The Importance of the "Comfort Zone" in Preservice Teachers' Evaluation of Video Analysis Sessions as a Tool for Enhanced Reflection

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Abstract

This study draws on sociocultural and affect theories to understand findings from our investigation of secondary English education preservice teachers' (PSTs') experience with communal video analysis sessions (VAS). We organize the article by first theorizing reflection in teacher education research and its relation to video analysis. Then, we describe our qualitative case study methodology and report on our findings to the question of how (dis)comfort shapes PSTs' communal reflections by using illustrative participant vignettes. Through analysis of a communal VAS around PSTs' teaching practices and follow-up interviews with the PSTs, the

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authors found that video analysis provides a nonevaluative supportive environment that enables reflection and growth when a sense of community is preestablished. This article demonstrates the affordances of staying within "comfort zones" for PSTs as they reflect upon their teaching practice within a group VAS. Several tensions around the organization of professional learning communities for reflective video analysis with PSTs are unpacked in relation to this finding.

Introduction

In teacher preparation programs across the world, scholars ask preservice teachers (PSTs) to reflect, but what reflection actually entails in practice is less clear. Furthermore, how teacher educators help PSTs learn to become reflective practitioners varies widely. Research on reflection in teacher education has suggested that PSTs must be pushed outside of their comfort zones to become critical of their pedagogical practices (e.g., Regalla, 2016; Riley & Solic, 2017; Tochon & Gwyn-Paquette, 2003). Although remaining in one's comfort zone may seem comparatively easy and less fear inducing, researchers have contended that to grow and learn, PSTs must move out of their comfort zones.

In teacher education, the term *comfort zone* has been used and promoted without systematically unpacking its origins and assumptions. The comfort zone was first theorized in the field of adventure and experiential education (Brown, 2008). However, despite its widespread use in popular vernacular, searches in educational and psychological journal databases reveal no reference to a comfort zone theory or model. Instead, the term appears in many scholars' works colloquially, as a metaphor. Within adventure education, though, scholars (e.g., Brown, 2008; Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; Leberman & Martin, 2003; Mitten, 1999) have questioned the comfort zone metaphor's value and underlying assumption that risk taking and heightened vulnerability will result in peak learning. They have argued that if risks are too high for a participant, going outside of the participant's comfort zone can actually be damaging. Instead, safety, security, and challenge are a better alternative paradigm to the comfort zone metaphor.

Although a widespread practice, reflecting on one's teaching can be fear inducing. Moving from individualized reflective practices to communal and collaborative ones poses new challenges and risks for PSTs. As adventure education scholars Berman and Davis-Berman (2005) attested, "for some people, exposure to risky situations can become debilitating for people, which may work against the process of change" (p. 64). We recognize that the process of learning to teach is fraught with vulnerability. Although we contend that learning to teach is an ongoing process and that the best teachers simultaneously see themselves as students (Feiman-Nemser, 2012), we also hold that for many PSTs, teacher education is the first time they are expected to move out of the comfort zone of being students to begin assuming identities as teachers.

During practicum and student teaching, PSTs are expected to behave simultaneously as students and teachers. Typical teacher education programs require PSTs to complete university-based coursework on pedagogical theories and methods—positioning them as students. As they complete their university-based courses, these PSTs are also working alongside field-based mentors to teach students in K–12 schools. Many PSTs may feel as if they have a foot in two worlds—at once positioned as students and expected to behave as and viewed by K–12 students as knowledgeable and authoritative teachers. In short, the experience of a PST is often uncomfortable and involves dissonance (Wall, 2016). Yuan and Lee (2016) reminded us that PSTs' learning during their teaching practicum is "often messy" and that they "are likely to encounter emotional ups and downs" (p. 820), which can shape their teacher identity and development. Thus, emotions influence novice teachers' ability to make sense of their teaching practices and can either facilitate or hinder change and growth.

In light of the discomfort that so many PSTs already experience during teacher education, this article calls into question former scholarship that posited that discomfort and wobble (Fecho, Graham, & Hudson-Ross, 2005) are necessary components of reflective practice. Thus, this study draws on sociocultural and affect theories to understand findings from our investigation of secondary English education PSTs' experience with communal video analysis sessions (VAS). We organize the article by first theorizing reflection in teacher education research and its relation to video analysis. Then we describe our qualitative case study methodology and report on our findings to the question of how (dis)comfort shapes PSTs' communal reflections by using illustrative participant vignettes. The aim of this article, based on our findings, is to demonstrate the affordances of staying within comfort zones for PSTs as they reflect upon their teaching practice within a group VAS.

Reflection in Teacher Education

Reflection is called for in documents guiding teacher education at both state and federal levels. Increasingly, university-based teacher education programs in the United States have adopted edTPA, which measures the quality of teacher education programs based on PSTs' performance on three tasks and serves as a gatekeeping mechanism to teacher certification. Included in the four stated purposes of edTPA for secondary English language arts (SCALE, 2016) is the expectation that PSTs will "reflect on and analyze evidence of the effects of instruction on student learning" (p. 1). Reflection remains a key concept throughout the task descriptions and evaluation rubrics—suggesting that through reflection, PSTs should be able to demonstrate mastery of their ability to plan for, instruct, and assess students. Specifically, Task 2 of edTPA requires PSTs to video-record themselves teaching and to draw on the video as they conduct a close analysis of their teaching.

The use of reflection in teacher education, however, is not exclusive to edTPA. In its position statement titled "What Do We Know and Believe About the Roles of

Methods Courses and Field Experiences in English Education?,"the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) English Language Arts Teacher Educators (ELATE; 2005/2014) outlined two belief statements that explicitly call for reflection with PSTs. Statement 12 states that there needs to be "instruction that addresses the teaching of English language arts [that] promotes reflective inquiry informed by first-hand experiences." In addition, Statement 15 states that "reflective practice is fostered through field experience" where PSTs "engage in guided purposeful reflections about their experience [and] reflection occurs often and focuses on a range of issues and ideas." Thus, both edTPA and ELATE call on PSTs to reflect on their experiences with teaching and learning as they develop conceptions of what it means to teach.

Over the past few decades, teacher educators have encouraged PSTs to use diverse modes and tools as they reflect on their teaching. An analysis of reflection in teacher education over the past 20 years suggests that independently written journals are the most commonly used tool for reflection (Bailey, 1997; Daloglu, 2001; Gilmore, 1996; Tsang & Wong, 1996). However, more recently, a growing number of programs are also beginning to use digital tools, such as blogging (Yang, 2009), and video-recording and annotation tools (Rook & McDonald, 2012) to do reflective work. Both blogging and video reflections have the potential to move reflection from a purely independent and individual practice to a relational and collaborative one.

Video, in particular, has been taken up by teacher educators to encourage PSTs to reflect in and on pedagogical actions. It has been used in teacher education since the 1960s (Sherin & van Es, 2005). Recently, video analysis has been viewed as a useful strategy to self-reflect on practice (Harford, MacRuairc, & McCartan, 2010; Schieble, Vetter, & Meacham, 2015; Scott, Kucan, Correnti, & Miller, 2013) rather than just using it as a teaching demonstration tool. Most of this research on video analysis, however, has viewed reflection through a Cartesian model, in which the purpose is to become more self-aware (Hamilton, 2012; Pelligrino & Gerber, 2012; Orlova, 2009). Very few studies have documented researchers moving to a more participatory and peer-oriented understanding of video recording as a reflective tool (Christ, Arya, & Chiu, 2012; Harford et al., 2010). In this study, we aim to contribute to the scholarship on reflection in teacher education by drawing on sociocultural and affective perspectives of learning and development as we consider the reflective potential of communal, rather than individual, video analysis during teacher education.

Theorizing Reflection in Teacher Education

Our inquiry into the reflective potential of the VAS is shaped by sociocultural and affect theory and literature that reviews the ways that reflection, particularly reflective practices that employ video, has been taken up in teacher education. We draw on these theories to better understand how the concept of a comfort zone affects PSTs' growth and learning during the VAS.

Theorizing Learning and Development

We approach learning and development from a sociocultural theoretical orientation. From this perspective, learning and development occur through the use of mediational tools (Moll, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2013). Vygotsky distinguished between two types of tools: technical tools, directed at "producing one or other set of changes in the object itself" (Kozulin, 1998, p. 13), and psychological tools, which direct mind and behavior. In this study, we consider video recording to be a technical tool (concerned with a particular teaching moment), while the subsequent oral discussion of the video recording acts as a psychological tool (concerned with the PSTs' teaching and thinking about teaching; Lofthouse & Birmingham, 2010; Rich & Hannafin, 2008). Together, these tools potentially contribute to PSTs' development as teachers.

Learning is also social. Specifically, sociocultural theory considers learning and development to be mediated by myriad social factors (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). One particularly influential mediating social factor is the zone of proximal development (ZPD)—the sometimes uncomfortable, but optimal, space between what learners understand on their own and what learners can understand with the support of a knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, learning and development are not internally situated, individual phenomena but occur through social interaction.

Situated theory is grounded in sociocultural theory and allows us to think about how *groups* of learners might come together to learn and develop. Lave and Wenger (1991) called this type of learning a *community of practice*. From this perspective, learning is not characterized by knowledge attainment or outcomes but rather as a process of social engagement and participation that requires negotiation and problem solving with others. A communities of practice model of learning shifts the focus of learning from the individual to a participatory framework (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003) and posits that reflective practice is best done through a community orientation to problem solving and discovery.

Theorizing Emotion's Role in Reflection

Relatedly, it is also important to understand that social learning spaces, such as a VAS, are also ripe with emotion. According to Zembylas (2003) and Day and Leitch (2001), emotions are central to how teachers filter and enact their teaching and the possibility of teacher transformation and growth.

In this article, we define and conceptualize emotions as not situated within the individual alone. Feminist theories of emotion articulate that emotions are not just individual but also relational (Ahmed, 2004), collaborative (Boler, 1999), and shared (Ahmed, 2010). Similarly, Micciche (2007) reminded us that "emotion is experienced between people within a particular context (and so resides both *in* people and *in* culture)" (pp. 7–8). This distinction is important because historically, emotions have been cast as internal, situated within a person (Burrow, 2000). Thus, our study fills a gap in reflection research, because reflection in teacher education

has largely been cast as a personal emotive experience rather than social. In this study, the relational aspect of emotion is important as we consider PSTs' reflections during a communal VAS.

Many scholars have found a connection between reflection and emotion. Janssen, de Hullu, and Tigelaar (2008), for example, believed that not only does reflection evoke emotions but also different types of emotion can evoke or have different influences upon further learning. For example, research by Fredrickson (2002) has shown that negative emotions, such as heightened discomfort and anxiety, can lead to narrow-mindedness, lack of problem-solving ability, and an unwillingness to try new things, while positive emotions, such as safety and comfort, have the opposite effect. Several studies (e.g., Malderez, Hobsen, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007; Meyer, 2009; Poulou, 2007; Yuan & Lee, 2016) have documented how important positive emotional experiences are for supporting PSTs' learning and development during teacher education.

However, not all scholars have seen emotion's role in reflection in the same way. Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogic theory, Fecho et al. (2005) suggested that optimal learning happens outside of a comfort zone, where teachers are in a state of *wobble* and embrace the tension and uneasiness. Wobble calls attention to uncertain moments, and it "creates opportunities for examining practice in ways that might not otherwise occur" (p. 175). It is a state that can facilitate growth as the individual interacts with others and responds to the world around him or her. Similarly, other scholars believe that "learning occurs when people are in their stretch zone. Intellectual development and personal growth do not occur if there is no disequilibrium in a person's thinking or feeling" (Panicucci, 2007, p. 39). Boler (1999) also believed that pedagogies of discomfort lead to reflective growth. Thus, teacher education research perpetuates the concept of the comfort zone as an unproductive space for learning and growth.

In this study, we draw on these sociocultural and affect theories in relation to learning and development to better understand the role that (dis)comfort might play in the reflective potential of a VAS. In other words, based on our findings, we question how (dis)comfort shaped PSTs' reflections on their teaching during a communal VAS.

Method

In this study, we use illustrative cases (Mann, 2006) to consider the reflective potential of the VAS in teacher education. Illustrative case studies are "descriptive in character and [are] intended to add realism and in-depth examples to other information about a program, project, or policy" (Morra & Friedlander, 1999). We next review the context, participants, data collection, and data analysis methods of this study.

Context

This research took place at a large public university in the U.S. Southeast. Undergraduate PSTs enrolled in the university's 1-year English Education program

took five methods courses and completed their field-based practicum during the fall semester. In the spring, PSTs completed their student teaching ideally in the same classroom where they served their fall practicum. PSTs were placed into professional learning communities (PLCs) that spanned both semesters. These PLCs consisted of five to six PSTs and one English Education methods instructor who served as the supervisor. PLCs met monthly to discuss teaching, learning, students, and teacher certification. Within the PLC, supervisors also engaged in the systematic reflection of PSTs' teaching practices through the VAS. This process took place during the practicum semester, when the PSTs planned and taught a 2-week unit in their field placement schools. The intention of the assignment was to prepare PSTs for the planning, teaching, and reflection they would engage in during student teaching.

Participants

The demographics of the 25 PSTs enrolled in the English Education program were reflective of the demographics of PSTs across the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Approximately 76.3% of participants self-identified as female and 81.9% as White. Michelle's PLC group consisted of six undergraduate English Education majors: five women and one man. Four of the women were placed at one high school, Cherokee High School, and the other two students were placed at another high school, Jamestown High School, both located near the university campus. All PSTs self-identified as straight and White.[1]

In this article, we offer three illustrative cases of our findings, found within the larger PLC. In keeping with illustrative case study design (Mann, 2006; Morra & Friedlander, 1999), Jonathan, Charli, and Tiffany's cases were purposefully chosen and written as vignettes to highlight the complexity of our findings related to comfort. Michelle selected these three cases because they demonstrate the range of schools, gender, personalities, and teacher dispositions within the larger PLC group. To ensure that the vignettes were not opportunistic or cherry-picked examples, Michelle asked Meghan to verify that the chosen PSTs' vignettes were representative and illustrative of the whole group.

Jonathan. Jonathan was the only male student in the PLC; however, this did not seem to bother him. The women in the group adopted him into their circle quickly. Jonathan described himself as a person who loved to teach and had a passion for students. Jonathan was placed at Jamestown High School, a school built fewer than 10 years prior to this study to accommodate the growth in the county. The school was considered rural, built in the middle of several farm fields, and although it had many technological gadgets, a high percentage of students received free and reduced-price lunch.

Charli. Charli was a female PST placed at Cherokee High School, also a rural school. The school had a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced-

price lunch. Charli was a highly motivated student who was in the university's honors program. Charli described herself as an organized teacher who had trouble relaxing. She prided herself in providing high-level, challenging texts to her students through scaffolded instruction.

Tiffany. Tiffany was also a female PST in the honors program, placed at Cherokee High School. Tiffany and Charli, both being gifted students, were quite competitive with one another in relation to their teaching abilities. However, their personalities and teaching dispositions were opposite, as Tiffany described herself as quirky and enjoyed being silly with her students and coming up with creative ways to engage them.

Michelle. We consider Michelle a participant because she was involved throughout the study as the PLC's supervisor. She also taught their Young Adult Literature course.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this qualitative case study over a period of 3 months. The first round of data collection took place during a 2-week unit that each PST taught during the fall. Approximately 2 weeks after the unit, the VAS occurred. About 1 month after the VAS, each participant was interviewed individually to provide insight into the participant's experiences during the VAS. Three pieces of data were used to analyze the findings: (a) transcripts of the PSTs' videos of themselves teaching, (b) transcripts of the audio-recorded VAS, and (c) transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews.

Video analysis sessions. We drew from Zeichner and Liston's (2014) elements of communities of practice to structure the procedures and purposes of the VAS. To prepare for the VAS, each member of the PLC was required to complete a variety of tasks (see Figure 1).

In Step 1, students picked a lesson that they were teaching during their 2-week unit to *record*. Next, they *watched* themselves teach and took notes on what they were seeing. This led to Step 3, *reflecting* on what they noticed in the video and determining which portion of the video they wanted to focus on. Step 4, *selecting*, required them to select a 10-minute clip of their teaching. PLC members were instructed to select an imperfect teaching moment that represented a teaching issue that merited further examination (Zeichner & Liston, 2014)—one where they would like the feedback and recommendations of their fellow PLC members. Finally, PSTs completed Step 5, *transcribing* the 10-minute clip. After transcribing, we again asked PSTs to *reflect*, this time considering both the video clip and the experience of transcribing.

PSTs' reflections on the video and transcripts helped them with Step 7: developing a guiding *inquiry* question that they would take to the PLC group to discuss

during the VAS. Steps 8, 9, and 10 (*share, reflect, adapt*) took place during the VAS and afterward. Figure 2 presents the specific elements of the VAS process.

The VAS lasted 3 hours and was audio-recorded and later transcribed by Michelle. During the VAS, each PLC member had 20 minutes to present the context of the member's teaching, to ask the member's guiding question, and to share the member's video with the group. Fellow PLC members could ask clarifying questions before and during the viewing of each PLC member's video. Following the video, each PLC member provided positive and constructive feedback for the presenter, while the presenting PST listened and took notes.

After receiving feedback, the presenting PST could reflect on and summarize the feedback given and ask questions to the group. The discussion then concluded with the supervisor opening up the floor for discussion and/or providing additional questions. This process continued with each member of the PLC. The purpose of the VAS was to provide a space for PSTs to analyze their own and others' teaching and to develop and offer methods for improvement. Additionally, the VAS contributed to the ongoing development of PSTs' teaching philosophies and goals and encouraged PSTs to see communal reflection and interaction as essential elements of their professional development (Zeichner & Liston, 2014). Unlike most reflection

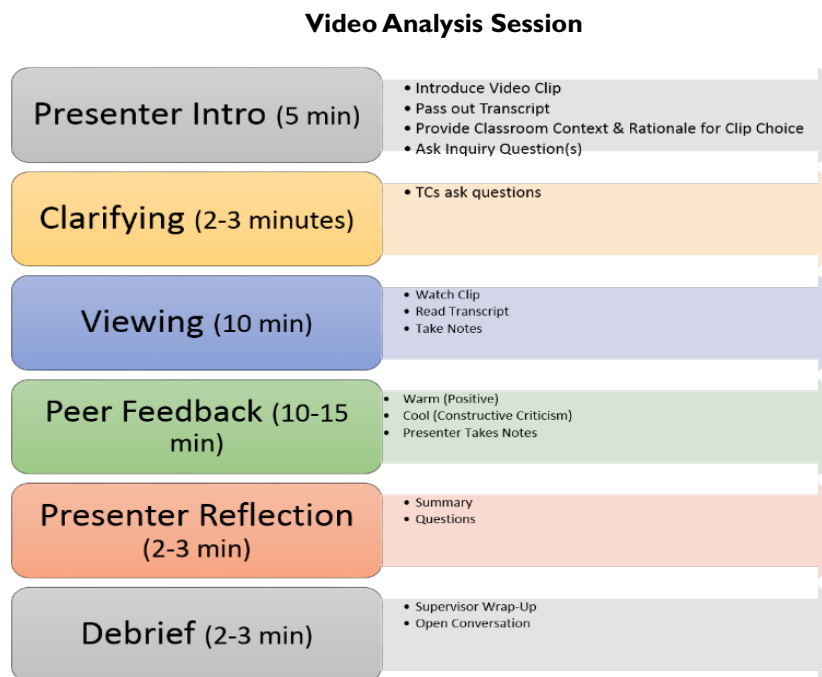**Figure 1**
Pre-VAS Reflective Process
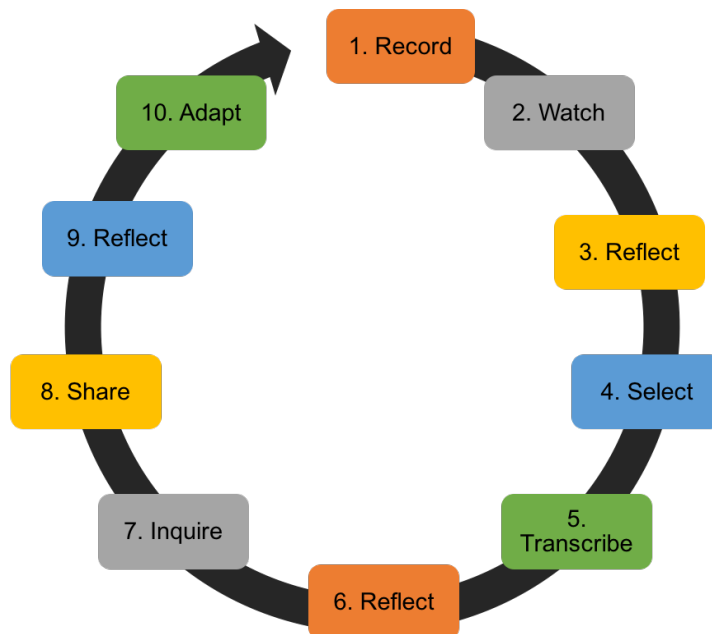
in teacher education, there was no written journal to accompany the VAS. Instead, the work done to prepare for the VAS and the discussion during the session itself served as the reflection.

Semistructured phenomenological interviews. Michelle also conducted semistructured phenomenological interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), which helped elicit each participant's unique conceptions of the VAS. Interviews were conducted with each PST approximately 4 weeks after the VAS to allow time for the PSTs to reflect on their teaching practice and implement ideas learned from the VAS during student teaching. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 min.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by Michelle, with the goal of describing the phenomena that occurred within the data in question (Yin, 1994). Michelle began data analysis by transcribing and then doing a close reading of each participant's interview transcript, followed by line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding (Corbin & Straus, 2014) to make sense of each participant's experiences. To further

Figure 2
Video Analysis Session Protocol

Video Analysis Session

Presenter Intro (5 min)	• Introduce Video Clip • Pass out Transcript • Provide Classroom Context & Rationale for Clip Choice • Ask Inquiry Question(s)
Clarifying (2-3 minutes)	• TCs ask questions
Viewing (10 min)	• Watch Clip • Read Transcript • Take Notes
Peer Feedback (10-15 min)	• Warm (Positive) • Cool (Constructive Criticism) • Presenter Takes Notes
Presenter Reflection (2-3 min)	• Summary • Questions
Debrief (2-3 min)	• Supervisor Wrap-Up • Open Conversation

refine codes, Michelle engaged in a process of constant-comparative analysis, focusing on each datum separately to focus on the "core message" (Boeije, 2002, p. 395). Initial codes from across the data were then reduced and collapsed into more manageable codes.

This process was repeated for each participant, and once all interviews and the VAS transcription of the participants' talk were coded, the data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Boeije, 2002). Ultimately, Michelle generated three major categories across the coded data: (a) self-perception of teaching practices and abilities through VAS, (b) perceptions of peers' teaching practices and abilities through VAS, and (c) emotions regarding the VAS process. For each of these three categories, summary memos were created, which aided in determining the main arguments, or theme, within each category (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). The final category—emotions regarding the VAS process—led to the finding described in the next section regarding the value of comfort zones.

Several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. First, triangulation was used in the form of interviews to corroborate the initial codes regarding (dis)comfort within the VAS (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Second, peer scrutiny (Shenton, 2004) in the form of ongoing discussions between Michelle and Meghan contributed to the credibility of the findings and the selections of the final illustrative case vignettes presented here.

Data Representation

Qualitative researchers have many tools at their disposal for representing and presenting data. In this study, we chose to use case vignettes, or "compact sketches" that "highlight particular findings, or summarise a particular theme or issue," by "encapsulate[ing] what the researcher finds" (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 70). The vignettes are useful in "making concrete the events and experience of practice" (Phillips, Schostak, & Tyler, 2000, p. 130); thus, the vignettes were created by carefully "condensing and compiling" (Ely et al., 1997, p. 74) the quotes from the VAS, the follow-up interview, and our memos that we had coded in the final category described earlier into a narrative-like style. Like Ely et al., we found that using several vignettes placed together is "far more effective when allowed to 'speak' to each other" (p. 77) rather than only having one on its own.

Findings

Although several themes were found within this study, this particular article has focused on a unique finding, not found within the relevant literature, related to PSTs' emotions regarding the process of the VAS. Through the analysis of the data, we found that the reflective aims of video analysis were better realized when the VAS was structured as a nonevaluative (i.e., it was not graded), supportive environment.

Additionally, the ability to critically reflect within the VAS was enhanced when a sense of community and rapport was preestablished among the PLC group.

Throughout the data, all PLC members, but particularly Jonathan, Tiffany, and Charli, engaged in discussions about how they felt during the VAS. Specifically, the PSTs felt that the VAS was an awkward and uncomfortable situation that was made more comfortable by having preestablished rapport, a sense of community, and preexisting relationships with peers, regardless of their school placement. To illustrate this particular finding, we present three case vignettes—Tiffany, "I'm a Good Kind of Weird"; Charli, "I Can Be Pretty Terrible to Myself"; and Jonathan, "I Feel at Home"—to demonstrate the richness and thickness of the data set.

Tiffany: "I'm a Good Kind of Weird"

First, Tiffany, from our data set, is representative of the insecurities that all of the PSTs in the PLC felt about their own teaching practices. Her case is an illustrative case of how the preestablished rapport within the PLC during the VAS alleviated her own insecurities around being "weird" when she taught. Awkwardness was a feeling that resonated for each of the students, but particularly for Tiffany. Throughout the VAS experience, she found a way to embrace these emotions because of the relationships she had within the PLC.

Across the data, Tiffany evinced a concern about being perceived as weird by her fellow PLC group members. Tiffany noted in the interview,

> Before we watched the video as a group, I knew my students were quirky, but I didn't really think of them as being weirdly overly quirky. And, I guess that is just because I am that sort of person myself, so we just sort of fit in together. But, hearing everybody's comments [*laughs*] about all the weird things my students were doing made me realize like oh! This is weird? I didn't realize that was so weird. Now I am thinking that like maybe I'm weirder than I thought [*laughs*] I don't know. You know whatever, I'll roll with it.

This excerpt demonstrates an acknowledgment of Tiffany's own unique qualities as a teacher. Although Tiffany admitted that her uniqueness, that is, her "weirdness," became more apparent through the VAS, it did not bother her. She laughed it off and said she would "roll with it."

Additionally, this carefree attitude about her quirkiness could have stemmed from the reactions of her peers during the focus group. In response to Tiffany's video during the VAS, another student remarked, "I think by being like good weird, and goofy. I am like this too . . . I feel like a freak some days but they love it, because they feel like they are so widely accepted by you." Her peer's admittance of a similar disposition assuaged Tiffany's potential discomfort. In Tiffany's reflection after the VAS, she remarked, "I'm a good kind of weird," which showed the level of comfort that her peers had provided her.

This ability to accept critique in a positive way could be due to the preestab-

lished relationships that Tiffany had with her PLC prior to the VAS. Tiffany stated in her interview that the VAS "was also like less threatening feeling because we like are with my friends and we're in a supportive group." The theme of comfort was further developed in her following statement:

> You know. Me, Charli and Marie and Reed, we are all at the same school so from the very beginning we were just like, we should be friends! Like we all student teach together, so let's be friends. And we carpool and I see them every day and we keep this positive dynamic going and then Jonathan and Lynn. I don't see them as much but both are like nice people and they. I don't know. I feel like Lynn and I get along really well whenever I worked with her on class projects. And Jonathan is dating Rebecca, and I love Rebecca, so naturally I have to love Jonathan as part of that. I don't know. I just feel like we're jokey people. We like to make people laugh, um. We're not hypercompetitive people. I think that might be a problem in some other groups, is that there are some people who feel the need to like compete with other people in the classroom, but we . . . we just want to be friends. [*laughs*] We don't want to compete. We just . . . we realize that we are all there for the same purpose so might as well work together and get the most accomplished.

As the excerpt demonstrates, Tiffany's level of comfort in the VAS was directly related to the relationships that were formed prior to the VAS. Furthermore, her and other participants' comfort levels were dependent on their perception of group members' respect for them as well as a sense of shared values and goals among the group.

A "strong group dynamic" was a key element of a productive and comfortable experience that allowed for better reflection. For instance, during her interview, Tiffany said,

> It made me feel, I don't know, just really supported. . . . and being supported makes me feel more comfortable and relaxed and getting so much positive feedback from my peers made me feel like I maybe I do know what I do. Maybe I am going to be a good teacher or whatever. It made me feel better about teaching this semester. I feel more relaxed about it.

Although Tiffany admitted to feeling uncomfortable at the beginning of the VAS process and fearful of her peers' perceptions of her weirdness, the support that Tiffany felt from her group members during the VAS itself contributed to a sense of comfort during the VAS. For Tiffany, then, an uncomfortable space could become comfortable, allowing her to reflect on her own teaching and to grow as a teacher.

Charli: "I Can Be Pretty Terrible to Myself"

Similarly, Charli had her own insecurities about being a teacher. Her case is representative of the PLC members' feelings about being judged harshly through viewing and discussing their teaching abilities through close video analysis. This illustrative case vignette of Charli demonstrates how the preestablished rapport

within the PLC helped her not to be overly defensive of her own teaching practices during the learning process and to be open to critique.

During the VAS, Charli addressed the group with a concern about whether she looked

> more comfortable with this set of kids . . . because I am sure that the other group of kids picks up on the fact that I am not as . . . I am not as comfortable with them because they are louder and less respectful.

Sensing that what she said might be considered an unbecoming quality of a teacher—the fact that she does not particularly like a group of students—she quickly corrected herself and toned down her feelings, saying, "They are still great kids, but they are a little less respectful."

In the post-VAS interview, Charli admitted that she "had to fight the urge to justify things that were happening in the video" because the only thing that she was

> really worried about was, you know, there were some people in the room who didn't know the context of the school. They don't know the kids. They don't know the classes. They don't even really know what I was teaching.

Charli, however, was not worried about the "people who are in the same school as [her]" because "they kind of knew what was going on." This possible discomfort was mitigated because three other PLC members were also placed at her school.

Additionally, Charli noted several times in the interview that the VAS was "nice," "kind of nice," "not bad," "fine," "not a big deal," and these comments were usually made in conjunction with the fact that she "knew the people in the room." Owing to her comfort with her group members, Charli felt safe to discuss a tension she was experiencing between what she "didn't know" and what she "knew." She commented,

> If it was like a random panel of people, I would have been petrified, but because I knew these people and because they were all having to go through it as well, it wasn't that terribly nerve-wracking, and it was nice.

Despite it feeling awkward to have people watching her teach, Charli was able to push forward and receive criticism because of the preestablished rapport with her classmates.

Furthermore, in her interview, Charli noted that doing the video analysis "made me a lot less nervous" than being formally observed by Michelle. There was an inherent power differential between her and Michelle, and no matter what feedback Michelle gave her, Charli commented that a formal observation of her teaching was nerve-wracking because she "know[s] there is somebody in the classroom typing away regardless of how you are doing, how the kids are doing, and I could keep going. So, it was more reassuring having the video analysis than having the formal observation." Michelle was that "somebody" who judged and critiqued her. She did not get to have the controlled environment of the VAS and her peers supporting her when Michelle came to observe. Interestingly, related to this, Charli noted that she was pretty hard on herself, so "I didn't really have a problem sitting back and

having people [during the VAS] talk to me about [my teaching] because I can be pretty terrible to myself, so any and all feedback is welcome." In one of Michelle's observations of Charli, she cried after things did not go as planned. Charli's fear of being observed and receiving feedback during the practicum make her positive response to the VAS particularly noteworthy.

The comfort established among group members prior to the VAS contributed to its success as a reflective tool for Charli, in particular. At the end of the VAS, for instance, Michelle asked how the session went. Charli responded,

> We could have come at this from a perspective and said, "Well Tiffany didn't do that well, but look at me I can do this, which means I am clearly better at this than Tiffany," but like . . . well, none of us have that outlook on this experience. We are all just so there for each other, and I think that in any other context this would have been significantly more uncomfortable than it was, but I was genuinely interested in what you had to say, because I knew it was coming from a supporting place. And that is my glowing review.

The camaraderie that was already built into the PLC contributed to Charli's ability to be "genuinely interested" in the advice and opinions of her peers, as opposed to Michelle's critiques and recommendations.

Jonathan: "I Feel at Home"

Jonathan, as the only man in the PLC, could have easily felt uncomfortable sharing and reflecting on his and his peers' teaching practices. However, this was not the case. His case is representative of the PLC members' skepticism of the type of helpful critique they would get from their peers. This illustrative case vignette of Jonathan demonstrates how the preestablished rapport within the PLC helped to dissipate Jonathan's concerns about the genuineness and trustworthiness of critique received through the VAS.

During the course of the year, the PLC had only seen Jonathan frazzled once. Typically, his demeanor was upbeat and self-assured. So the fact that his minor moments of discomfort revolved only around the awkwardness of watching himself teach did not surprise Michelle or the PLC. Jonathan remarked, "I was familiar with how painful it is." Also, Jonathan was the only one within the PLC who had videotaped himself teach before, while he was a youth minister during the summer, potentially contributing to his level of comfort with video analysis.

Like Charli and Tiffany, Jonathan commented on the preestablished rapport of the PLC as a contributing factor to the success of their reflecting and conversing. In the postinterview, he talked about the fact that the PLC group was a place where "I feel at home." He discussed how the preestablished PLC meetings that began at the start of the year with the same six people created a sense of "loyalty" and "trust." In his classes, he began to "notice them more . . . so you start bonding with them more then." Having the meetings consistently, he noted, "eventually builds that."

In contrast to Tiffany and Charli, Jonathan worried that the group's shared camaraderie would result in feedback that lacked criticality and would instead be overly nice, regardless of the quality of the teaching shared. Jonathan told Michelle in her supervisor role, several times over the course of the year, to give it to him straight. During the interview, he confided in Michelle that he "was skeptical" about the types of feedback he would receive. Jonathan noted,

> I feel comfortable with our PLC group, but I didn't think anyone was going to say anything that a) probably would shock me enough or would just make me completely shocked that they said it, or b) you know, or I didn't feel like anyone would say anything mean, or negative. All very constructive.

The fact that the feedback was all constructive was not necessarily a bad thing for Jonathan. His skepticism turned to comfort and ease as he realized "I could tell they were being genuine . . . They weren't just like, 'Oh, I got to say something positive about Jonathan.' They were actually genuine things because they gave details about it and gave examples, and so that made me feel good." By the end of the VAS, Jonathan's initial skepticism dissipated as he found the group's feedback to be particularly helpful *because of* the genuine rapport between PLC members.

Discussion and Implications

This study inquired into the reflective potential of VAS in teacher education. As seen through the comments made in both the VAS and the post-VAS interviews, for these participants, video analysis in itself did not engender enhanced reflection. Rather, what we have found is that for the VAS to be an effective space for both reflection and the development of a community of practice, the participants must have a preestablished sense of rapport and feel that they are working *within* a comfort zone rather than being pushed out of one.

Our findings are in conversation with earlier studies on the role of (dis)comfort in learning. Specifically, our findings contrast with the literature on discomfort (Boler, 1999) and wobble (Fecho et al., 2005) in education and are against the shared notion that learning and growth happen outside of the comfort zone. The PSTs in this study demonstrated that for them to be OK with discomfort, they had to feel safe with those around them in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This was similar to Yuan and Lee's (2016) finding that PSTs' professional agency can be nurtured through "collaborative learning" with their "peers" where they could "develop confidence in their own abilities, seek out feedback, and try out innovative approaches in their teaching" (p. 822) through positive emotional interactions. For us, the notion that feelings of safety must come first when doing group reflection highlights several implications for those considering using the VAS in teacher preparation.

One of the tensions within our findings relates to the fact that most of our PSTs were White, middle-class women who do not resemble the bodies of students in K–12

schools (Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). On one hand, homogenous groupings like those described in this PLC group gave the students a sense of safety because they were, for the most part, from similar cultural and social upbringings. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) argued that in communities of practice, "cultural differences often make trust and deep personal relationships more difficult. For many people, connecting with others from their own cultural background is more comfortable" (p. 120). These PLC group members were placed at schools with each other, and they also had similar school demographics that mirrored the demographics of our PSTs (i.e., majority White). On the other hand, if feeling safe and comfortable is contingent upon familiarity with people just like you, then we question how these PSTs will fair when confronted with parents and students who are not like them.

Another implication regarding the need for a comfort zone for reflection on practice is whether teacher education programs can create similar environments to the one that Michelle's PLC group had. In speaking with the group, Michelle asked several of them if there was any specific act that helped to establish a comfort zone. Most of them said that they did not think it was anything in particular, that they just got along well. Jonathan, however, said nonchalantly, "obviously ... I think just having the idea of a preestablished PLC group" and "setting the guidelines from the beginning that this is a family." What Jonathan referred to was a statement Michelle made during the first PLC meeting of the year. Six months later, the concept of "family" still stuck with him.

The teacher education program's cohort model could have also contributed to the sense of family and comfort that participants felt within the PLC. Although the PSTs did not know each other at the beginning of the year, they developed deep and often long-lasting relationships with one another after working together. Also important to consider is the fact that this PLC group consisted of only undergraduates all placed in high school classrooms for their practicum and student teaching. Within the English Education program as a whole, other PLC groups, including Meghan's, had a mix of undergraduate and master's students who were placed in a combination of middle and high schools. Often these more heterogeneous groups struggled to find their comfort zone (Barnes & Falter, 2019).

The participants in this study, however, did experience tension within the PLC. The comfort zone, thus, was not impermeable to moments of frustration and fear often stemming from their own insecurities of how their teaching practices would be viewed by others. Instead, the comfort zone was constantly made and remade through the interactions of the PLC members because of the preestablished rapport among the group. Perhaps, as Vygotsky (1978) articulated, the level of risk involved in doing this dialogic reflection was alleviated due to this communal environment, thereby allowing for a certain zone of proximal development, or comfort, where the supervisor was nearby but not in control.

Of note, out of all the studies that used video analysis as a reflection tool, none of them mentioned the notion of comfort. Only Yang's (2009) article about blogging

as a reflective tool came close to this topic. He noted that for his PSTs, "there was evidence that students were more comfortable critiquing themselves than critiquing others" (p. 16). Furthermore, Yang claimed that "encouragement and intervention were needed from time to time to push student teachers to think further and become more comfortable with expressing critical thoughts" (p. 18). We, too, found this to be true during the VAS, but less intervention was needed because critical feedback was built into the responses that were expected from the PSTs.

Additionally, it should be noted that, like much qualitative case study research, because the findings of this project are specific to a small number of individuals within a specific environment and context, generalizability beyond this situation is not possible, and the data are not meant to be representative of larger populations. They are, however, meant to be illustrative; they illustrate a contextualized phenomenon that we hope "rings true" (Shenton, 2004) and also opens up conversations about the goals of communal video reflective pedagogies, and how we can empower PSTs to foster positive emotions toward their peers and themselves.

Finally, we applaud the risk taking that these PSTs engaged in during the VAS. At the time of the VAS, the participants in this study had only taught 2 full weeks of class, and so it is quite remarkable that they were willing to put themselves on display in front of their peers and risk looking foolish so early in their teaching careers.

Conclusion

Our study's goal was to examine how a group VAS might facilitate enhanced reflection for PSTs as they learn and develop as teachers. What we found was that for the VAS to be an effective space for both reflection and learner development, the participants must have a preestablished sense of rapport and feel that they are working *within* a comfort zone. Had the students not felt a sense of rapport, camaraderie, and positive emotions linked to their own teaching practices, the VAS might not have resulted in enhanced reflection.

Through the vignettes of Tiffany, Charli, and Jonathan, it is clear that reflective models based in rhetoric of moving past one's comfort zone need to be reexamined, problematized, and potentially discarded. Teacher educators need to rethink the role of discomfort, vulnerability, and risk taking when it comes to reflective practices. Having more conversations within the larger field of education, namely, with adventure and experiential educators to start, would provide richer understanding of how and when risk taking and vulnerability can enable PSTs when they reflect on their own practice.

Furthermore, this study fills a gap in the literature around the role of emotions in teacher education, particularly with PSTs. Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) have argued that more scholars need to move beyond a "dispassionate cognitive perspective" (p. 401) of teacher sense making, because, as Kelchtermans (2005) stated, "emotion and cognition, self and context, ethical judgement and purposeful

action: they are all intertwined in the complex reality of teaching" (p. 996). Directing attention to the emotional experiences of PSTs can enrich teacher educators' understandings of the complexities of becoming a teacher and should inform the reflective practices that they require of PSTs.

As teacher preparation programs increasingly make use of video analysis as a reflective tool to meet standards governing teacher education (e.g., edTPA), our study suggests that merely adding a collective analysis component to video reflection may not suffice. Instead, VAS that involve collaborative reflection and discussion of PSTs' teaching should take place in a comfort zone where PSTs feel a sense of camaraderie, preestablished rapport, and mutual respect for one another.

Note

[1] The terms "straight" and "White" were selected by the participants themselves, and do reflect the authors' choices.

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