Evidence of Sway

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the metaphor of trees and their tendency to sway with the wind and grow new leaves and branches to represent teacher candidates as diverse learners who come to our classes with their own experiences and understandings. This collaborative research study analyzed a particular cohort of candidates' evidence of sway and how the sway influenced these candidates' ideas about teaching and learning. According to the data, we found most candidates showed signs of sway-subtle changes in their thinking. We propose that some candidates may resist swaying because it can feel disloyal to question, in an inquiring way, the ways you were taught.

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Picture, if you will, a woodland forest with a variety of trees—elm, oak, birch, and evergreens. Some trees are fragile saplings pushing out new branches and inching their roots into the soil to ensure their continued growth, stability, and survival; others are in their prime with their roots securely grounded. Note that even the strongest of trees will sway with the wind.

This paper uses the metaphor of trees and their tendency to sway with the wind and grow new leaves and branches to represent teacher candidates as diverse types of learners who come to our classes with their experiences and understandings. As they move from one education course to another, they grow and sway as they develop cognitively and professionally.

Here, we define *sway* as candidates' oscillation in thinking as they contemplate what they perceive as their certainties and uncertainties in their understandings about teaching and learning. In a forest, trees sway more or less depending on various factors, such as the power of the wind and the strength of the tree. In a classroom, candidates' thinking sways depending on many factors also, such as the instruction, the assignments, professional experiences, and the candidates' willingness to consider and learn from others. In this article, when we talk of *others,* we include peers, instructors, K-12 classroom teachers and their students, and authors of multi-modal texts.

As teacher educators in an undergraduate childhood education program in a small, upstate New York teacher preparation college, the authors were interested in exploring how candidates' ideas about teaching and learning developed as they participated in the first of their education courses, *Issues in Education*. This course, typically taken in the sophomore year of the Bachelor of Arts program, introduces candidates to fundamental topics and critical issues in education while inviting them to examine their forming professional philosophies as they learn content and take an inquiry stance. Typically, one of the important functions of this course is to act as a gateway; it encourages candidates to evaluate career choices. However the cohort in this study were juniors in a 2 + 2 program, where two years of community college courses are followed by two years of teacher preparation and upper division course work at a four year college. These 2 + 2 program students are firmly rooted in their career choice as elementary educators.

The goal of this collaborative research study was to analyze this particular cohort of candidates' deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning and to determine if course content influenced or changed their beliefs. This research examined the course instructors aim to provide opportunities for candidates to grow new branches of understanding and to contemplate their perspectives and positions on issues. Instructors encouraged candidates to rely on their past experiences as learners and what they think they know about teaching—the firmness of their roots—to allow them to sway securely and comfortably among the perspectives—trunks—of others.

Theoretical Background

This was a collaborative study among three colleagues-- a Piagetian developmentalist, a post- structuralist, and a literacy deconstructionist. As a result, each researcher brought with her various and diverse readings and experiences. Interestingly, this led to discussions around the table that created connections and comparisons among theorists that we previously had not considered. These connections and comparisons allowed an understanding of the data we could not have reached individually. As evidence was examined, we each saw different ideas emerging from the data. This section describes the theories that grounded our individual interpretations and how our collaborative discussions grew and melded into what we termed mutually conceived interpretations—we swayed (and continue to sway) as researchers and academics through this process just as we found our students doing.

Specifically, this study looked to learning theories proposed by Piaget. We also refer to discussions by Wortham, Fecho, and McLean (2001) about the representational powers of narration and how we develop substantive teacher beliefs. We drew on Bakhtin's (1986) contributions to understanding of the forces within language that impact knowledge acquisition. We used each theorist's premise to explore how our teacher candidates' recollection of the ideal teacher influences shapes what they attend to and retain when faced with new visions and definitions of what it means to teach and to learn.

Piaget's theories regarding epistemology provided insight into the thinking processes exhibited by the teacher candidates in the course upon which this study focuses. As Piaget noted (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995), an organized system will attempt

to absorb or assimilate anything it encounters. He postulated that it is the same when humans encounter new ideas and behaviors. If we are unable to absorb or assimilate a new phenomenon, then we must adapt or change. Moreover, Piaget noted this change is neither spontaneous nor straightforward. This unpredictability of reflection mirrors our concept of sway as a non-linear developmental phenomena.

Furthermore, Piaget (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995) determined that the act of reflection on our own thinking actually drives cognitive development. One of the ways thinking moves is through a type of reflective practice. Piaget observed that individuals engage in three types of reflection that he referred to as abstractions: reflective abstractions, empirical abstractions, and pseudo-empirical abstractions. These reflective abstractions move through various stages of no change, some change, and complete change. The stage of some change seems to parallel our concept of sway. Our thinking oscillates or—we would propose—sways, between our certainties and uncertainties.

In the analysis of candidates' narratives, it is important to note that these self-reported responses are part of the candidates' ongoing negotiation of themselves and who they are becoming as teaching professionals. Wortham (2001) referred to this negotiation through discourse as foregrounding, or using the transformative and representational powers of narration to construct identities as teachers and learners. In other words, as learners speak or write, they use their voices through narratives to listen to how various positions, or stances, sound and to consider what it might be like to take on a particular stance. They foreground what their voice sounds like against the backdrop of their current perspectives and those of their readers. By listening or attending to their voices in this way, along with the responsive voices of their listeners and readers, they are sometimes able to re-evaluate and re-negotiate their understandings and perspectives. The process is something like dipping your toe into the water to see how cold it is. If you like the feel of the water, you might dive right in. However, if the water is too cold, you might quickly withdraw your toe, at least until the water temperature (or the perspectives of listeners/readers) is more agreeable. In this study, candidates' responses were co-constructed as they wrote to clarify and determine their positions with the instructor as their intended audience.

Our preliminary analysis of the teacher candidates' reflective writing brought us to Fecho and McLean's (2006) construct of *wobble* as a way to frame our thinking. Working with preservice secondary education majors, Fecho and McLean proposed that teacher educators should nudge both candidates and themselves into a state of *wobble* (disequilibrium in Piagetian terms) where they are thrown off-center to collectively examine current stances, question those stances, seek further dialogue, and come to an informed stance. Fecho and McLean found that it is through this state of *wobble*—being pulled away from your core beliefs-- that we grow to consider possibilities and develop substantive beliefs related to teaching and learning.

When discussing this construct of *wobble* the authors of this study came to realize that perhaps the image of *swaying* was more illustrative for the novice education student. We found that their deeply rooted beliefs about teaching and learning allowed our students to bend their thinking but not shift off-center as the metaphor of wobble would

imply. The idea of *wobble* (imagine a child gymnast on a balance beam faltering and falling to the floor) in our minds misses the strength of deeply rooted beliefs (envision a tree bending but not breaking in the wind). The instructors in this study intended to act as wind pushing against candidates' rooted beliefs through assignments and discussions designed to create states of disequilibrium.

Because Fecho and McLean's (2006) construct of *wobble* drew on the work of Bahktin (1986) we explored his constructs in relation to our developing notion of *sway*. For Bahktin the process of making meaning is an outcome of resolving the tensions created in discourse. This process of meaning making is as constant as the wind. Our current understandings are shaped by our codified past responses, which in turn position, define, and/or limit our future responses. Heteroglossia describes the co-existence of distinct varieties within a single linguistic code, translated literally from Russian "different-speech-ness." Bakhtin distinguishes centripetal linguistic forces, exerted by official, cultural, or established forms, from the intent of centrifugal forces to serve the existence of unofficial, dialectal forms. The centripetal forces that normalize linguistic forms, monoglossia, carry strong ideological conventions of the dominant class. We propose that the instructors push to have teacher candidates question linguistic and socio-cultural school conventions initiates *sway*, whether grammatically, semantically, or ideologically. The need to make meaning of the created tension results in a swaying of beliefs, an examination of dominate conventions' worth and effectiveness, and a recodification of previous understandings.

In our discussions we concluded that each of these theorists, coming from dramatically different contexts, seemed to reflect on the point at which learning occurs. It is in the purposeful creation of tension, disequilibrium/wobble, swaying, centralizing, and diversifying forces that the role of instruction takes shape and takes place. The instructor must be the wind in the woods strengthening the young saplings by providing opportunities to sway safely without fear of being uprooted.

Methodology

The Participants

The cohort of 21 teacher candidates being followed was a subset of junior teacher candidates who had transferred into the bachelor's program of our four-year college from a two-plus-two joint teacher preparation program offered at a nearby community college affiliate. A joint two-plus-two program typically has a cohort of candidates that spends two years at a community college taking a prescribed set of courses that they then transfer to a four-year program where they complete their junior and senior years. Due to scheduling, these teacher candidates are required to take this introductory course in a four-week summer session. Though instructional time remains the same—37.5 hours—instructors report that the amount of time for concepts to grow and develop into personal philosophies within the context of other education courses and related fieldwork experienced simultaneously is undeniably truncated.

These teacher candidates typically continue through their junior and senior years in the bachelor's program as a cohort. Statistically, 79% of the group is nontraditional, choosing not to attend college directly following high school or pursuing a second career

as a teacher. Twenty-one percent are of traditional college age but chose to attend the community college near home for personal or financial reasons. Half of the teacher candidates in the joint program have had in-school experiences, such as working as a substitute teacher or a teacher's aide (with one to five years of experience) or working in after-school or preschool programs. Perhaps due to these circumstances, another unique attribute of this summer section of the course, according to instructors' observations, is that this course does not function, as intended, as a gateway for teacher candidates in the joint program. These teacher candidates typically express a deep commitment to their career path by this point in their programs.

Two of the authors taught sections of the course in the summer of 2005. Both used the same syllabus to ensure course content and objectives were consistent. The third author's role was that of an outside researcher, to lend an objective perspective.

Data Collection

Data for this study consisted of pre- and post-instruction written responses to the same set of questions designed to probe teacher candidates' knowledge and understanding of what it means to teach and to learn (Figure 1).

1. How would you describe your current teaching philosophy and beliefs?

2. How do you learn best?

3. How do you think children learn best?

4. What teaching approaches or methods do you know of? Which fits your philosophy best? Why?

5. Tell me what it means to teach someone something.

6. What does it mean to learn something?

7. Is there anything else you'd like to say about teaching and learning?

Figure 1. Prompts used for the pre- and post-instruction written responses.

The questions used for the written responses were selected to gather information about the teacher candidates' thoughts on their 1) personal philosophy of education, 2) comprehension of what constitutes best practice, and 3) schemata for teaching and learning. Other data sources included teacher candidate, researcher, and instructors' journals; the course syllabus; follow-up interviews with select candidates; and writing samples from class assignments and essay/short-answer examinations. It was felt that a collection of data from each participant across assignments and from the beginning to the end of the semester would allow us to determine how students were foregrounding their ability to sway through narratives (Wortham, 2001), how participants were working

through Piaget's (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995) stages of reflection, and how their language reflected their growth (Bahktin, 1986).

Data Analysis

The methodology used for analyzing data was based on Sepstrup's (1993) procedure for conducting content analysis. This procedure adheres to the following steps to determine categories of thought: a) grouping like responses; b) making assumptions regarding the meanings of these groups; c) verifying assumptions against existing research; d) defining group membership; and e) re-visiting the original data set and regrouping material based on existing literature and definition of group membership.

This was a collaborative study and data analysis was managed in a way that would best lead to triangulated results. After organizing our data to ensure anonymity of candidates' data sets, we each took complete sets of data to analyze. Following Sepstrup's procedure, we initially grouped responses and noted our assumptions and the meanings we made independently of each other. We drew from theories with which we were familiar to verify assumptions and define group membership. Then, we met several times to discuss our insights and interpretations.

These meetings led to a melding of our thoughts and a swaying of our understandings as we considered how each of us had worked our way through Sepstrup's procedure and what this meant to our own interpretations. To clarify our understandings, we re-examined data pieces and discussed how theory played into our interpretations. We listened to each other's ideas and shared readings to explain how we had negotiated meanings from the data. This spurred the re-negotiation of some assumptions and sparked the swaying metaphor as a way to help us create meaning for the results we were seeing. In many ways our system of data analysis acted as a Litmus test of our own ability and willingness to sway as we held to familiar theories and studies to ground our work, shared our perspectives with each other, and used what we learned from our narratives to foreground and adapt understandings for our data sets (Bahktin, 1986; Wortham, 2001). By experiencing sway within our collaboration, we were better able to connect to what the candidates had experienced.

Results

According to the data, we found most candidates showed signs of sway—subtle changes—in their thinking to varying degrees. Several appeared to be moving toward wobble (Fecho & McLean, 2006) by demonstrating distinctive changes in their understandings. A few were unable to attempt to sway at that moment in time. Interestingly, when we individually analyzed our data sets following Sepstrup's (1993) procedure, each researcher initially came upon that result in a different way basing her findings on theories and research with which she was most familiar. We see this result as a strength in our study because we all arrived at the same conclusions even though we used different recipes, so to speak. First, we will share our individual perspectives of how we viewed the data, offering salient and representative quotes/reflections from the teacher

candidates. Second, we will provide a synthesis of our mutual consensus of interpretations based on our collaborative swaying.

Researcher A's Initial Analysis

The data, based on the use of language by the teacher candidates, led me to the conclusion that most candidates did indeed transition through the three Piagetian levels of abstraction (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995), which I saw as evidence of sway. The teacher candidates' transitioning was reflected in their developing ability to understand and think using professional language.

Our candidates struggled to maintain equilibration when faced with the need to change their schemata of what is meant by "to learn" or "to teach" through reflective exercises. These candidates were asked to look back upon the activities, discussions, and projects intended to help them see perspectives that differed from those they held when starting their formal teacher education program.

An example of what the instructors of the course have found to be a purposeful and effective series of reflective exercises appears in a four-part assignment that was linked to candidates' first field experience in the program. First, as an introduction to research techniques, the teacher candidates collectively wrote a survey of education issues that mattered most to them. The second step in this project was to administer the survey with practicing teachers, then analyze the results for salient themes. The next step served as an introduction to the use of professional journals. Each teacher candidate did background research on the salient ideas found in their teachers' responses. In the last step of this assignment, the teacher candidates reflected in writing on the relationship between their raw data and the literature on best teaching practices. The teacher candidates, after having manipulated the concepts through discussion, analysis, and written reflection came to realize the complexity of the relationship between teachers and learners.

It is within the context of this assignment that I first noted evidence in the data that some candidates began to reframe their initial beliefs, or to sway. Using Piaget's (in Gruber & Voneche, 1995) three types of reflection/abstraction, I noted examples of some change (i.e., sway). The first type of reflective abstraction is empirical abstraction, in which the learner attends only to observable characteristics. This may be followed by reflective abstractions, in which learners build upon their understanding by seeing the relationships that sustain their established understandings. Some individuals went directly to the level of pseudo-empirical abstractions. At this level, insight occurs the moment learners have manipulated a concept in some way and come to understand something new about the basic essence of the concept.

I found in candidates' written reflections a transition from empirical abstractions (just give me the facts) to pseudo-empirical abstractions (seeing the relationship between and among ideas). I interpreted this evidence as strong proof of sway. See how Candidate D, in the data that follows, moves from observations and stating facts in May (empirical abstraction) to connecting how a teacher builds relationships with the need for a teacher

to reflect on practice and try new methods when others are not successful (pseudo-empirical abstraction).

May 24

I have been exposed to many lectures over the years. Some were very interesting, many were not. Group discussions/projects are another way I have been instructed.

June 24

I feel the most important approach a teacher can have is to build a relationship with your [sic] candidates and let them know you really care about them. We need to let them know that we are real and imperfect and that we have faults. Failure is an opportunity to learn. When one approach doesn't work, we need to try another and another until we are successful.

One candidate fully exemplified the third level of reflective abstraction—the acknowledgement that ideas that had previously gone unnoticed or were viewed as incidental or meaningless were important and critical. This candidate discovered through reflection that there was a powerful connection between the death of his sibling and his motivation to be a teacher. Others came close to reflective abstraction when they dug deeply into their life stories and emerged with a certainty that learning and lessons taught were not confined to school buildings. Others demonstrated movement toward this third level of reflection as their ability to articulate their understanding of the student/teacher relationship improved. Many initially remarked that "teaching and learning go hand-in-hand." After four weeks they began to grasp the complexity of the student/teacher relationship as demonstrated in their choice of words to describe it (i.e., "reciprocal" and "students and teachers learn from each other").

The emergence of consistent use of pseudo-empirical abstractions is the hallmark of individuals who have fully embraced comfort in swaying. Most candidates' initial responses produced reflections that were not quite within the realm of pseudo-empirical abstractions. After four weeks, half of the participants showed progress toward reflection at the formal operational level, albeit inconsistently, which lends weight to the notion of sway in their cognitive development.

There were a few students, however, who were more resistant and showed little progress in their willingness to sway throughout the course. For example, Candidate I's philosophy on teaching at the beginning of the semester was

> … I feel I have a very good head on my shoulders. Since I have already
> substituted, I have received a good idea of how I want my classroom set
> up, the do's and don'ts and what really works best in teaching,
> imagination.

She has in her mind a list of behaviors she has observed—the empirical abstraction phase. At the end of the semester Candidate I wrote a lengthy paragraph discussing her philosophy on teaching. Her understanding had grown to include the idea of teacher as facilitator, the role of choice in learning outcomes, and the power of reflective practice as the pathway to a "…much more permanent type of learning." There was no use of these terms in her initial reflections; however, her final reflections did not exhibit the candidate was able to make connections among ideas or that she had added

these concepts to her personal or professional philosophy. She stated, "…I will provide the students the most education I can give them. Every student will have learned as much as I can offer." To us, this demonstrates the candidate's need to cling to her original list of understandings about what teaching entails.

Researcher B's Initial Analysis

This class is the first education class most of these candidates take. It offers an especially fertile ground to consider the unifying centripetal and the stratifying centrifugal forces of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1986) as they intersect from candidate to candidate and in spaces among the identities the candidates are creating. In other words, candidates often come with a strong voice and a position from which to speak about education. It is, moreover, the voices and positions of candidates—often candidates who identified a teacher from their experience as their ideal—that act as the motivating factor that influenced their move to become a teacher.

In analyzing candidates' uses of language, initially one finds they identify their philosophy of education with personal attributes. *Enthusiastic, positive, upbeat,* and *trustworthy* were some of the most common terms used. They do not want to become teachers, in a general sense; they want to become that particular teacher from their past. They want to be loved and respected and have a place in the community by becoming who that teacher was. When we ask our candidates to develop a critical inquiry stance around their educational philosophy, it is like asking them to critique apple pie and mom. For some, it just isn't done. It may be, however, that this position has less to do with their inability to participate in critical dialogue and more to do with their identification of what the dialogue is about and perhaps even more to do with their developmental level.

This creates an interesting tension in education classes where the professor hopes to move candidates away from centripetal, official forms of discourse by requiring a critical stance on official established ways of thinking and being. Requiring teacher candidates to critique their beloved teacher positions the professor as a centripetal force of the new dominate culture. The positions of nostalgically remembered teachers from the past represent the unofficial, the centrifugal forces of change (Bakhtin, 1986). This "Ghost Teacher's" voice and position of supreme authority would over-ride any discourse or suggestion of critique by the new dominate culture (professors, practicing teacher interviews and research literature). Because the time frame of a summer course and often even a full semester does not allow the growth required for some undergraduates to develop a critical stance that allows them to reflect on the forces of heteroglossia maturely, a compromise is required. The compromise we see is that they come to possess the vocabulary of the foundations, philosophies, and theories of learning and are able to position themselves in conversations about these. However, it is not clear that they buy the need to question their desire to recreate the world from which they came, the world of their favorite teacher, yet.

I noted at least three levels of change between the first date of questions and the last when analyzing the language candidates used, particularly the development of the foundational vocabulary of philosophy and teaching and learning. The first level is

actually the level of no change; the candidate feels no tension, as she believes her voice is the unifying centripetal (Bakhtin, 1986). A demonstration of this is a remark overheard by one of the authors—one candidate's advice regarding another candidate's frustration with critical thinking requirements was to, "Just sit in your chair and smile and nod." This is a clear demonstration of a candidate unwilling to engage in the process of self-reflection.

The second level is when the candidates move to focusing on students in their educational philosophy by including a sort of grocery list of educational philosophies. Early in the semester one candidate stated, "I believe students deserve a very upbeat, easygoing teacher, [who] can be tough when she needs to be." This develops into, "I believe in progressivism, constructivism, behaviorism, and positivism. Students need to be free to develop naturally. The process of teaching should be based around the students." We noted that candidates tended to use a grocery-list approach when overwhelmed by trying to understand the various philosophies. However, this candidate is beginning to focus on what her philosophy of education means for students rather than the personal characteristics she wants to have as a teacher.

A third group of candidates moved away from identifying personal characteristics. For example, one candidate stated, "I would describe my current teaching philosophy and beliefs as being eager and optimistic" but then later reflected on a more in-depth commitment to what she actually understood and believed about teaching and learning when she said, "Currently, I would describe my teaching philosophy and beliefs as being constructivist. I think that each student is a unique individual, and each student should be exposed to an education that will be meaningful in his or her own life." The term *constructivist* is used correctly and then defined through a new level of use.

I hypothesized that candidates' use of the "grocery list" may sound like a regression in the strength of their writing, as they work to develop mastery of the complex terms and vocabulary of pedagogy and philosophy. In other words, they seem to be developing an understanding of the words and concepts of the philosophy of pedagogy, but their use of these words and concepts does not yet extend outside their preconceived view of the classroom. It also appears their ability to enter into a dialogue around the concept of heteroglossia-multiple views-- is limited. They still feel the need to identify the "correct" voice or perspective rather than discussing the intersections of many voices and perspectives. The hegemonic focus of most schools does not provide experience in identifying or understanding "other" voices. With the exception of certain older, returning candidates, it appears as though an emphasis on multiple perspectives and view-points as valid has not reshaped candidates' realities in any meaningful way. Conversations with selected students from this cohort in their senior year revealed that exposure to heteroglossia, constructivist and deconstructivist critical literacies made returning to these constructs easier with each ensuing course in education.

> "We cried for a month, some of us thought about quitting, it was so
> hard all these new ideas… I was so afraid, you changed me in four
> weeks—what would you do with fifteen?" Candidate P

Researcher C's Initial Analysis

As previously described, Fecho and McLean (2006) use the term *wobble* to identify a state of interrogation of ourselves and others that works to transform us as educators. However, our analysis of data did not yield evidence that this cohort of candidates realized this level of transformation. While Fecho and McLean's data were rich with anecdotes of their candidates' epiphanies, ours did not seem to reach that level of self-discovery. Instead, we noted subtle shifts and hints at candidates beginning to grasp a deeper understanding of the issues and constructs.

That is why I suggested the term *swaying* to describe our candidates' progress. We agreed that *swaying* was a more subtle analogy in that it implies movement reliant upon the external force. Whether it is a gentle breeze or a gale-force wind, candidates respond to many factors: their instructor's expectations, their readings, their prior experiences, their conversations with others, and their narrative writing in which they foreground their stances and positions (Wortham, 2001). Although we found candidates' to be firmly rooted in their past educational experiences and trying to hold onto their belief systems, evidence indicates most were beginning to make subtle changes to their schemata. In some cases it was two steps forward and one step back, and in other cases there seemed to be little change at all. However, the majority did express budding shifts as seen in the following example from Candidate C:

May 24

I would describe my current teaching philosophy…as being eager and optimistic.

June 24

I would describe my teaching philosophy as being constructivist. Each student is an individual and should be exposed to information that is meaningful in their own lives.

While in May, the candidate's response is enthusiastic and upbeat, it reflects little insight about forming a substantive teaching philosophy. However, in June it is evident that the candidate picked up some of the terminology related to forming a philosophy, such as "being constructivist" and "each student is an individual" and "meaningful in their own lives." Clearly, this candidate is beginning to incorporate the new ideas and constructs the instructor introduced in class into his writing as he foregrounds a new professional identity. We believe that through this foregrounding and trying out this terminology, the writer is adopting a characteristic position that will edge him toward acting and becoming more like the teacher he describes (Wortham, 2001). Therefore, his writing becomes a force that encourages him to sway.

Evidence also indicates that several candidates resist this tendency to sway. Candidate O serves as an exemplar. Her work experience as a teacher's aide had more power and weight than her experience in this truncated course. Her response to question seven, "Is there anything else you'd like to say about teaching and learning?" indicated there was no real movement from her initial teacher-centered approach.

May 24

Teaching is the opportunity to shape someone else's mind. It is the opportunity to make an impression on someone.

June 24

From my experience as a teachers' aide in a child care center, I find it very satisfying to see the smiles on those children's faces with [sic] I have taught them something new to their world.

Further evidence of resistance is found in reactions to class-viewed documentaries, such as the PBS film "First Year." In this film, cameras follow five teachers for their first year of teaching in South Central Los Angeles. The film depicts the realities teachers will encounter in their first years in the profession. However, each semester instructors have taught this course, approximately one-third of the candidates' written reflections on the film indicate a determination not to allow new information to shake them from their certainties with comments such as, "that won't be me," and "I won't have those problems here in (upstate New York)."

In the introduction we mentioned this course, on main campus, serves as a gateway course that tends to cull out candidates who may not be ready to meet the academic expectations or to develop the professional dispositions to become teachers. In some respects, it has had the opposite effect with this cohort and began to cull out individuals who were the brightest and most capable in an intellectual sense. Candidate K, who had the most startling transformation from empirical abstraction to reflective abstractions, and in subsequent semesters showed great promise, has left the program feeling disenchanted with her peers knowing they would be her colleagues if she continued. For Candidate K, her classmates' "just do it and get it over with—to **&^% with learning" attitude was a significant factor in her leaving the program. Another candidate is choosing not to continue with her pursuit of a teaching degree citing her peers' resistance to education reform as a primary cause for leaving. She has also declared in class discussions that she will be home-schooling her children (when she has them) as she sees no real effort to transform public education into an institution that celebrates learning and thinking. These two candidates could see a vision of education that was truly inclusive, creative, and democratic; however, they could not see how to survive in a system that they felt did not truly want to change.

Mutually Conceived Interpretations

As a collaborative team, we recognized candidates' attempts to organize what they were learning through their language. Candidates organized through reflective transitions (Piaget in Gruber & Voneche, 1995), through heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1986), and through foregrounding within narrative discourse (Wortham, 2001) as described in the previous sections of this paper. As Piaget noted, an organized system helps learners absorb or assimilate what they encounter. We propose that candidates may resist swaying because it can feel disloyal to question, in an inquiring way, the ways they were taught. They do not quite know how to organize these thoughts yet to make sense of them. Yet, we did see candidates responding to instruction. Although they did not transform their thinking as Fecho and McLean (2006) described in their study of willingness to wobble, they did begin to use their narratives to foreground organization of their thinking. They learned to sway.

Implications for Teacher Education

Though this study focused on a specific cohort of candidates in upstate New York, several important generalities can be offered to teacher educators. First, with the increasingly popular use of reflective practice in the classroom, we as educators need to develop a critical understanding of how the reflective process works so we can best implement assignments and discussions that will foster candidates' development as reflective educators. We must also be very careful that we not link high-stakes assessment scores to the individual components of the reflective process. For example, when candidates are asked to reflect about a lesson they observed, we need to contemplate how each response represents the developmental level of reflection to which the candidate has progressed. Is it fair to score two reflections differently if they have completed the assignment but one candidate demonstrates more highly developed reflection abilities? Perhaps our assessment tools should demonstrate candidates are showing evidence of making progress in the development of reflection rather than having achieved the highest standard or level of reflection?

How many of us assign reflective essays and are disappointed with our candidates' grocery list of observations? Although this appears to be an essential phase of reflection, as teacher educators we need to take the time to structure reflective assignments and interactive discussions to prompt and push candidates to see the relationships among key factors they have observed. Each reflective assignment should walk candidates through the process of reflection. Reflection takes time and is a nonlinear process. As one candidate put it,

> During the course of the struggle to arrive at an answer to an inquiry, one will often be forced to recognize the actual way in which they view the universe in order to accommodate the new knowledge, resulting in a much more permanent type of learning.

We believe candidates should be explicitly taught about reflective practices and how to self-assess their responses using Piaget's three levels of reflection. If Candidate I, whose data is cited in this paper as evidence of resistance to swaying, had been taught and practiced pseudo-empirical abstraction, is it feasible that her ability to demonstrate metacognition and reflective practice would have facilitated her development of this high level of reflection through foregrounding (Wortham, 2001)? We think candidates are capable of achieving higher levels of reflection, but some just do not know how, do not value, or have not yet experienced effective reflection as they will through reflective practice in teaching. Models of various levels could be provided with instruction on the purposes and benefits of reflection and reflective practice.

Next, we need to examine our use and the candidates' use of language as we each position ourselves in this landscape of learning. Recall what it feels like and how frustrating it can be to try on new ideas and vocabularies. For example, can you talk knowledgeably about the differences between laser and high-definition televisions? Would you be able to express how to use a jam cleat or jaws to hold a line when sailing? Perhaps this study offers evidence for the use and power of a portfolio assessment in

conjunction with nongraded feedback rubrics or assessment tools that value the progress made rather than mastery of the highest level of development.

Preservice teacher educators need to teach distinctions between approaches, theories, and philosophies. What does it mean for candidates' grades if they are using the new words and language but not applying the concepts with complete accuracy? We propose this phase of language use should be recognized and groomed. Trying on the language should be valued even if candidates misuse or abuse terminology. Again, as with reflection assignments, we must be sure of what we are assessing in our assignments. Are we penalizing candidates by assigning low grades to written assignments because they are misusing concepts? If, as Wortham (2001) proposed, candidates are trying on a professional persona through narrative discourse, we must recognize the value in this process and candidates' emergent stages of formal and critical thinking and use of professional language.

Finally, we need to examine how our assignments are contributing to candidate resistance and burnout. How do we acknowledge their idealized vision of *teacher* as we reshape that vision without damaging their dream of becoming that teacher? This truncated course produces sway but very few examples of wobble, which we see as real learning or transformation. We need not reduce the rigor of the course—but does rigor mean 13 different course objectives and 20 different topics in four weeks of instruction? This workload may be reasonable over a 15-week semester—but appears to be counterproductive in this truncated summer class. Candidates burn out because we are trying to get them to sway without breaking. Wind can pass as a steady current over a period of time, making the trees (our candidates) stronger or as a gust in a shortened time—breaking the trees. Though we believe we function as a steady breeze, from the candidates' perceptions we are blowing a gale-force wind their way. They—like damaged leaves—fall from the tree, not because they are questioning their career choice but because they feel overwhelmed with the disequilibrium experienced.

How can we compassionately and effectively help these candidates with the transitions from wanting to be the idealized teacher they carry in their hearts to valuing the work and all its elements? Perhaps there are less damaging ways to achieve the open space, the disequilibrium, that triggers lasting and healthy growth. We need to rethink the format of "summer school." We professional educators need to challenge ourselves, as we challenge the candidates to think in truly innovative ways and reshape the landscape of the instructional environment. We need to cultivate the pedagogical forest to open up spaces to grow and sway without damaging the fragile buds and new branches of learning.

Ending Thoughts

We engendered for some a willingness to sway, a recognition in them that there was still much to learn. In this truncated course we realistically cannot expect new branches to grow from the core of the tree. The good news is that by their third semester in the program there are clear signs of growth and for some it will take their first year in the field to realize the value of what they learned in their time with us—as candidate D from the joint program recently remarked to one of the authors,

"I hate to admit this—but you were right, I actually did learn without being lectured to—when I tried some of your ideas with the kids—they loved it and did so much better on their next quiz—And all along, I thought you were just crazy. "

Candidate D

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