future students to have similar negative experiences. For students with positive memories, they wanted their students to have similar positive experiences. Again, this
demonstrates that past memories do influence current beliefs whether these experiences were positive or negative.

With more generalist teachers teaching at the elementary level the importance of a minimum of one required elementary physical education methods class during teacher preparation becomes even more necessary. Future studies should continue to investigate the effect of past experiences on both the beliefs of pre-service generalist teachers and the degree to which their beliefs translate into practice.

Conclusion

The results of this research clearly indicate that past experiences influence what pre-service generalist teachers see as the purposes for elementary physical education. Their intentions for their future students are strongly based on their past experiences and their desire to replicate positive experiences and modify and change negative ones. Physical education pedagogues must acknowledge and investigate these experiences because if left unexplored, future elementary generalist teachers may continue to replicate misguided practice. By examining the beliefs of their students, teacher educators can best decide how to effectively use their limited contact time with their students to develop and present content that is most meaningful and relevant to the students and also aligns with what the teacher educator expects students to know and be able to do.
References


The Impact of Professional Development on Beginning Teachers’ Practices in One Secondary School

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Abstract

A case study was conducted in 2004-2005 on the professional development experiences of beginning teachers (1-5 years of experience) in an Ontario, Canada secondary school (Grades 7-12) and the impact of those experiences in improving their practices. For comparative purposes, the study included the perspectives of administrators from the same school on the impact of professional development on these teachers. The findings revealed that the literacy training program was successfully implemented at the school and positively affected beginning teachers’ knowledge, instructional strategies, and planning practices. Other findings indicated that beginning teachers needed subject content and instructional strategies, ongoing mentoring, and skills in both classroom management and mapping the curriculum. Based on the findings of the study, a new framework for professional development is suggested. A number of recommendations propose ways of connecting research, policy and practice that could ultimately improve the effectiveness of professional development programs for beginning teachers.

Key words: teacher professional development, beginning teacher, adult learning, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, supervision, organizational policies and culture

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The Impact of Professional Development on Beginning Teachers’ Practices in One Secondary School

Professional development for beginning teachers from 1995-2006 in Ontario, Canada, was viewed by many policy makers and program developers as a means of improving teacher competencies, reducing the achievement gap among students in schools, and accelerating the implementation of reforms to the school curriculum.

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility. In 1997, the Government of Ontario mandated the Ontario College of Teachers (College) to oversee the Teacher Professional Learning Program that required each teacher to complete 14 courses over five years. In addition, beginning teachers were required to take the Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test before they were eligible to be certified by the College.

The College in 2002 advocated a two-year induction program for newly-hired teachers. The program’s goals were to improve teaching practices and thus student learning; to provide professional development opportunities; to contribute to a collaborative school environment; and to demonstrate to the public that new teachers have the skills and support they need to be effective teachers (Ontario College of Teachers [OCT], 2002, p.7). What do we know about beginning teachers and their professional development? What impact does professional development have on beginning teachers? To answer these questions, it is useful to first consult a growing body of literature.

Background Literature

Professional development for new teachers should begin with a solid induction program where they learn to consider specific educational contexts, and acquire practices and beliefs that last throughout their career (Glassford & Salinitri, 2007; Luft, Roehrig, & Patterson, 2003; Moir & Gless, 2001; Wong & Wong, 1998). Mentoring as an extension of an induction program, is needed to support teachers, provide them with feedback, and retain them in the profession of teaching (Ingersoll & Kralk, 2004; Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, 2004). One of the benefits of mentoring can include beginning teachers identifying themselves with the profession (Healy & Welchert, 1990). Research also indicates successful induction and mentoring programs: improve the quality of teaching, foster greater student achievement, facilitate the sharing of information about the professional work of the teacher and the daily job of classroom teaching, and help ensure new teachers are prepared and engaged in the educational process (Breaux & Wong, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Bradsford, 2005; Díaz-Maggioli, 2004; Fenwick, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Recent research indicates that beginning teachers differ from other teachers in their content knowledge and understanding of subject matter and application of learning to their teaching environment (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Cochrane-Smith, 2005; Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004) and, therefore, require ongoing professional development and supervisory evaluations consistent with their stage/phase of development (Sergiovanni, 2007).

Beyond mentoring, teachers need professional development that focuses on subject content and pedagogical strategies and prompts them to make changes in their instructional practices (Garet, Porter, Desimone, & Birman, 2001; Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry &
Hewson, 2003). Growing evidence from large-scale studies also suggests beginning secondary school teachers require 60-80 hours of professional development to develop their knowledge and skills and enact standards-based instruction in their classrooms (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Supovitz & Turner, 2000).

Standards-based instruction can assist schools in establishing a culture of teacher reflection and self-assessment which contributes to new teachers’ abilities to recognize mastery experiences and find gaps between desired and actual practices (Ross & Bruce, 2007); it can also enable new teachers to become self-directed learners (Banilower, Boyd, Pasley & Weiss, 2005) who can assess their progress. Bandura (1997) reminds us, however, that the psycho-social skills of interacting, perceiving, influencing and relating with and to others contribute heavily to beginning career success.

Effective supervision can also assist beginning teachers to adapt and to become active participants in the school’s culture (Wood, 2005), and, using the Standards of Practice for the Profession that reflect a teacher’s stage of development, can make it possible for a teacher to set goals, improve capacities for self-reflection, and internalize the expectations of the profession (Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation [OSSTF], 2004).

Little is known about the efficacy of professional development programs for beginning teachers (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007) and its impact on their practices. These teacher practices include an understanding of the needs of their students, gaining and using subject content knowledge, and implementing sound instructional and classroom management strategies. In addition, teacher practices also focus on applying Special Education principles to students who have Individual Education Plans, integrating technology into the curriculum, using new student assessment and evaluations, contributing to innovative programs or projects, and collaborating with their colleagues (OCT, 1999).

To verify the impact of professional development on teachers’ practices, Guskey (2005) suggests collecting and analyzing five critical levels of information: 1) participants’ reactions to the professional development, 2) participants’ gains in new knowledge and/or skills, 3) organizational support and change, 4) participants’ use of new knowledge and skills, and 5) the impact on student outcomes.

To improve the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs, qualitative research that examines beginning teacher and administrative narratives of their reflections and assessments of the impact of professional development in progress needs to find a place in the literature (Cochrane-Smith, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004).

**Research Questions and Theory**

In order to obtain a better understanding of teachers’ perspectives the following four research questions and theory framework were employed:

1. How do beginning teachers understand the definition and function of professional development?
2. How do the existing design and implementation of professional development contribute to beginning teachers’ existing practices?
3. What goals and aspirations do beginning teachers have for professional development and how might these contribute to teachers’ practices?
4. Are the school board’s goals and aspirations for the design and implementation of professional development in conflict with or congruent with the goals held by beginning teachers?

By examining the perspectives of teachers and administrators on professional development within the political and organizational context of one school and school board, the study presented current insights into the state of professional development. The authors, building upon the works of previous researchers, chose the following set of principles and theories to frame the inquiry: a) the principles of andragogy that focus on self-directed learning and application of that learning (Knowles, 1984, 1990); b) the theory of self-efficacy, which refers to “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994, p.71); c) the theory of collective efficacy, which “for schools, refers to the judgments of teachers in that school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students” (Goddard, 2004, p.4); and d) the theory of re-defined supervision that suggests professional development is a joint responsibility and that supervision be used to promote teacher development and build a professional community (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). The theoretical framework formed by these principles and theories proved useful in developing instruments and guiding the analysis of the investigation.

**Purpose and Method**

The case study outlined here was part of a larger research project that focused on three groups of teachers (beginning, mid-career, and experienced) and their ongoing experiences with professional development within one Ontario secondary school, Grades 7-12 (Hinds, 2007). The study also included interviewing three administrators on the subject of teacher professional development. Their interviews provided a basis for comparison between teacher and administrator perceptions on many issues pertaining to professional development activities and programs and opportunities to learn. The purpose of the study was to understand the meaning and purpose that each group of teachers attached to their ongoing professional development experiences and to describe and interpret how these experiences affected teachers’ practices. The goals were to uncover the discernible interaction of factors characteristic of professional development, to gain insights into the relationship between effective professional development and improvement in practices for each group of teachers, and to learn how to recognize patterns that support and/or undermine teacher learning. This paper focuses solely on beginning teachers and their administrators.

**Demographic and Context Information**

Seventeen new teachers were hired by the school board (hiring and placement are the jurisdiction of the board, subject to the Collective Agreement and in accordance with the Acts and Regulations of the Province of Ontario) and assigned to a medium sized secondary school in 2004; of these, six were beginning teachers. The six beginning teachers and the three administrators in this study were part of an ethnically diverse teaching staff of 90, and worked in a three year old school located in a modern middle class suburb of Ontario. The school’s enrolment included 580 Grade 7-8 students who were situated in a separate section of the school.
and followed a different schedule from the 820 Grade 9-12 students. Ninety-six percent of the students were Caucasian. The visible minorities were students of Black and Asian descent. Administrators and teachers spoke positively about the school’s attendance record, accomplishments in sports, academics, community involvement, and the handling crisis situations; yet, there were strained relationships on a number of levels.

Of the six beginning teachers in this study, two were female teachers and four were male teachers. One male and one female teacher were assigned to the Gr. 7-8 division, one male teacher to the Gr. 7-12 division, and two male and one female teacher to the 9-12 division. Of these six teachers, three were teaching outside of their area(s) of training, and two were trained in a different province or country from Ontario, Canada (see Table 1, Appendix).

The professional development framework from the board that was in existence for beginning teachers in 2004 included a two-day orientation session, a series of workshops conducted primarily at the board by consultants, and activities available on a first-come first-serve basis. At the school level, professional development included administrator assistance in the formulation and feedback on the Teacher Annual Plan and the Teacher Performance Appraisal Program, department head led workshops during staff meetings once a month on literacy and student assessment, and ‘just in time’ professional development for report cards and parent-teacher meetings.

**Qualitative Inquiry**

The qualitative inquiry movement is built on a profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing and saying (Schwandt, 2000). A case study, as Stake (2005) tells us is defined by an interest in the individual case ‘beginning teachers’ and not by the methods of inquiry used (p.443). One of the advantages of using a case study design is that problems and programs in their natural setting can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice (Merriam, 1998). This study used an ethnographic approach in that the researchers weighed and categorized teacher and administrator experiences, made choices regarding what to include and what to exclude. This approach is not simply a chronicle but rather teacher and administrator interview scripts and researcher observations placed in a meaningful context of practices and histories (Richardson, 1990, p.10).

Voluntary engagement in the research project and protection of participants’ confidentiality were in keeping with the Ethical Guidelines of the authors’ home university and the criteria for research in schools. This qualitative research incorporated a number of data gathering measures: hour-long audio taped interviews with teachers and administrators, non-taped follow-up interviews, researcher field note observations, and the use of school and teacher artifacts and documents pertaining to professional development. Data were collected on a daily basis over a period of seven consecutive months. A transcription of each interview was returned to the participant to solicit feedback on content accuracy. Requests by teachers and administrators for modifications to their individual transcripts were accommodated.

**Data Analysis and Validation of the Study**

To facilitate the analysis process of the data from the interview and follow-up sessions, Nvivo 2.0 software was used. Seven steps suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) were employed to code the data: raw text, relevant text, repeated ideas, themes, constructs, narrative,
and researcher’s concerns. To validate the study, three strategies were employed: 1) Triangulation provided for confirmation and completeness of data. The multiple sources of data were derived from school board literature, school artifacts and documents pertaining to teacher professional development, and teacher and administrator interviews; 2) Participant validation was attained through feedback on transcriptions from beginning teachers and administrators through two independent researchers coding samples of the research, and through completion of an individual validation form. All six beginning teachers and administrators completed all of the phases on the research process; 3) Dependability was achieved by an audit trail which consisted of coded transcriptions and field notes.

Study Findings

Conceptualizing Professional Development

Teachers’ conceptualization of professional development, its effects on their practices, their aspirations for professional development and their perceptions of the congruency of the school board and beginning teacher professional development are presented first; administrators’ perceptions follow those of the teachers. Quotations from teacher and administrator interviews are identified by code initials and dates.

The sample of secondary school teachers and administrators interviewed for the study shared a complementary understanding regarding the theoretical meaning and educational function of professional development. Three of the six teachers defined professional development in terms of improving themselves. The other three teachers perceived professional development in socio-political as well as in school cultural terms. One teacher stated, “The purpose of PD is to become a better teacher in your subject area” (RD, 1/20/05). Another teacher related, “Professional development is meeting other Math teachers, sharing ideas and being able to, as professionals, meet and learn more from each other” (FH, 12/14/04). A third teacher linked professional development to academic excellence and suggested that professional development set up by the school or the board had student achievement as the first priority but the by-product was teacher personal growth (CY, 12/3 & 13/04). A fourth teacher remarked that the client base of the school was high, and this enabled the school to keep the teaching standards high. He added that “the rankings and ratings of the students’ successes in the various testing program is a source of pride for the school, and administration ranks academic success high on the list of priorities” (LR, 11/26/04).

The three administrators understood the purpose of professional development as “an institutional goal to change teachers’ practices and improve student achievement” (MY, 11/24/04); as “a means of developing teacher capacity” (EY, 11/25/04); and as “a strategic means of building in-house expertise” (ZI, 11/23/04).

Contributions of Professional Development to Teachers’ Classroom Practices

The core categories that emerged from the data indicated that professional development by department heads, the literacy program, and professional development by teachers and administrators contributed to teachers’ practices.
Department Head Led Professional Development

Three teachers who were working in their subject area of specialization noted that department heads who were supervising their own specialty subject area assisted them with prioritizing the vast amount of content to be covered and with aligning the content to student assessment. One teacher noted that “Once I understood how to organize by big ideas, I was able to help some students change their attitude and explore the power of math as opposed to just using the tools” (FH, 11/24/04). Two other teachers recalled one department head who, through her ability to share resources and facilitate discussions, made a difference in their ability to bring consistency to their assessment practices, and differentiate instruction for students (CY, 2/28/05; RD, 1/20/04).

Literacy Program

All six teachers said they found that the literacy program made a contribution to their teaching practices and believed that the collective effort at the school by staff, students and administration improved the reading scores at the school. One teacher stated that “Each department presents a section of Think Literacy Grades 7-12 to the whole staff and reviews the teaching strategies and best practices; the goal here is better literacy” (CY, 9/28/05).

Three teachers substantiated the value of literacy training to their practices by stating how they transferred skills reinforced in the literacy program to their respective subject areas: scanning for signal words helped students with complex math problems; using concept maps to generate and sort ideas in biology; and finding the main and supporting ideas in history classes. The two remaining teachers mentioned that the literacy program allowed teachers to question certain practices and collaborate as a group.

Teacher and Administrator Led Professional Development

The teachers acknowledged that their school environment was an extremely busy one. One teacher, who at an administrator’s request provided in-service workshops for the staff on a software program for report cards, indicated that the experience gave him greater acceptance in the school culture and a sense of satisfaction knowing that teachers were using the program in their classrooms (FH, 9/26/05). Four teachers said they were thankful for the report card in-service and tips on parent interviews from administrators.

Administrators perceived the beginning teachers as highly skilled, capable, and focused on the curriculum. One administrator complained that the attitude of beginning teachers is, “if kids don’t cut it, they don’t cut it…. Personal growth should translate to the academic and social growth of their students” (ZI, 10/11/05). A second administrator described the literacy program as a grass roots initiative that was supported with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (ministry). He elaborated, “The change in results of moving from a score of 70% to 93% on the EQAO [Education Quality and Accountability Office] test in reading is evidence that we are on the right track” (MY, 2/8/05). The third administrator described the pre/post test carried out before the literacy program and assessments to identify students at risk as types of data that beginning teachers used. She added, “Beginning teachers are open to professional development but changes in practices may not be readily discernible” (EY, 2/8/05).
Goals and Aspirations of Beginning Teachers

Teachers hoped for some control over their own learning. Their individual priorities differed from each other, but, as a group, they valued accessing trained mentors, subject content knowledge and resources, and having a workload that factored in time for collaboration. Unlike administrators who envisioned full control over professional development from the board and professional development that was embedded in the teachers’ practices at school, teachers sought professional learning both in and out of school to guide their growth and development.

Trained Mentors

Four of the six teachers said they expected mentors to be trained and to follow a program that could be modified to address individual beginning teachers’ needs for content or pedagogical knowledge, could ease their transition into the profession of teaching, could orient them to the system, and could provide them with assistance and support as they carried out their responsibilities. As one teacher pointed out, “Mentorship is part of the procedure here. The only thing is the individuals are chosen not necessarily because of their strengths but because they are willing to help” (ET, 12, 23, 2004). A second teacher stated, “I don’t have a mentor; I wish I did” (RD, 12/14/04).

Subject Content Knowledge and Resources

The teachers envisaged a future where beginning teachers would not have to teach outside of their specialization, or, if they did, they would receive ongoing assistance in building their knowledge and instructional repertoire. Three of the six beginning teachers received teaching assignments “out-of-field,” that is, they had less than a minor in the field in which they were teaching. One teacher stated, “My area of specialization is English and religion, but I am teaching science and math” (RD/1/20/05) A second teacher confided, “In my first three years of teaching, I taught 16 different subjects in six semesters” (LR, 12/16/04). A third teacher noted, “I would like to get some professional development in the fields that I am teaching that I don’t have much content knowledge or specific training on how to teach those subjects” (CY, 9/28/05). The other three teachers said they envisaged orientation session for teachers hired late in the season, adequate supplies and materials, current math texts, teaching materials that they did not have to translate into French, funds for teachers to manage their own professional development, and pay for performance instead of pay for seniority.

Time and Workload

Six teachers identified time embedded in the work day, an increase in the number of Professional Development Days, and the use of those days, as elements that were missing from their present professional development agenda. Five teachers believed that with more embedded professional development time they could address matters such as collaborating on lesson plans, examining student work, analyzing data from tests, sharing classroom management strategies, and integrating technology into the curriculum. “Receiving .5 day leave to attend a training seminar on classroom management and a .5 day follow-up session was far from the support I need,” stated one teacher (ET, 4/5/05).
“What we need is time to express concerns and to dialogue with other teachers in the same subject area, same department, or same grade level,” proposed another teacher (BE/1/25/05). The six teachers believed it was critical that professional development time allocated by the ministry not be used for changing semesters, inviting inspirational speakers, or planning community celebrations.

One teacher described the Grade 7-8 workload as ‘unreal’ because Grade 9-12 teachers had more prep time, could concentrate on one or two subjects, and saw far fewer students per day than did Grade 7-8 teachers. He used the term ‘second class citizens’ to describe their situation and noted that “Greater equity in workload and working conditions would positively affect teacher morale and create better learning conditions for students” (ET, 4/5/05).

Meeting the needs of all students was extremely difficult as one teacher explained, “I have twenty-three students in this class, and nineteen have had an Individual Education Plan” (LR, 10/3/05). The teacher expressed concerns that the learning environment was sometimes unsafe and unproductive. This teacher expressed the need for administrators to take a leadership role in addressing this issue at the board.

A second teacher, in taking on the role of curriculum leader after having just one year’s experience in the profession, related that “There is no professional development on how to be a curriculum leader. It’s hard to help others when you are learning yourself” (BE, 10/14/05).

One administrator, noting beginning teachers’ aspirations and the lack of support to address their concerns, stated that “PD tends to be general in nature and focused on literacy or assessment and evaluation… Very rarely do they get PD that is particular to their own field…and with our workload there is no time to meet the many needs” (EY, 11/25/04). A second administrator believed professional development should be self-directed as long as people recognized what they needed and where they wanted to go (ZI, 1/25/05).

**Congruence between Teacher and Board Goals for Professional Development**

Beginning teachers learned of board policy primarily through their colleagues or family members in the teaching profession. One teacher, recalling the signing of the teaching contract, stated, “When I went to the board and signed my papers, they never talked to me about professional development. Also, the school never mentioned it” (BE, 1/25/05). This teacher indicated that it was ‘the old boys’ network that had access to information on the best workshops and conferences that were partly subsidized by the school board. A second teacher stated, “The board and school expect a lot from us…it would be nice if we were allowed to talk sometimes …. I want to have a role in determining what I want to do better” (RD, 11/22/04).

**School Board Policy Issues**

Teachers perceived the professional development sessions in school, as well as time planned for beginning teachers away from school, as unrealistic. They also suggested that professional development provided by the school board was designed to satisfy a legal requirement. One teacher contended that taking off two days in the second week of school or meeting the week before report cards were examples of poor planning (FH, 11/26/04). Three of the teachers expressed the view that professional development had to take into consideration the needs and interest of teachers who aim to improve student learning in all subject areas.
Perceptions of visits by school board consultants varied. One teacher commented that “He [the consultant] didn’t say how to put it [the assessment and evaluation] into practice… That left huge gaps [in knowledge] in implementing the policy” (BE, 1/25/05).

**Relationships and Communications**

Four of the teachers believed that greater harmony in relationships between the school and the school board could provide a coherent approach to professional development. All six teachers experienced some degree of information overload and believed that devising a mechanism for streamlining the multiple communications from various sources intended for them would help them deal more effectively with what really mattered: their students’ and their own growth and development.

The three administrators reinforced the idea that the school board needed to negotiate with the ministry for increased time, support, and resources for beginning teachers’ professional development. One administrator identified three problems areas where the board and the school’s professional development practices were incongruent 1) a reduction in the number of department heads and the amalgamation of departments; 2) teachers with minimum teaching experience becoming vice–principals and required to do Teacher Performance Appraisals; and 3) the allocation of money and resources to EQAO testing. “The whole crux of the problem,” noted this administrator, “is political in nature and what they [the school board and the ministry] say we are getting and what is really happening are two different things” (MY, 10/11/05). This same administrator said, “There’s little money in the budget for PD. It is not a priority for our board.”

**Analysis of Challenges**

One possible explanation for the underlying dissatisfaction of beginning teachers and their administrators with professional development during 2004-2005 was a network of provincial government education reforms that had wide-reaching effects on teachers and their practices. This analysis and interpretation of the findings, while not absolving teachers of all responsibility for the advancement of their own learning, suggest that problems for the advancement of teacher learning and its application to practices often fell within the wider political and social realm. We are referring to changes to policies to education brought about by changes in government and changes in society: the family unit, economic means, attitudes toward authority, and technological impact on teaching.

Reforms that directly or indirectly affected beginning teachers’ professional development and practices included: a) a centrally defined curriculum and a new report card; b) an increase in the number of courses taught and mandatory participation in extra-curricular activities; and c) EQAO testing in Grade 9 in reading, writing and mathematics, and a literacy test for Grade 10 students.

The lack of coherence among reform policies, the lack of agreed upon vision of the board and the school, and the lack of sustained support with resources from the ministry left the board and the school pondering the purpose of teacher professional development and questioning the objectives of professional development programs. Based on teachers’ responses to the research questions the reforms did affect their professional development and their practices.
System Approach

The system approach to professional development is presented here as a key determinant that facilitated some types of professional development for teachers and hindered others. Beginning in 1995, with some reforms taking place in 1996, the provincial government by 1997 exercised its legal jurisdiction and authority to centralize education. By 2004, the provincial government controlled educational finances and was spending $15 million annually on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test while at the same time delaying the release of over $100 million for special needs students.

The prescriptive curriculum meant that groups of students and teachers were marginalized and their programs undervalued. The system approach to teachers’ marking papers to establish consistency and programs that focused on testing did foster team work. The design and implementation of the professional development at the school and school board, however, was not a substitute for the day-to-day professional conversations that teachers in the study suggested they needed for subject content, instructional strategies, mapping the curriculum, joint lesson planning, classroom management, problem solving, and creating meaning for their practices.

Teacher Identity

In 1996 the government gave the College the authority to govern the province’s teaching profession. By 2004 the conflict between the College and the teacher federations affected teacher identity; it prevented many new teachers from receiving the guidance they needed from these organizations that set standards and guidelines for the profession and have the responsibility to safeguard the quality of public education.

The number of courses taught by each Grade 9-12 teacher and the mandated extra curricular activities resulted in beginning teachers’ not having the time to dialogue, work with mentors and colleagues, and demonstrate instructional strategies and classroom management techniques. The added component of mandating beginning teachers to take on extra-curricular activities meant these teachers were over-extended and were now exhibiting resentment toward other teachers who had a lighter load to bear.

Support

The provincial government’s removal of $1 billion from the education budget; the reduction in professional development days from nine to four; the increased supervision, program and management responsibilities assigned to principals and vice-principals; the reduction in leadership roles of department heads and consultants; and the mandate that teachers teach four credit classes a day adversely affected the organizational support that school boards and schools could offer beginning teachers.

Educational policy and related funding are key elements in teacher and student learning; the operating budgets and program infrastructure have a large impact on professional development opportunities and the options offered to teachers and administrators. The board as a result of the government’s removal of dollars did not guarantee the school funds for teacher professional development. This state of affairs with professional development left teachers competing with one another for professional development places and left most dissatisfied with
the process. Hence, this low level support for beginning teachers resulted in uneven progress in teacher knowledge, pedagogical strategies, practices and transition into the profession. This was evident in the study from the comments of teachers who were teaching in their subject areas and those who had been assigned to areas outside of their specialty.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Growing evidence suggests that training alone cannot meet the learning needs of beginning teachers. Professional development, to have a greater impact on beginning teacher practices, needs to be a focus on teacher learning and teacher capacity building which will give teachers expanded options to improve student learning and be part of a professional learning community. This change in focus will require commitment and purposeful support from all stakeholders.

High expectations for beginning teachers require a new model of professional development that must be met with a high level of support. The model which includes adult learning principles, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and re-defined supervision requires a learning climate that involves beginning teachers in all phases: planning, implementation, and evaluation of their professional development and support in carrying out their objectives so they develop their skills of critical reflection. Those principles of adult learning could be used to bridge the gap between theory and practice and produce teachers who, because of their own learning experiences, have greater self-efficacy in the form of confidence, and provide better experiences for their students.

The model employs collective efficacy because the sense of group capability helps establish expectations for success that encourage members to work toward the desired end of establishing a workplace where teachers not only have a thorough knowledge of a subject area, help students relate ideas to one another, address misconceptions, and relate knowledge to everyday life but also are committed to school-community partnerships.

New understandings about professionalism, teaching and learning, and leadership suggest that supervision, the last component of the model, should be viewed as a joint responsibility with supervisors providing teachers with the opportunities and the resources they need and with teachers reflecting on their practices and sharing their best practices with others. The implication here is that the feedback from supervisors articulated in terms of teachers’ and administrators’ understandings of the teaching-learning process becomes a form of professional development that should positively impact on teachers’ practices.

Various stakeholders, policy makers, Faculties of Education, school boards, administrators and teachers working together must be change agents in their respective areas. These stakeholders need to use a common language to agree upon the direction and scope of the change and to stay focused on the goal of achieving better professional development for beginning teachers.

Policy makers, using findings from research, could create a coherent support system for schools and develop mechanisms that ensure beginning teachers teaching outside of their subject area receive 60+ hours of professional development to acquire the subject knowledge and instructional skills that are essential to their classroom effectiveness.

Faculties of Education, using beginning teachers’ comments that make visible what learning has been internalized and what has been imbedded into their practices, could make strategic decisions to expand programs to include features such as classroom management and teachers’ transitions to the workplaces.
School boards, working to change beginning teacher professional development, could require providers of professional development to have recent classroom experience and to know how to apply the principles of adult learning to the professional development sessions. Boards could work closely with schools to avoid duplication of professional development content and to find the ‘best times’ for beginning teachers’ in-service.

Administrators, through a staff analysis, must ensure that beginning teachers do not receive the most difficult assignments. They need to find ways to hire workers to cover mentor-teacher non-teaching duties. In that way, beginning teachers and their mentors can conference 2-3 times per week or discuss with other colleagues strategies that promote their own and student learning.

Beginning teachers need to understand school board and school policies pertaining to professional development, seek guidance from colleagues, administrators, and consultants, and register the form of assistance received. They should also develop the practice of logging their learning from professional development and find venues to articulate its application to the classroom.
References


### Appendix

**Table 1: Demographic Information on Beginning Teachers and Administrators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Participants</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teaching Assignment</th>
<th>Qualifications &amp; Added Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 male</td>
<td>Gr. 7-8</td>
<td>1 yr + 10 years High Tech. Business</td>
<td>French, Math, Science.</td>
<td>B.A/B. Ed. (ON) Math/French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 male</td>
<td>Gr. 7-12</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>PhD, Religion, History</td>
<td>B.A/B. Ed. Areas of specialization History/geography (BC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 male</td>
<td>Gr. 9-12</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>Construction Technology</td>
<td>B. Ed Areas of specialization Economics/Bus. Management/Design &amp; Tech (AU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 male</td>
<td>Gr. 9-12</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>Math, Technology, English</td>
<td>B. Ed/ B. Sc.(ON) Area of specialization Science/Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 female</td>
<td>Gr. 9-12</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>Math, Science, English</td>
<td>B.A/B. Ed.(ON) Area of specialization English/Religious Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin.</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Teach/Admin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 male</td>
<td>Gr.9-12</td>
<td>11/15 &amp; nil</td>
<td>M.PHE.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 male</td>
<td>Gr. 9-12</td>
<td>12/6 yrs nil</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 female</td>
<td>Gr.9-12</td>
<td>17/3 yrs nil</td>
<td>M. Sc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modeling and the
Gradual Release of Responsibility:
What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?

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Abstract

Recent professional development efforts in literacy have highlighted the role of the teacher as a model for students using direct instruction. Direct instruction is a lesson methodology taught to teacher candidates. We developed a schematic to represent the confluence of evidence found in the research and analysis of several lesson planning templates in order to create a visual representation of the elements of instruction that could be used to plan lessons. Previous research has demonstrated that modeling was not used frequently in classrooms. We were interested in determining if teachers were still using modeling infrequently. To investigate this, we identified three questions we would pursue through action research and mixed methods of analysis in local classrooms. These questions focused on determining the amount of time spent modeling in classrooms and the actions used after modeling to determine the extent these actions were reflected in the research literature. We found that teachers are using modeling much more frequently than was found to be the case in the previous study, but that the instructional actions following modeling are often inconsistent with research literature conceptions.

Key Words: direct instruction, modeling, gradual release of responsibility, models for teaching

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Modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility: What Does it Look Like in the Classroom?

This study was designed to examine the relationship between theory and classroom practice in the use of modeling as an instructional strategy. Faculties of Education teach lesson planning to teacher candidates and typically teach candidates to plan both through direct instruction and through indirect approaches. Direct instruction would require modeling. Research and instructional theories (Rosenshine, 1997) identify instructional actions that should follow modeling.

Statement of Purpose

Prior research about direct instruction indicates that modeling is an aspect of direct instruction that should be followed by structured and scaffolded practice and a gradual release of responsibility to support increasingly independent practice. The purpose of this study was to determine if modeling, followed by structured and scaffolded practice and the gradual release of responsibility approach, was being used in classrooms and to examine the incidence of the use of modeling as an instructional methodology.

Literature Review

Modeling is a component of direct instruction. The terms direct instruction and explicit instruction are essentially synonymous in current usage. Between the late 1960s and 1998, Siegfried Engelmann and colleagues (Engelmann 1992; Engelmann, 1998; Engelmann & Carnine, 1991) developed the concept of direct instruction to describe intentional instructional intervention. The original direct instruction conception was developed with two guiding principles. The first was that children can learn if they are taught. The second was that all teachers can teach effectively if they have effective programs and instructional techniques. Engelmann’s (1998) approach used program designs that promoted the careful analysis of program content to ensure: that big ideas were taught; that ideas were built on clear communication by the careful wording of instruction and use of examples; that used a scripted approach that identified what teachers should say and do and what they could expect from students’ responses; that planned careful sequencing of the skills being taught; and that included a breakdown of the skills into activity sequences to teach over many lessons. The Engelmann (1998) approach to direct instruction promoted the organization of instruction using flexible skill groupings, the maximizing of instructional time to optimize the learner’s focus, and the use of continuous assessment.

The Concept of Gradual Release of Responsibility Evolves

In 1990, and later in 1997, Barak Rosenshine elaborated a model for direct instruction that used many of the elements of the Engelmann approach, without the limitations of scripted lessons. Rosenshine also called his model direct instruction and developed a list of characteristics to implement this approach. In both the Engelmann and Rosenshine conceptions of direct instruction, once students have had modeling from the teacher, the students need opportunities
for guided practice, with support being removed gradually as students’ independence in using the new learning increases. This is commonly referred to as the “gradual release of responsibility” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Fisher & Frey, 2008).

It is clear from previous research that modeling is a major feature of direct instruction. It is equally clear that after modeling is completed, students need opportunities to work with new learning in a supportive learning environment and gradually have opportunities for increasing levels of independence. It is also clear, based on our analysis of lesson planning templates used in many pre-service teaching programs, that Faculties of Education try to teach this sequence of instructional actions to teacher candidates through lesson planning. Our experience with teaching lesson planning to teacher candidates promotes our belief that the linear nature of lesson planning templates makes it very challenging for these aspiring teachers to determine when they should model, when they should provide practice, how much practice is needed, and when they should start the “gradual release of responsibility”.

To aid our teacher candidates with these decisions, we developed a pair of diagrams that we use to accompany the linear lesson planning template so that they can see the elements of instruction in relation to each other (Figures 1 and 2). The components of the diagrams are supported by the work of other researchers and authors (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Healey, 1987; Marchand-Martella, Martella & Ausdemore, 2005). Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976) referred to the gradual release of responsibility as scaffolding. The concept of gradual release of responsibility continued to be used by more recent researchers in the study of apprenticeship approaches (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991). In 1983, Pearson and Gallagher developed an informative but awkward diagram to identify their conception of the gradual release of responsibility in direct instruction. The literacy text Teaching the Language Arts: Engaging Literacy Practices (Parr & Campbell, 2007) proposes a leveled continuum of support from modeling to student independence when referring to the gradual removal of the teacher’s support to develop increasing independence with new learning. They identified the stages of the gradual release of responsibility after modeling as shared, interactive, guided, and independent practice.

Figure 1 shows the stages of the lesson that uses direct instruction, including modeling. The elements of gradual release of responsibility are shown graphically in the second schematic (Figure 2). These schematics have proven to be very promising instructional aides when used to explain instructional approaches and the gradual release of responsibility to teacher candidates designing their first lesson plans. Figure 2 provides expanded details of the characteristics of the gradual release of responsibility in terms of the teacher’s instructional actions.

The efficacy of these diagrams in pre-service instruction about lesson planning led us to an interest in examining their potential for classroom teachers to self-monitor their practice, as well as for teacher supervisors (principals and superintendents) to use during teacher performance appraisal cycles. It is outside of the parameters of this paper to provide a detailed explanation of all parts of the instructional elements shown in Figure 2. However, this is the subject of a complementary conceptual paper (Authors, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, we have focused on examining the actual practice of the use of modeling in classrooms. In our schematic representation of the findings of prior research and the phases of instruction needed in a strong direct instruction lesson, modeling begins a sequence of teacher actions that guide students through supported practice toward increasing independence. The Durkin (1979) study revealed that modeling was only being used sparingly for instructional purposes. Of 4469 minutes of instructional time (the equivalent of
Figure 1

PHASES OF INSTRUCTION IN A DIRECT INSTRUCTION MODEL

approximately three weeks of classroom time in Canadian classrooms), only twenty minutes was being used to model new learning. We hypothesized that modeling was probably more in evidence in today’s classrooms because literacy modeling has been such a strong focus of teachers’ professional development during the last fifteen years across Canada.

**Method**

Research Ethics approval was sought and acquired to work with teachers in one mid-northern Ontario school to examine the use of our schematic as an observation tool in the in-service
context. We requested opportunities to observe three teachers for five instructional days apiece in order to replicate the observation time of the 1979 Durkin study. Three teachers from among the whole school staff volunteered to be observed for five days over three weeks by two researchers. These teachers had to agree to this observation and to be somewhat unaware of what was being observed, understanding only that we were testing and developing a model. This was a necessary construct of the research because the teachers might have changed their practice if they had been fully aware of the focus of our observations.

Our focus questions for the classroom observations included:
1. How much time are teachers spending modeling?
2. What are they modeling?
3. How are they managing the gradual release of responsibility?

These questions would provide data that would help us determine changes in the role of direct instruction using modeling. Also we would be able to characterize the nature of teacher actions during the instructional phases (i.e., recapitulation, consolidation, application, metacognition) to support students’ increasing independence with new learning following the use of modeling. The three questions guided the development of an observation chart used to record both qualitative and quantitative observations in the classrooms (Appendix 1). During observation, researchers
recorded anecdotal field notes in a chart headed by the three questions. The amount of time spent modeling was recorded in minutes then calculated as percentages of the school day to show the amount of time spent modeling in each instructional day. In our study, we noted start and stop times of modeling and later tabulated totals and calculated percentages based on the mandated 300 minute instructional day in the jurisdiction. All modeling over the five instructional days spent in each of the three classrooms was calculated as totals and percentages of total instructional time. Descriptive observations were recorded in narrative form in response to the second and third questions. Observations were then analyzed to determine trends and patterns and to form generalizations where applicable. Figures 1 and 2 became reference tools for creating this observation framework. Pre-observation meetings were held with each teacher to explain the visits that would be required and the observational role of researchers during the three weeks of time they would spend in the classrooms. A meeting with the school principal was held to explain, in confidence, the models we were using to guide our observations. Our research was welcomed because it was anticipated that it would provide data that would help clarify the school improvement goals and critical pathways being engaged in by the staff.

Action research approaches were used to observe teachers throughout a three week block of time. A third researcher assessed the transcribed observation data and coded emerging patterns. Following this, the three researchers worked together to examine and interpret the data and identify trends and patterns. During this study, we did not measure amounts of time nor strategies used for approaches to learning through indirect instruction. Although these are also very valuable approaches to learning, these approaches are outside of the scope of this research focus. Following the classroom observations, researchers met with the school principal and the staff to explain the findings. They were given copies of the model we had used to guide our observations (Figure 2). This workshop for the school staff supported their ongoing professional dialogue about improved conceptions of the gradual release of responsibility and the importance of modeling.

Analysis

Previous research (Durkin, 1979) had shown that modeling had not been a commonly used strategy in classrooms. Less than one half of one percent (.44%) of classroom time had been found to be spent on modeling. During our study, over thirty years later, we found that teachers had spent an average 20.4% of their classroom time modeling new learning for students. The amount of time spent modeling in each classroom, regardless of division, was similar, ranging from 18.5% to 22.5%.

In these classrooms, modeling was being used in a variety of subject areas in each of the three classrooms. Modeling was evident for the following activities: brainstorming using semantic webs; analyzing components of a magazine cover; adding and subtracting; filling out a chart; reviewing story elements; writing an invitation; reading and performing a play script; presenting routines for a presentation; deconstructing lyrics; creating a map legend; demonstrating text forms; demonstration of strategies for making meaning; and demonstrating a physical education game. Teachers modeled processes, products, or values. The incidence of modeling as an instructional approach was much more prevalent than in the 1979 Durkin study, which was restricted to the use of modeling in reading comprehension. In some lessons, the theorized sequence of levels of support was evidenced as displayed in the diagram (Figure 2). Many incidences of modeling were highly energized and supported with technology and visual
aids. Some modeling instances were proceduralized by virtue of the fact that they happened in consistent places in the classroom (e.g., on the carpet) or were associated with the use of specific classroom management routines (e.g., the use of flip charts to focus attention).

Although the modeling was observed as an intentional instructional practice, the instructional time following modeling was not always related to the modeling. Teachers appeared to be intentional and confident in the modeling phase of instruction, yet were sometimes inconsistent in relating the purpose of the modeling to the other phases of instruction. For example, we were able to observe the phases of instruction supported by the research literature as a teacher first modeled (making change with coins), then consolidated learning through scaffolded practice (students practiced making change in small groups), and then provided application practice (a simulation of purchasing items and making change with the coins). However, we were able to see variants from theoretical approaches with a situation where a teacher modeled the planning of a paragraph by showing the development of a thought/brainstorming web using a familiar visual aid, and then followed the modeling by having students use their own brainstorming web to plan and write a paragraph, although paragraph writing using a web plan had not been modeled. Figure 3 shows the degree to which teachers followed modeling with intentionally related consolidation and application (Figure 3 in Appendix 2: What Follows Modeling?).

Comparing the schematics that we had created with what we had observed in the classroom allowed us to determine how closely theory matched practice. Several conclusions were evident after analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected from our observations. Analysis showed that the majority of modeling was of process skills or specific products. Teachers used modeling to show students how to do something. The purpose of the modeling was often not explicitly stated, nor clear. Teachers did not consistently tell students that they would be responsible for using what was modeled in upcoming work. Not all modeling led to practice opportunities of what was modeled. Opportunities for students to practise often introduced new variables into the required work. This complicated students’ efforts to practice what was modeled and often led to the need for one on one support as students applied new learning with unknown or un-modeled variables. Modeling was sometimes followed by practice opportunities that introduced new variables and complexities that might have been more effectively introduced at a later stage, when the skills were solidified by practice that replicated what was modeled. The decision about what was modeled often appeared to be influenced by the imminence of provincial testing rather than by formative assessment data from previous lessons. The rationale given to students for the need to practice often related to doing well on upcoming tests.

Some practice activities were directly connected to modeling yet often provided severely limited amounts of time before summative evaluation. Most of the work that students presented after first practice opportunities was evaluated through summative approaches. Summative assessment was often not preceded by formative comments to guide improvement. Formative assessment was given verbally. During practice, students often had verbal guidance from teachers about what they could improve. No written formative assessment was observed in any of the classrooms. Verbal formative assessment was often not specific enough to guide improvement and was frequently rushed by the support demands of other students. The conceptualized “gradual release of responsibility” was often not observed. Many aspects of the makeup of the classroom and tasks assigned by the teachers seemed to work counter to the
conception of the gradual development of independence. Practice time was severely limited in all contexts.

Teachers often followed modeling by regrouping small numbers of students to provide individual support to those who were anticipated to experience difficulties. This left the remainder of the students (usually more than three quarters of the class) with no scaffolded support during practice. Some frustration and off-task behaviour characterized students who needed support but were unable to get it immediately. While we did not measure the incidence of consolidation nor application support during indirect instruction in this study, our overall impression was that support for these elements was strong when applied to project based learning. This opens the window to examining indirect instruction in relation to the schematics at a later date. In each classroom the teachers had outstandingly positive relationships with their students. This appeared to have a beneficial effect on the degree and quality of engagement of the students during and following the modeling, regardless of the tasks.

Previous research, examination of lesson planning templates used in many Faculties of Education, and our personal experiences of teaching lesson planning to pre-service teachers have led us develop schematics (Figures 1 & 2) that relate theory to practice visually. Modeling is an important component of direct instruction. Previous researchers and theorists consistently identify the use of scaffolded support during practice following modeling. Scaffolded practice should follow and be supported by formative feedback to guide improvement and progress towards independence. This is the theory.

In practice in classrooms, modeling is being used much more frequently than was evident in prior research. However, the theorized roles of scaffolded practice, formative feedback, increasingly complex applications supported by further feedback, and summative evaluation that reflects adequate opportunities for successful demonstration of new learning is not being transferred to classroom contexts with consistency. We observed inconsistency of approaches related to modeling and the gradual release of responsibility. This has led us to conclude that, when using direct instruction, teachers have a strong conception of how to model effectively but unclear conceptions of the relationship between modeling and subsequent practice opportunities.

The school staff met with researchers after the study to discuss our research results. They were openly appreciative of the strength of the Figure 2 diagram to guide consistency in practice. One teacher said, “Now that I know what to do, I’ll be able to do this better.” It appears that provincial focus on improving teachers’ use of modeling in the classroom has been successful but limited by the lack of a clear and comprehensive understanding of what should follow modeling. It is our hope that this diagram may be helpful with this aspect of teachers’ understanding of direct instruction in both pre-service and in-service contexts.

**Discussion**

A clear conception of the role of modeling in direct instruction, and a visual perspective (Figure 2) of the grounded theoretical actions that should follow modeling have guided classroom observations of teachers’ use of direct instruction in their classrooms. By comparing observed practice with the diagram in Figure 2, researchers were able to see and measure both qualitatively and quantitatively, the instructional actions that followed modeling. Using this aid to observation, we could see the limitations on the opportunities for students to consolidate and apply new learning. Teachers used modeling in direct instruction. Time spent modeling was relatively consistent across classrooms and the strategy itself seemed to be well received by
learners. However, the time following the modeling was often problematic in that teachers seemed to be without a clear conception of how to move students to independence through structured practice after the modeling.

We examined the potential of the schematics (Figures 1 & 2) for direct instructional elements to inform teachers’ use of direct instruction and to guide the practice opportunities afforded by supported consolidation and increasing opportunities for independent application. Current use of this diagram with teacher candidates is helping them: conceptualize the phases of direct instruction, contrast direct and indirect approaches, and support their understanding of lesson planning. Professionals charged with the task of evaluating lesson delivery may also find it beneficial to use the diagram for professional development and to guide classroom observation. It has proven to be an effective framework to guide research reflections and the analysis of data.

Conclusions

Teachers are using modeling as an instructional approach more frequently than was found in the 1979 Durkin study. We observed that modeling was commonly used in direct instruction to help students develop targeted skills, products, and values. In discussions with teachers regarding the schematics (Figures 1 & 2), there is a common stated understanding that classroom modeling should be followed by scaffolded practice. Practice should then be followed by the gradual release of responsibility to the student and increasing independence with practice in new contexts. However, observations reveal that in actual implementation, teachers may be unclear about the nature of the practice that needs to follow the modeling and how they should support this practice.

An observation that should be cause for considerable concern also surfaced from this study. Providing supports to help some students caused others to be deprived of support. Our classrooms are not homogeneous environments. In a diverse environment, some students will require that new learning be re-taught before they can achieve success in any application of the learning. In response to this, teachers often work with students whom they anticipate will need re-teaching and who will benefit from strong scaffolding during early practice attempts. Immediately following the modeling to the whole class, they work one-on-one, or in small groups, with the students who need additional support. This is good proactive teaching. Problematic in the approach is the unsupported practice that is being engaged in by the rest of the students. They have no immediate supervision or error correction available, because the teacher is engaged elsewhere. Strong scaffolding for some means no scaffolding for others.

Additionally, the practice opportunities we observed frequently ended in a product that was being evaluated in a summative manner, with a grade or level assigned to it. The opportunity to practice in a supportive and formative assessment context was severely limited or absent in most observed lessons. We identified some gaps in practice, including: students being required to demonstrate learning that had not been practiced; summative evaluation that was not preceded by formative assessment; limited feedback to support error correction; assurances of firm and correct responses before evaluation was required; and limited applications within new contexts to solidify students’ understanding. Modeling was often done in isolation and was not followed by any related practice opportunities.

There appears to be a significant gap between teachers’ conceptual understanding of the role of modeling and their understanding of the role of structured, scaffolded practice, that is followed by a gradual release of responsibility after modeling. Although teachers may articulate
the sequential relationship among the phases of instruction, they do not consistently follow these phases in lessons.

**Future Research**

This study has uncovered new areas of inquiry related to the use of direct and indirect instructional approaches in the classroom. Future research will examine the amount of unsupported time that students attempt initial practice with new learning and examine whose efforts are scaffolded in the classroom from a demographic perspective. Additionally, opportunities to consider the nature and effectiveness of strategies that teachers are using to scaffold the majority of students while they support re-teaching to small groups should be considered in light of their frequency and efficacy. The strategies that motivate students to obtain support in a timely way when teachers are scaffolding other students would provide valuable information about what we can teach students about supporting their own growth. The nature of the formative feedback students receive during practice needs further study. The nature of the strategies that students may be taught about how to respond to formative feedback and address improvements (assessment as learning) requires further investigation. The proportion of formative to summative feedback that is being received by students would tell us a great deal about the sufficiency of practice opportunities with new tasks. Studying the range and complexity of the tasks that students engage in to ensure deeper understanding of new content would enrich our knowledge of the efficacy of indirect instructional approaches. Finally, the impact of teacher in-service on student learning should be thoroughly investigated. If teachers fully understand the instructional actions that might support and follow their strong modeling attempts, we could anticipate highly favourable correlations to improved student achievement.

An additional benefit of the schematics is that they display the role of indirect instruction in its many forms (inquiry, project-based learning, web quests, cooperative learning, trips, activity centers, problem solving, contract learning, and so forth) in relation to direct instruction. Examining the relationship in teachers’ practice between the use of direct and indirect instructional approaches will be a valuable future study.
References


APPENDIX 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much time was spent modeling?</th>
<th>What was being modeled?</th>
<th>What followed the modeling?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 2

**ELEMENTS OF FIGURE 2 REFLECTED IN CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE OF SUPPORT (gradual release)</th>
<th>PHASE OF INSTRUCTION as identified in diagram</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION of segment as found in diagram</th>
<th>FREQUENCY/CONSISTENCY of what was observed in study as INTENTIONAL practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do</td>
<td>1.1 Motivation</td>
<td>Remotivate through high levels of task success (from previous lessons)</td>
<td>(*) purpose of lesson not often identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 (Re)modeling</td>
<td>Transmission to whole class or groups</td>
<td>sometimes weak link to application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intense cavitational interaction between teacher and students</td>
<td>positive relationships have an influence on degree and quality of interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 Structured consolidation</td>
<td>High engagement</td>
<td>(unsure of factors affecting this)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Ensured 'first try' success through support</td>
<td>Interacting with teacher provides support for some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Initiate gradual release of responsibility for learning</td>
<td>(*) sometimes observed but not usually as an intentional progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Continual monitoring for formative redirection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Error corrections in context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Provide formative assessment feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Shifts in context, application, level of content; from familiar to new, to problem embedded</td>
<td>*Time not allocated for students to experience a variety of practice opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1 Application</td>
<td>Firm responding (by students)</td>
<td>evident in strong participants, not all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Strongly supported through scaffolding</td>
<td></td>
<td>(*) many without support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 Moderately supported through scaffolding</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Missing step- students expected to assume responsibility shortly after initial supported efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You do</td>
<td>4.4 Independence; begin collection of summative assessment data</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Many not set up for successful independent work, through lack of practice/feedback; nature of assessment rarely made explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5 Mastery; collect data from summative assessment task(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Data usually collected for summative purposes without formative stage experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-cognition</td>
<td>5.1 Lesson conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>(*) Often without metacognitive aspect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Longitudinal Exploration of the Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of Students with Emotional/Behavioural Difficulties: The Importance of Student Perceptions of Themselves, Their Peer Relationships, and Their Classrooms

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Abstract

Students with emotional/behavioural difficulties (E/BD) continue to experience poor academic and psychosocial outcomes. Developing a better understanding of the ways in which indicators of these outcomes develop while students are still in early grades can assist in planning effective programming and alter negative trajectories. Accordingly, the present study sought to explore the perceptions of students with and without E/BD regarding their self-concept, classroom climate, and academic achievement over the course of one school year. The participants consisted of 68 elementary-aged students attending two schools in Northwestern Ontario. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted and a number of significant differences were found both between groups and over time. Specifically, students in the E/BD group experienced poorer functioning compared to students without E/BD at most time points. Patterns of change in psychosocial and academic variables were largely similar across groups. Discussions of these findings, as well as implications for practice and for future research are presented.

Keywords: Emotional/behavioural difficulties; self-concept; academic achievement

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A Longitudinal Exploration of the Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of Students with Emotional/Behavioural Difficulties: The Importance of Student Perceptions of Themselves, Their Peer Relationships, and Their Classrooms

Students who exhibit emotional and/or behavioural difficulties (E/BD) are at-risk for poor academic and psychosocial outcomes (e.g. Wood & Cronin, 1999). Recent large-scale data from the United States (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005) and Canada (Whitley, Lupart, & Beran, 2009) highlight the social and academic difficulties experienced by elementary and secondary-aged students with school-identified E/BD. In fact, according to some researchers, students with E/BD experience less school success than any other group of students, whether identified with an exceptionality or not (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Wagner et al., 2005; Wood & Cronin, 1999).

Within the Canadian education system, students with E/BD may be formally identified for special education services through a combination of teacher observation and referral, parent observation, and psychological assessment (Visser, Daniels, & Cole, 2001; Zionts, Zionts & Simpson, 2002). This identification is dependent on a number of factors including the provincial categories or diagnoses, the severity and type of difficulties the student is identifying, the services available in the school, as well as numerous other student, teacher, and school characteristics (e.g. Lahey, Schwab-Stone, Goodman, Waldman, Canino, et al., 2000; Noble & Bowd, 2005). Regardless of the source of the definition, however, all contain reference to students displaying behaviour problems (either internalizing or externalizing) that are severe, chronic, and pervasive, and that negatively impact the students’ ability to learn and function in a classroom setting (e.g. Alberta Learning, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; Winzer, 2008).

It is clear from the extant literature that students displaying emotional and behavioural difficulties, whatever the exact criteria used, are at-risk for poor academic achievement and dropping out of high school, as well as psychosocial difficulties in areas such as peer relationships. Teachers consistently rate students with E/BD as having moderate to severe academic difficulties and poor social skills (Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Nelson, Benner, Lane & Smith, 2004; Soles, Bloom, Heath, & Karagiannakis, 2008). Teachers also view students with E/BD as being more disruptive and difficult to teach, as exerting less effort and often report having more negative relationships with them compared to typically-developing peers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Gunter, Coutinho, & Cade, 2002; Whitley et al., 2009). What is less clear, however, is how students with E/BD perceive themselves and their classroom environments. This is important because three facets of self-perception, namely, general and peer self-concept as well as classroom climate, have been found to be influential for outcomes among the general student body (e.g. Henderson, Dakof, Schwartz, & Liddle, 2006; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Lubbers, Van Der Werf, Snijders, Creemers, & Kuyper, 2006). Research exploring these in relation to students with E/BD is summarized below.

General Self-Concept

Self-concept, in both peer and general areas, is an important marker of psychological adjustment for students with and without exceptionalities. Students with high self-concept have better peer and family relationships, higher grades, and lower levels of alcohol and drug use, depression, anxiety, and externalizing behaviours than those with lower self-concept (Deihl, Vicary, &
Dieke, 1997; DuBois, Felner, Brand, & George, 1999; Henderson et al., 2006; Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997). As well, students who have chosen to drop out of high school report declining self-concept prior to leaving school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

For students with E/BD, self-concept is of particular importance given the risk these students experience for long-term difficulties (Margerison, 1996). However, few studies have explored the self-perceptions of students with E/BD with respect to their competencies and self-worth. In addition, syntheses of findings in this area are confused by the use of varying terminology and measures. Self-esteem has been defined as an individual’s “positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality” (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995, p. 141). Indeed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1979), one of the most widely used self-esteem measure in social science research (Whiteside-Mansell & Corwyn, 2003), was based on a unitary conception of self-esteem and assesses self-esteem using a single score.

More recently, however, a multidimensional view of self-esteem has been endorsed and has become more prevalent in recent years. One of the most influential theories is based on a hierarchical, multidimensional model presented by Shavelson and his colleagues (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), and subsequently tested by Marsh (e.g. Marsh, 1989; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003). According to Marsh and Shavelson (1985), self-concept is a person’s perceptions of him- or her-self. It is formed through experience with interpretations of one’s environment and has both a descriptive and evaluative dimension. Furthermore, self-concept consists of a general component, which is a higher order factor comprising multiple, domain-specific self-concepts that, while related, can be viewed as separate constructs. For the present study, then, self-concept will be defined as having a general domain as well as more specific domains such as academic and peer relations self-concept. This clarification is important, as more general self-esteem measures have not always been found to be linked to academic achievement or specific behaviours, or capture differences among subgroups of students (e.g. Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2005; Rosenberg et al., 1995). This is due in part to the different perceptions that individuals can have of themselves simultaneously, in areas such as academics and peer relationships as well as generally. Studies that employ a unitary measure of self-esteem will be referred to as investigating self-esteem, rather than self-concept.

Early research by Lund (1986) suggested that students with emotional and behavioural difficulties who were traditionally removed from regular classrooms experienced low self-esteem. Margerison (1996), in his exploration of a cohort of elementary-aged students, found that over 12 percent of the participants had low self-esteem and that the majority of these students displayed behavioural difficulties. From his perspective, low self-esteem is one of the causal factors in E/BD and that if the former is increased the latter will also improve. Other researchers have also documented the depressed self-esteem scores of students with E/BD relative to comparison groups (Slomkowski, Klein, & Mannuzza, 1995; Treuting & Hinshaw, 2001). Clearly, further research employing a multi-dimensional view of self-concept is necessary to determine whether students with E/BD do in fact report poorer general self-concept than their peers.

**Peer Relations Self-Concept**

As noted previously, students can have varying perceptions of their own worth and competence depending on the domain in question. Peer or social self-concept is one domain of student perception that has been found to have a positive influence on general self-concept, academic
self-concept, and academic achievement (Marsh & McDonald-Holmes, 1990; Lubbers et al., 2006). Peer relations self-concept refers to the ways in which individuals perceive their competence in peer relationships. As might be expected, teachers and parents consistently rate students with E/BD as having poorer social skills and fewer friends than students without E/BD (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Lane et al., 2006; Sabornie, Cullinan, Osborne & Brock, 2005; Wagner et al., 2005).

However, contrary findings have been reported for student perceptions of their own peer relationships. A number of studies have found that students with various emotional and behavioural difficulties rate themselves as being as socially competent as their typically-developing peers (Diener & Milich, 1997; Hoza, Dobbs, Owens, Pelham & Pillow, 2002; Hoza, Pelham, Milich, Pillow & McBride, 1993; Whitley, Heath & Finn, 2008). Students with E/BD also view themselves as more socially successful than their teachers (Hoza et al., 2002; Owens & Hoza, 2003), which has been interpreted as reflective of the inability of students with E/BD to reliably assess their own skills and behaviours. Whether this finding will extend to a sample of students who self-identify as having emotional and/or behavioural difficulties will be explored in the present study.

Classroom Climate

As with self-concept, there is scarce extant literature exploring the perceptions of students with E/BD regarding their classrooms and their relationships with their teachers. Given the research documenting the negative views of teachers regarding the behaviour of these students, as well as the academic and social difficulties that are often experienced by students with E/BD, it appears likely that these students would perceive their classroom environment less positively than their peers. Class climate, as measured by student-teacher relationship, has been found to have a significant influence on students’ academic achievement, school engagement and behavioural adjustment both in the short-term and across school years (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2009).

Mihalas and her colleagues (2009) make the argument that developing a positive classroom environment for students with E/BD and most importantly, fostering strong and supportive student-teacher relationships, is key in promoting positive outcomes. Certainly students with E/BD may not always feel welcomed in their classrooms and schools (Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008). Studies documenting less positive student-teacher relationships from the perspective of teachers support this assertion (e.g. Birch & Ladd, 1998). Whitley et al. (2009) found that students with E/BD felt significantly more negative about school than peers without exceptionalities. However, students also reported similar perceptions to typically-achieving peers with regard to being treated fairly by their teachers and not feeling like an outsider at school. Further research is needed to explore the perceptions of students with E/BD regarding their classrooms and teachers.

Present Study

Clearly, then, although the poor long-term outcomes of students with E/BD are widely documented, the processes by which these occur are not well understood. In particular, the perceptions of students themselves have long been overlooked as potential influences on academic achievement and psychosocial outcomes. Students with E/BD are often identified very
early on in their school career and there are many opportunities to intervene and alter the downward trajectory that many follow (Mihalas et al., 2009; Montague, Enders, Dietz, Dixon, & Cavendish, 2008). Developing a better understanding of the ways in which emotional and behavioural difficulties change and influence academic and psychosocial outcomes while students are still in early grades can assist in planning effective early intervention. Student general and peer self-concept as well as their perceptions of classroom climate are three variables that have been found to significantly impact student learning, engagement, and psychosocial adjustment. Thus, the present study sought to explore the perceptions of elementary-aged students regarding their self-concept, emotional/behavioural difficulties, and classroom climate over the course of one school year. The academic achievement of students were also included as a variable of interest. Specifically, our research question was as follows: Are there any differences in the self-concept, classroom climate, and academic achievement of students with emotional/behavioural difficulties and those without, both in the short- and long-term?

Methods

The data for the present analyses were drawn from a larger study focusing on bullying and violence in two elementary (K-8) schools in Northwestern Ontario. Students completed several paper-based measures related to their experiences with bullying, their behaviours, general and peer self-concept and their strengths in a number of domains. Students’ grades in all subject areas were also collected. The first administration took place prior to the intervention (February, 2008: Time 1), the second in June of 2008 (Time 2) and the third in March of 2009 (Time 3). Data from all three time periods are used for the present study.

Procedures

Consent packages were sent home with all students in Grades 4 – 8 that included an invitation for parents to participate in the anti-bullying project and to provide consent for their child(ren) to participate. A student assent form was also included. Those students whose parent returned a signed consent and student assent form were included in the study. Participation was limited to these grades because of the number of self-report measures that were judged to be at a reading level appropriate for students in at least Grade 4.

Participants

Of the approximately 352 potential student participants at the two schools, parental consent and student assent was obtained for 103, resulting in a return rate of 29 percent. Equal numbers of students participated at the two schools and no significant differences were found by First Nations status, gender or grade. The mean age of the student participants at the outset of the study was 10.93 years of age ($SD = 1.18$) and approximately equal numbers of male and female students took part. When asked to report their ethnicity, approximately 25% of the sample indicated that they were of First Nations descent with the remaining 75% reporting largely European backgrounds.

For the present study, analyses were conducted on a number of student self-report measures as well as academic achievement data. Students from the larger study were retained if they had complete data on all measures at both time points, resulting in a final sample size of 65.
Due the longitudinal nature of our analyses, only students who were in grades 4 through 7 at Time 1 were included. Demographic characteristics for all participants at Time 1 are presented in Table 1.

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Once parent consent and student assent were obtained, students completed three questionnaires in small groups (5-10) at a time during the school day that was convenient for them and their teacher(s). Students completed the three questionnaires independently with assistance provided by research assistants if required. They took approximately 20 minutes to complete in total. The questionnaires consisted of a) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, b) Self-Description Questionnaire and c) the Classroom Climate sub-scale.

Measures

**Strengths and difficulties questionnaire.**

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, Meltzer, & Bailey, 1998) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire with parent, teacher, and self-report versions. The SDQ assesses the E/BDs of children and youth between the ages of 4 to 16 (informant-rated) and 11 to 16 (self-report) in 5 areas: conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer problems, and prosocial behaviour. Scores are calculated for each of the five areas and summing all but the prosocial behaviour score creates a total difficulties score. For each of the areas, five items are presented describing positive and negative attributes; children and youth respond to each on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 = not true to 2 = certainly true. The SDQ has been found to have good psychometric properties with moderate cross-informant correlations (Goodman, 1999; 2001). The self-report SDQ has been found to accurately discriminate between community and clinic-referred samples and is sensitive in detecting emotional/behavioural problems (Goodman et al., 1998; Mathai, Anderson, & Bourne, 2002; 2004).

**Self-description questionnaire.**

General and Peer Self-Concept were measured using the Self-Description Questionnaire – I (SDQ-I) (Marsh, 1988). The SDQ-I is one of the most widely used and psychometrically sound measures of multidimensional self-concept (Byrne, 1996; Marsh & MacDonald Holmes,
According to Marsh (Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1998), the general self-concept scale is intended to measure “student self-perceptions of themselves as effective, capable individuals who have self-confidence and self-respect and are proud and satisfied with the way they are” (p. 1051). Children and youth respond to ten items on a five point scale ranging from 1 = false to 5 = true. Marsh reported Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for the factor as 0.81 (Marsh, 1990). In the present study, Cronbach’s $\alpha$ averaged 0.84 across the three time points.

The peer self-concept scale measures “student perceptions of how easily they make friends, their popularity, and whether others want them as a friend” (Marsh et al., 1998; p. 1051). The Peer Self-Concept scale consists of nine items, which are rated by children and youth on a five point scale ranging from 1 = false to 5 = true. Marsh’s SDQ is one of the most well-validated measures of self-concept for children (Byrne, 1996). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was reported by Marsh as 0.85 (Marsh, 1990). In the present study, Cronbach’s $\alpha$ averaged 0.88 across the three time points.

Classroom climate.

The Classroom Climate measure is a subscale of the Diversity, Individual Development and Differentiation survey (DIDDS; Lupart, Whitley, Odishaw, & McDonald, 2006) developed to assess student views in areas relevant to overall school functioning and inclusive education. The Classroom Climate subscale consists of seven items that evaluate students’ perceptions of the support they receive from their teacher and their opportunities to take part in classroom activities. Children and youth respond to items on a five point scale ranging from 1 = false to 5 = true. In the present study, Cronbach’s $\alpha$ averaged 0.72 across the three time points.

Academic achievement.

Academic achievement was assessed through student grades, which were obtained from report cards. Numerical grades were provided for students in grades 7 and 8 and letter grades for students in grades 4, 5 and 6. Letter grades were transformed into numerical grades to allow for quantitative analyses by choosing the midpoint of each grade range. For example, a grade of B- represented a mark range of 70 to 72 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998), so a 71 was assigned for each B-. The academic average used in the present analyses was obtained by calculating the mean of the three strands of English Language Arts (reading, writing, oral/visual communication), five strands of Mathematics (number sense/numeration, measurement, geometry/spatial sense, patterning/algebra, data management/probability) and Science and Technology. These subjects were chosen as they appeared in all reporting periods, for students in every elementary grade (1 through 8).

Analyses

Analyses were conducted to assess differences in self-concept, classroom climate and academic achievement for students with and without emotional/behavioural difficulties. Accordingly, a dichotomous variable was created. Students who scored in the top third of the Total Difficulties Score on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire were identified as having emotional/behavioural difficulties (E/BD group, $n = 23$, see Table 1) and those scoring in the bottom two thirds were identified as having low or no emotional/behavioural problems (Comparison group, $n = 45$). It is important to note that the decision to select students in the top
third of the group was not based on clinical cut-off scores or comparisons to external norms but rather was a way to select a group of students experiencing significant emotional and behavioural difficulties relative to their peers. Using the E/BD group status as a between-group factor, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with general and peer self-concept, classroom climate and academic achievement at each of the three time periods as dependent variables. Descriptive analyses indicated that none of the variables displayed a distribution with a degree of kurtosis or skewness greater than 2 standard errors. For academic achievement, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction (Greenhouse & Geisser, 1959) was applied due to violation of sphericity.

Results

Results of the repeated measures ANOVA reveal a significant multivariate effect for group, $F(4, 59) = 7.68, p < .01$ and time period, $F(8, 55) = 3.99, p < .01$ (see Figure 1). There was no significant interaction between the two. Univariate tests revealed significant differences between the E/BD and Comparison groups on general self-concept, $F(1, 62) = 11.58, p < .01$, peer self-concept, $F(1, 62) = 13.65, p < .01$, classroom climate, $F(1, 62) = 23.10, p < .01$, and academic achievement, $F(1, 62) = 9.80, p < .01$, at all time points. Scores were lower for students in the E/BD group than the Comparison group in all instances.

Figure 1. Mean scores over time, by group.
Across time, general self-concept, $F(2, 124) = 3.50, p < .03$ and classroom climate, $F(2, 124) = 3.16, p < .05$, changed significantly. A significant linear trend was noted for the former and a significant quadratic trend for the latter. Similar trends were observed with respect to general self-concept, which declined significantly across time for both groups, for peer self-concept, which remained fairly stable for both groups, and for academic achievement, which displayed a significant quadratic trend but did not change significantly across time for either group. Classroom climate, however, showed dissimilar patterns for the E/BD and Comparison groups with the former reporting a significant quadratic trend and the latter remaining stable over time.

**Discussion**

The results show a number of interesting findings. Students with greater emotional/behavioural problems did report significantly lower levels of general and peer self-concept and they had significantly lower average school grades than those in the comparison group. They also perceived their class climate as being significantly more negative. Most importantly, these findings held across all three time periods indicating that the difficulties of the E/BD group were not transient or solely the result of a poor classroom experience. Clearly then, regardless of the directionality of the relationship between emotional/behavioural difficulties and the outcome variables, the educational experiences of students in the E/BD group are more negative overall.

The present findings, particularly the negative, stable self-perceptions of a sample of students with E/BD, are supported by limited research (e.g. Whitley et al., 2009). Several studies have in fact found that students with E/BD rate themselves as similarly competent in terms of social and academic skills, in comparison to their typically-developing peers (e.g. Diener & Milich, 1997; Hoza et al., 2002). Participants in these studies, however, have generally been children and youth (primarily boys) who have been referred to medical clinics by parents, teachers, and health professionals for having extreme levels of hyperactivity, impulsivity and/or inattention. The present sample consists of students who fall mainly within the average range of emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and represent a more typical group of elementary-aged students. The inability of students with E/BD to recognize their own areas of difficulty may be observed only among students with severe difficulties.

In terms of longitudinal effects, similar patterns were observed across groups for general self-concept, which declined significantly across time for both groups, for peer self-concept, which remained fairly stable for both groups, and for academic achievement, which displayed a significant quadratic trend but did not change significantly across time for either group. Classroom climate, however, showed dissimilar patterns for the E/BD and Comparison groups with the former reporting a significant quadratic trend and the latter remaining stable over time. Previous research supports a linear decline in general self-concept in late childhood and early adolescence, which typically shows a quadratic age effect as it increases somewhat in later secondary grades and into adulthood (Marsh, 1989; Marsh, Parker & Barnes, 1985; Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). Explanations for this pattern include the change that occurs as students move from an inflated sense of self during childhood, to a more realistic self-perception prompted by cognitive development allowing for greater self-awareness and awareness of the perceptions and evaluations of others (Harter, 1998; Marsh, 1989). Students may also face greater pressures, both academically and in terms of peer relations, as they enter
middle school years and may internalize negative messages from others, thus resulting in lowered general self-concept (Eccles et al., 1989). As no differences in the changes were noted between groups, it appears that students with and without EBD experience this well-documented trend. One study by Montague and her colleagues (2008) did note a dramatically different pattern of self-concept scores for students with E/BD; as students without E/BD reported higher scores through adolescence, those with E/BD reported declining self-concept after age 15. Unfortunately, as the current study does not extend into secondary school, the generalizability of Montague’s findings cannot be assessed. Future research will be needed to follow the self-concept trajectory of students with E/BD into late adolescence.

The stability of peer self-concept is in contrast to these studies that also document declines in this construct across childhood and into adolescence. Changes in peer self-concept are much less robust than those observed in all other domains, however, (e.g. Marsh, 1989) and may not be apparent in all student samples. Also, as students in the present sample remain in the same school for grade 7 and 8 and do not transition to middle or secondary school, the changes and potential difficulties in peer relationships that may result from exposure to new students and a new environment may not be relevant.

The remarkable similarity of the longitudinal trends in academic achievement for both groups of students is worth highlighting. While students with E/BD experience significantly lower achievement, their scores remain consistent over the year in which measures were obtained, as do those of their peers. This indicates that, regardless of environmental changes occurring from one grade to the next, students typically achieve at similar levels. For students without E/BD, this finding would be expected. That those with E/BD continue to achieve at such similar and far lower levels than their peers is problematic. In the present study, information is not available as to the instructional methods or programs that were put in place to help these struggling students. However the pervasive, chronic nature of the difficulties experienced by this group of students that is documented in this study makes clear the need for timely, focused intervention.

The pattern observed for classroom climate over time is in contrast to that of self-concept or academic achievement. Students without E/BD continued to view their classroom climate similarly, and more positively than students with E/BD. Those in the E/BD group, however, show a slight decline from February to June and then a significant increase the following year. It is possible that the relationships between students with E/BD and their teachers worsen over the course of the year as their negative behaviours and relatively poor academic achievement persist. Students with E/BD, who experience multiple difficulties, may perceive their classroom environments and their teacher more positively at the beginning of the school year and then more negatively as the year goes on. In turn, their teachers may grow increasingly frustrated with the lack of improvement observed in students’ behaviours and achievement. As neither earlier or later time points are available in the present study, and relevant research does not exist, this hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

One interesting and unique element of the present study is that students themselves identify the emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, rather than teachers or parents. The perceptions of adults in the lives of children and youth have generally been viewed as ‘objective’ or closer to reality than those of the students themselves. While we have no way of knowing how closely the identification of E/BD would have been between students and teachers in the present sample, we do know that the academic achievement of self-identified students was significantly lower than the comparison group. This indicates that teachers are aware of the difficulties of this
group of students, at least in their schoolwork. Certainly there may be moderating variables not assessed in the present study, such as depression, which may contribute to an overall negative view of self on the part of the E/BD group resulting in low scores across self-report measures. However, given the significant relationships between student self-concept, engagement, teacher relationships and long-term outcomes (e.g. Mihalas et al., 2009; Zimmerman et al., 1997) the perspectives of students regarding their own behaviour, estimations of competence and class climate cannot be discounted.

The latter of these is particularly interesting. There is very limited existing research that has explored the perceptions of students with E/BD of their classrooms and teachers. Whitley et al. (2009) found that a group of Canadian students with E/BD felt they were treated fairly by their teachers but did not like school as much as their typically-developing peers. The student-teacher relationship, which is an integral part of classroom climate, is of particular importance for students at-risk for academic failure, such as those with E/BD (e.g. Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Sutherland et al., 2008). However, teachers may struggle to maintain positive relationships with students who are displaying potentially disruptive behaviour, lack social competence or who appear disengaged from their education. The promotion of functional behaviour assessments, positive behaviour supports, and whole-school approaches to supporting students with E/BD and their teachers (e.g. Christensen, Young & Marchant, 2004; Hawken & O’Neill, 2006; Mihalas et al., 2009; Sutherland et al., 2008), may help to ameliorate these relationships and enable more positive outcomes for students with E/BD.

The myriad challenges faced by students with E/BD make school-based interventions difficult. Although not included in most definitions of E/BD, the vast majority of students with this label experience significantly lower academic achievement than their typically-developing peers (e.g. Reid, Gonzales, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004). The relationship between academic achievement and emotional and behavioural problems is likely reciprocal; if students continue to struggle with their school work, they will continue to experience internalizing and externalizing behaviours and thus spend less time on task and have less positive relationships with their teachers, resulting in further academic declines (Sutherland et al., 2008). Although most students with E/BD who attend school in the United States are educated in segregated settings, many more in Canada are included in mainstream education settings. Students with moderate E/BD may face repeated suspension and/or expulsions as responses to behavioural outbursts or failing to attend school (e.g. Conroy, Hendrickson, & Hester, 2004). This type of reactionary approach has been found to be largely ineffective in terms of improving future actions and may in fact contribute to worsening behaviours (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; 2000). An altered school-wide focus that seeks to find ways to better include, rather than exclude students with E/BD is necessary. This can be accomplished through the use of school-wide prevention programs that encourage social-emotional learning, a dual focus on the academic and behavioural needs of students with E/BD, and additional and specific training and support to allow teachers to better support students with E/BD (Alberta Learning, 2008; Hymel & Henderson, 2006; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).

Many students with more severe E/BD present with complex needs that overwhelm classroom teachers faced with diverse classrooms and varied support. Results from the present study confirm the range of difficulties that students themselves are aware of. In light of this, there is growing recognition of the need for interdisciplinary, collaborative approaches to educating students with E/BD, including teachers, parents, behaviour specialists, board personnel and possibly mental health specialists. For example, Manitoba has created an intersectoral
initiative to support students with severe E/BD that is known as a Circle of Care (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2009). The circle includes the student’s school, family, and an outside agency such as Mental Health or Youth Corrections. Other provinces have created or are in the process of developing similarly comprehensive initiatives (e.g. Heath, Petrakos, Finn, Karagiannakis, McLean-Haywood & Rousseau, 2004; Ontario Ministries of Education and Children and Youth Services, 2008).

Given the current results, it is also essential that the self-perceptions of students with E/BD be considered as part of any intervention. While behaviour problems and poor achievement do present difficulties for educators and parents, they also contribute to poor self-worth and perceptions of competence as well as a negative view of the classroom environment on the part of the students themselves. Finding ways to build on students’ strengths and promoting social acceptance of students with E/BD within schools may improve these self-perceptions and contribute to improved outcomes.

Limitations & Future Research

There are a few limitations in the present study. First, participation at the two schools was fairly low and a number of students had incomplete data sets, resulting in a moderate sample size. As well, although the focus of the present study was on the perceptions of students self-identified as having emotional/behavioural difficulties, it would have been beneficial to have had access to teacher and/or parent measures to confirm that these problems were evident across multiple settings. Future research may explore the views of multiple informants in regards to the academic and psychosocial experiences of students with E/BD. As well, while this study is one of few longitudinal explorations of the experiences of students with E/BD, it was still relatively short-lived at approximately one year. Following students for a longer period through their school careers may shed light on the processes involved in the successes and areas of need.

Conclusion

As a group, students with E/BD experience poorer academic and psychosocial outcomes than their peers with and without exceptionalities. However, few Canadian studies have explored the experiences of these students early in their schooling, when intervention attempts are likely to be more successful. The present study documents the more negative and persistent perceptions that students hold as early as elementary school regarding their classroom climate and self-concept. Findings also highlight the pervasive academic achievement that students with E/BD struggle with. It is essential that future research and practice consider the self-perceptions of students with E/BD as well as the contextual influences such as student-teacher and peer relationships in developing and evaluating interventions.
References


In his latest work, Richard Nisbett optimistically explores past and contemporary constructions of intelligence, seeking to overturn the strong hereditarian positions of intelligence by meticulously considering the evidence for in-group and between group differences in IQ from a ‘racial’, cultural, and social perspective. Nisbett argues against the extreme hereditarian view—that nothing in the environment can much affect intelligence—arguing instead that intelligence is likely far more mutable than hereditarian authors allow. He subsequently navigates many of the social, cognitive, and educational interventions that stand to increase intelligence and academic achievement.

Nisbett strikes an effective balance between being overly optimistic about possible interventions, and being cautious about judgments of causality, while walking the reader through well-crafted arguments and careful analyses of the research. He provides compelling explanations for many of the patterns that have arisen in the literature linking intelligence to genetic and ‘racial’ variables and he shows how and why at least some of the claims about genetic intelligence made by well-known hereditarian authors such as Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, Arthur Jensen, J. P. Rushton, and others have been mistaken. In doing so, Nisbett builds his case as to why both laypeople and experts are wrongly convinced that intelligence is mostly a matter of genes, and he suggests that promoting change in intelligence is both possible and worthwhile.

Claims of the universal validity of intelligence metrics are controversial. Despite this controversy many measures of intelligence and cognitive performance are used frequently with acceptable error in schools, particularly in the identification of learning exceptionalities. Tests such as the WISC-IQ and many other objective tests have been appropriately validated and field tested and are consequently considered reliable—that is, whatever it is they measure they measure well.

However, questions regarding the universal validity of objective tests arose early in their use. One noteworthy example comes from Weschler (1944) himself regarding his WISC-IQ test. He warned “our norms cannot be used for the colored population” (p. 107). Clearly, Weschler was aware of cultural, ‘racial’ and possibly linguistic effects on test performance, ideas later confirmed by researchers like Williams (1972), whose intentional ‘biasing’ on the BITCH-100 test demonstrated the ease with which bias could be constructed to impede the performance of ‘whites.’ Somewhat later, Erikson (1987) noted that genetic-deficit models of poor performance had been replaced with cultural-deficit models. By the next decade, the work of Ogbu (1992; 2002) and Ogbu and Simmons (1998) explained how cultural variations (i.e. social phenomena) rather than ‘racial’ differences (i.e. those attributed to biological characteristics) have a
predictable and significant effect on school performance and on objective test results. At the same time cultural and linguistic explanations for test bias were being better understood in the social sciences, biologists and proponents of a gene-centred version of neo-Darwinism were examining intelligence differently. Dawkins’ (1976) gene-centred view of evolution worked to buffer the many unpleasant responses to the idea that some ‘races’ were less intelligent than others by thinking about the matter in terms of competition between rival genes rather than between rival groups or individuals.

Although controversial, Herrnstein and Murray’s (1994) publication of *The Bell Curve* seriously entertained the idea that intelligence is a function of ‘race’. J.P. Rushton (2000) took the hypotheses further in *Race, Evolution, and Behavior* by exploring correlations between cranial capacity and intelligence, a gene-centred evolutionary position that remains popular among prominent evolutionary psychologists such as Pinker (2002) and Tooby and Cosmides (2005). Pinker’s (2002) *The Blank Slate* sharply criticized what he termed the Standard Social Sciences Model of explanation, a euphemism for the significant work done by social scientists in drawing attention to problems of cultural, linguistic, and social bias on objective intelligence tests.

Nisbett, however, avoids terms such as bias and ‘nature versus nurture’ focusing his attention instead on a meticulous analysis of the evidence presented by hereditarian scholars on the subject and by dismantling the evidence for between-group differences in intelligence. Not surprisingly Nisbett’s alternate explanations for between-group (e.g. ‘racial’) differences in IQ have not been well received by the very academics whose positions he undermines. In a retort recently published in *The Open Psychology Journal*, J.P. Rushton and Arthur Jensen (2010) accuse Nisbett of substantial errors of omission, selective bias, and refer to the work as one “not of scholarship, but of advocacy” (p. 29). As such, the retort is important reading if for no reason than to illustrate how deeply disparate these positions are. Rushton and Jensen, while methodically critical of Nisbett’s use of the evidence, often fail to address some of the most important points made by Nisbett – focusing instead on specific details emphasizing their thesis that IQ scores are “Life History Traits” (p. 37) of specific human ‘races’ (some other such traits include frequency of intercourse, size of genitalia, aggressiveness, law abidingness and cultural achievements among other bizarre things – clearly categories that beg to be taken seriously but no such explanation is offered). When Rushton and Jensen miss the point they seem to miss it widely. For example, when responding to Nisbett’s suggestion that normed and validated IQ tests in one population may not usefully apply to another, Rushton and Jensen (2010) respond by claiming, that even in Africa, IQ strongly predicts “job performance” (p. 22). What those metrics of performance are and how they are applied and measured – particularly in a rural context – makes for a very curious claim.

Nisbett’s thesis – that heritability says nothing about environmental mutability – appears sound despite the negative critique from Rushton and Jensen. While Nisbett concedes that a significant part of intelligence may well be genetic, he is skeptical of causal claims that fail to acknowledge that IQ tests and intelligence are particular kinds of socially and culturally-situated constructions. Nisbett seriously considers cultural implications while systematically and competently destabilizing the positions that have taken a strong hereditarian perspective.

For educators in particular this is an important book because emerging research is opening new possibilities in thinking about learning mechanisms that may begin to more adequately address environmental and experiential effects on human achievement. McCain, Mustard, and Shanker (2007), Jablonka and Lamb (2005), and Harper (2005) assert that inherited
variables contribute to intergenerational transfer of skills and development of “core capacities” (McCain et al., p 13) in ways that complicate traditional understandings of what exactly is entailed by genetic inheritance. Nisbett sets the stage for developing a richer understanding of heritable intelligence and the implications are significant for it appears that the views on what skills and capacities can be inherited are still evolving.

Anyone involved in Education knows that it is well established that parental education, income, and related demographic variables predict student achievement in school. However, families transmit more than wealth, assets, and social capital over time. They also pass on skills, behaviours, knowledge, attitudes, habits, and more complex skills involved in problem solving, decision-making, and automaticity in situational response. These endowments contribute to the causal determinants of achievement and while Nisbett avoids Jablonka and Lamb’s (2005) categories specifically, he similarly explores how heritable pathways of transmission via epigenetic (environmental effects such as stress), behavioural (habit/action related), and symbolic (language/concept) inheritance systems can contribute to intelligence and student achievement. Nisbett provides many supporting examples to show how these effects almost certainly explain many of the intelligence differences between groups and he explores the evidence on which interventions are most effective. Sadly, the list is often scant precisely because of how far beyond education the causal determinants may reach. However, there is room for improvement when one considers Nisbitt’s warning regarding poorly designed research studies in Education, those studies lacking sufficient controls to avoid self-selection problems and those lacking efforts of randomization. Particularly troubling, he suggests, may be some of the ‘effective schools’ research, and policies like ‘No Child Left Behind’ which he claims reveal a “deep ignorance of the forces that operate to produce high academic achievement” (p. 119).

It is worth noting that Nisbett’s thesis -- that environment can have a significant effect on ‘genetic’ outcomes -- has been confirmed in the biological sciences as well. Consider one now famous example of this environmental-genetic interplay in a longitudinal analysis of genetic and environmental interactions in the work of Caspi, McClay, Moffitt, Mill, Martin, Craig, Taylor, and Poulton (2002). In their study of the gene called MAOA, a gene with two alleles or variants thought to increase the likelihood of depression and anti-social behaviours, it was found that the gene had to be activated by environmental conditions to do any harm. That is, children with the ‘risky’ allele were 2.5 times more likely to develop clinical depression than those with the other, but only under particularly stressful conditions. In ‘healthier’ environments, the genetic variation had no observable effect. These findings are consistent with Nisbett’s claim that environmental contributions to genetic intelligence may be significantly underestimated.

Nisbett’s book is certainly not the end of discussion but it effectively reveals new possibilities in thinking about intelligence and the effects of education, health, parenting behaviours, cultural practices, and educational interventions. Nisbett details considerable evidence that suggests that behaviours and conditions that promote intelligence are heritable in much the same way as other behaviours such as parental behavioural patterns (Liefbroer & Elzinga, 2006), antisocial behaviours (Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, & Lovegrove, 2009), religious behaviours (Morgan, 1981), as well as attitudes toward risk and trust (Dohmen, Falk, Huffman, & Sunde, 2008). These examples suggest Nisbett’s examination and consideration of both student and parental attitudes, perceptions, and experiences are well-warranted and overdue.

Although poorly received by the hereditarian scholars, Nisbett’s analysis is not wishful liberal thinking. His message regarding the role of genes in intelligence is largely consistent with many experts on intelligence in that a significant portion of intelligence may be heritably genetic.
Genetic, however, does not imply immutable and Nisbett’s most important claim appears to stand intact: “heritability of IQ places no constraint on the degree of modifiability that is possible” (p. 38).

As long as initial endowments differ, equal outcomes may not be possible. However, if educational policy, research, and practices are to be moved forward by Nisbett’s hopeful position – that dramatic changes in intelligence and achievement are possible – a rethinking of possible interventions and resource redistributions is required. Such a rethinking stands to have an important effect on the kinds of interventions that can work to address issues of fairness and equity in schools and on the kinds of interventions that can gain public support.
References


