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Where Are They Now? Where Are We Now?

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Where Are They Now? Where Are We Now?

In this paper we, a research team comprising one professor of education and four graduate students document our reflections on questions we have about the challenges of documenting the impact of teacher education coursework and on our collective research. This paper is organized into three, separate sections. In the first section we present data that Patricia collected while observing Renee teach the same group of prospective English students over two semesters. These courses, C&I 301 (Introduction to Teaching in a Diverse Society) and C&I 302 (Teaching Diverse Middle Grades Students), are the first two courses in a four course sequence that integrate methods of teaching English with critical analysis of schooling and with reflection on one's own transition from student to teacher. For the two subsequent courses (C&I 303, Teaching Diverse High School Students; C&I 304, Assessing Secondary School Students) the students were taught by different instructors and, during C&I 304, were student teaching. The term, "diversity" is included in the course titles because the teacher education program emphasizes that multicultural education is not a separate course, but that celebrating and working productively with a diverse student population is embedded in everything we do as teachers of adolescents (and adults).

In this paper we respond to two recommendations Renee and Patricia have raised in previous works (Clift & Brady, 2003; Clift, 2004) in that we are exploring the ways in which longitudinal study can be incorporated into self-study; we are also using friendly critics (Patricia, Raul, Jason, and Soo Joung) as we analyze Renée's teaching and the potential impact of her courses (as well as that of the larger teacher education program) on thirteen teacher education graduates' developing practice. (These graduates have all been out of the teacher education program for two years now.) As our work proceeded we realized that as a team we were grappling with issues of power, authority, and voice in both the self-study and larger study. We have shaped this paper to allow others to glimpse our process and the questions it continues to raise for our work. Thus, the paper is divided into four sections:

- Fall 2000-Spring 2001: Renee's voice predominates

here as she reflects on Patricia's classroom observation notes and on what, for her, the classroom talk might imply about her teaching.

- July 2002: We brought an external researcher in to interview our teacher education graduates about what they remember in terms of the impact of the teacher education program. The graduates' voices predominate, but we imposed the categories on the interview summaries.
- January 2004: We read through Renee's earlier and longer drafts of the paper and discussed our thoughts in a tape-recorded group conversation, which we collectively summarized for this paper.
- February 2004: We deliberately chose not to analyze our paper collectively. Instead we let our individual thoughts serve as a multi-vocal conclusion—leaving readers to make their own inferences about our work.

FALL 2000 (RENEE REFLECTS)

I note that the first three class sessions were devoted almost entirely to activities designed to surface and legitimate honest and respectful discussions of race and racism in the United States based, in part, on documentary videos. I am pleased to recall that the graduate assistant (not a coauthor on this paper) and I were able to encourage a great deal of student interaction around issues of race, class, and social justice. After this, as the notes become more detailed, I notice that the students are in touch with the topics through a variety of pedagogical techniques – small group work, role plays, student-directed presentations, reflective writing, and field-based research – with very little lecture or recitation.

Class topics cover group presentations of an autobiography written by someone who did not come from a White European-American middle or upper class background; a lecture-discussion-role play on the negative impact of cultural deficit theory and thinking; discussions of field placements; discussions of the pedagogy of the book presentations; lesson planning; using rubrics for assessment; and group presentations on the communities in which their field placements were located. I am satisfied that we provided more than an introduction to issues

of race, class, teaching, and education, and that we enabled the students to grapple with their responsibilities for teaching in a diverse society.

I am less pleased to notice that I do not model beginning class with content instruction and establish a pattern of beginning class with discussion about “business” such as upcoming field experiences or assignments. I am not happy with the amount of time we devoted to discussions of assignments even though I caused some of this by deliberately not providing highly structured assignments. I was pleased that my enacted theory of teaching and learning strongly emphasized the importance of learning from experience and reflecting on that experience orally and in writing and alone and with others over time. But it seems to me that my relationship with my graduate assistant/co-teacher was not well formulated and was, perhaps, condescending. She seldom began class; I often told her what to do giving her insufficient time to prepare.

SPRING 2001 (RENEE REFLECTS)

The notes tell me that my co-teacher (in my mind, graduate assistant no longer) and I began the semester with conscious attention to sharing both the decision-making and teaching responsibilities more equally and to providing more structure for the assignments. There was far less negotiating of expectations. I note that reading and the teaching of reading from a cognitive and interpretive stance was covered early in the semester and linked to the students’ own reading of two novels. Often, reading instruction was related to lesson planning and to classroom management. While there was more lecture than in most of the previous semester’s classes, the students participated in role-playing activities and in group discussions of their own cognitive/interpretive strategies. Several classes were devoted almost entirely to lesson planning and classroom management, in which students practiced the early stages of writing lesson plans and unit plans.

I felt that we had become more practice oriented in our instruction and in our assignments. I say “our” because I think I was no longer condescending and that the co-instructional relationship was cohesive and egalitarian. I was a bit disturbed to learn that we did seem to assume that a lot of written work and, therefore, learning would occur outside of class. We may not have made the connections among field, in-class, and out-of-class work as clear as we might have.

JULY 2002 (THE TEACHER EDUCATION GRADUATES TALK)

The external researcher assured the participants, “this is your anonymous chance, so no names and I’m going to be the one to transcribe....” The graduates’ comments were taped and transcribed (bulleted below) by the researcher, but grouped into the following categories by Renee and modified by the team.

Cohort and program structure:

- ... being able to go through with the same group of people the whole time, and getting to work together and getting to know each other.
- ... the classroom was a really comfortable place.
- I love that it’s theoretical because it gives me a better base now, but I wish that there was some more practical element.

Applicable, helpful content:

- ... and then we did projects for each one...that really helped me.
- ... there was more of a focus on understanding diverse cultures and understanding the broader things, but there was never any of this guilt thrown at you ... I think that, at the time, when I was an undergrad, I didn’t appreciate it, and now, in retrospect I think it was a really good program.
- ... you know, not growing up in a very diverse area, like, it was a great part of, you know, preparing me, made me feel a lot more comfortable about helping the students.

Insufficient content:

- And writing? My first semester, yeah, I didn’t teach them squat. And I know that.
- Oh God, I don’t know anything about grammar, still don’t know anything about grammar, don’t know how to teach it, afraid to touch it, very bad.
- ... We didn’t talk about ESL students...I didn’t know how to get them to where they needed to be.

The classes that were Renee’s responsibility:

- ...I think I’d like to start with more practical stuff.
- ...in 301 and 302 [they] asked us to write a unit or do a lesson plan but we’d never actually talked about how to do it, so it was just kind of thrown on us.
- I feel bad about some of those things that we said about C&I because I think some of that comes from not remembering the beginning...

JANUARY 2004 (THE TEAM DISCUSSES)

RENEE: I found that I was surprised and saddened to learn that much of the time I spent being practical, modeling lesson planning, talking through classroom management, etc. was forgotten. As an instructor I wonder if I had any impact on practice at all. As a researcher I am wondering how we can better capture that program-based knowledge gets stored and exerts influence somehow, but is not acknowledged. I was surprised and pleased to learn that the participants valued our program’s emphasis on diversity and on theory.

(All coauthors consider where to go from here...)

PATRICIA: Are there different ways you might have covered or taught the same material?

RENEE: I don’t have an answer for that yet. There are

points in the notes when... they were doing hands-on activities with lesson planning.

JASON: I was just reading about Carrie [pseudonym for one of the graduates we are following]... She was talking about how she got these wonderful ideas from the teacher education program but she didn't think she could make things up on her own. Maybe that's what they were hoping for – just sort of like a packet of things that they could use in their classes...

RENEE: Have I said anything or written anything that rings false?

SOO JOUNG: In the second semester you tried to provide more structure for the assignments. What are the data for this?

RENEE: It's in the data from the syllabus and class notes.

RAUL: How do you reach that conclusion that in a way your relationship with your co-teacher was descending?

RENEE: There's one chunk [of data] that's in the notes and one chunk you all don't have and it's just in my memory; one of the students comments about it.

PATRICIA: I remember her being an integral part of the planning, but then you would enact it.

SOO JOUNG: I think it is almost impossible in any human relationship to ignore the power relations among people. How are you going to explain that?

RENEE: My co-teacher starts the class a lot. I was gone and she took the class. We told to the students which assignments we'd be [assigning and] grading. We told them we were going to try to share more.

PATRICIA: As you went through this whole process, were you thinking about, "Next time I teach 301/302 what I plan to do?"

RENEE: No I wasn't. I was thinking about how in the world do you document the impact of teacher education. I thought the class notes documented that we provided both the theoretical and a practical foundation. Clearly, [documentation] through retrospective accounts is problematic. [But], I could argue that if they don't remember I, what the heck do they have to do it for?

JASON: In 303, they talk about the different activities that went with the book. They remember what they did with the books. That's what they remember... [t]hose are the tangible things they did.

RENEE: We gave them three different formats for doing lesson plans. And they did a whole week of lessons in their unit plan.

PATRICIA: I remember they were not necessarily doing any of those three formats... It seems [their work] was completely disconnected from the Power Point you did.

JASON: How do you know what they would be doing if they didn't have this teacher education program? At least two have talked about how teachers they've met from other teacher education programs have a different outlook. To me that would be evidence...

RAUL: Jenni [pseudonym for one of the graduates we are following] makes it explicit that she can be so critical of her law school program because she has a teacher education background.

RENEE: Are there any things you want to say, having been my students yourselves? Anything on my style of teaching?

RAUL: I've found it surprising having gone through two different classes. One you had us be more active; the other had more background instruction. Research for me was hell because of writing. It taught me to have more focus. In the other class it was more group work. I benefited from both.

JASON: About being future oriented in a lot of ways that makes sense to me that the students would be future oriented. And in the research on teacher education class that was future oriented. Everything we did it was going to prepare us for our future careers.

RENEE (to Patricia, co-teacher for the same course, different students, in 2001-02): Was I a lot different in 2001-02?

PATRICIA: I was just thinking about my own personal self-study for the past five minutes. Having watched you do it once; doing it with you a second time; and then the third time by myself in which I took what you'd done, but I made some changes... given that I have such a vested interest... I am finding it hard to comment on you. I'm your advisee and your employee and I've taken two of your courses plus an independent study, plus we've coauthored...

RENEE: Is this kind of research possible? All of the self-studies we included in our chapter (Clift & Brady, 2003) that had other people helping with the research used graduate assistants...

PATRICIA: It's not only that I am thinking about issue of power, etc. between us, but also there are so many different data points between me and this course. 301 302 means so many different things to me.

RENEE: Is it possible to have a conversation about my teaching given that I am a professor and that we know each other in multiple ways.

RAUL: In other circumstances I probably wouldn't be able to go through this... When I was reading the draft you sent the first thing that struck me, you used the word, "colleagues." And you never referred to us as, "my graduate assistants." Under those conditions, and with the structure we've laid out for the research team; it is possible to have a self-study in which all four of us are asking questions and challenging some elements of your previous teaching.

PATRICIA: (to Raul) You're using the first person plural when you probably should use the first person singular.

RAUL: Yeah.

RENEE: Patricia, what would you say? I'm not going to put Soo Jung on the spot; she looks too uncomfortable.

PATRICIA: Well, also it has to do with... how we've always related to authority, etc. And I think that I have become increasingly comfortable telling you how I really feel, but... there is definitely a very strong edit button.

RENEE (to Jason): You're not my advisee [or] looking uncomfortable, but the fact that I can ask you to talk is a power relation and I acknowledged that. Is it possible for you as a graduate student to be a useful validator or challenger?

JASON: So far I haven't felt like I've had to hold back...But checking your perceptions of the class or asking...if we saw something different, I don't have a problem with that.

RENEE: What would you have a problem with?

JASON: Probably if it was like, "Was there something I did that you didn't think was a good idea or that you didn't like?"

SOO JOUNG: I didn't say I'm uncomfortable, you just got that.

RENEE: Let me tell you why I said it...

SOO JOUNG: I am jet lagged and for me it is time to sleep.

RENEE: I apologize, but I did have to say that was what I was inferring.

SOO JOUNG: You say that and now I think – what did I do?

FEBRUARY 2004

(THE TEAM REFLECTS ON ALL OF THE ABOVE)

Our editor requests us, "to talk as specifically as possible...about what you have learned through your self-study about yourself and your practice."

RENEE: This study is (still) surfacing tensions within myself—organizing action and setting, but not so much such that students' responses become prescriptive. Tensions around forcing speech and allowing silence; in encouraging risk taking yet being the evaluator. Tensions around pushing people too hard or not hard enough and times I have been pushed too hard or not hard enough. I am learning that it is really quite helpful to have this group pushing me to consider previously unthought thoughts in context and to justify decisions. I've learned that part of my own habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) involves being in charge while, at the same time, trying to share control in a context where I am clearly the teacher. This came out forcefully for me in my change between semesters and, even more so, in my control of our group discussion on my analysis. I will work to foreground this realization in both our discussions and in my classes. It is important to me that we collectively reflect on what we are learning – and that the power dynamics, while acknowledged, don't inhibit our learning and acting.

PATRICIA: I thought I had done too much talking during the taped conversation. Was my talk focused enough on Renee and her teaching—or was it too focused on myself and issues that I found interesting? Will I self-silence in our next conversation?

SOO JOUNG: I felt uncomfortable when Renee put me on the spot. As a life-time English as a Foreign Language learner, I do not like to provide my opinions on the spot because I can regret my unreflected com-

ments later. I need time to reflect and to sort out my thoughts and then to put them in right English using the right register.

JASON: This reminds me of the Johari window...things we share with others...things that others know about us that we are not aware of...I don't think there is perfect data...It's all an interpretation.

RAUL: When does the transition from "grad students" to "colleagues" happen in a professor's mind? One of the best lessons I learned by writing this paper is that sometimes no one has a specific "right" answer; sometimes the best answer is something you come up with as a result of negotiation and conversation.

This paper has no real end. Even as we proofread it in May, we realize we could write another section — one which chronicles our participants' continuing development — and our own. But the genre of papers and presentations does call for a closing. We close with this — what began as a team effort to investigate the impact of teacher education on practice and as Renee's examination of the lasting(?) effects of her own teaching is morphing into our collective, data-based reflections on ourselves as researchers and our roles as teachers for our team. Renee may be the professor and principle investigator, but she is a learner. Patricia, Soo Jung, Raul, and Jason are among her many teachers. The thirteen participants are challenging and stretching all of us in ways we did not know we needed to stretch. The self-study of teacher education is, for us, also becoming the self-study of teacher education research.

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