Less Test-Taking and More Care-Taking: Teacher Educators Explore Identity in a Changing World

Nancy T. Walker, Christian Bracho, and Marga Madhuri
LaFetra College of Education, University of La Verne

Abstract

Through a collaborative self-study of course redesign, we examined the process of restructuring our courses within a socio-cultural context of teaching. Specifically, we explored the shifts we made in course transformation as we reconsidered dominant frameworks while reflecting on our practices, an exploration that allowed to us to reconfigure our teacher educator identities. Our experiences as teacher educators during this unprecedented COVID 19 crisis, in conjunction with racial, political and economic challenges, spotlighted the necessity for trauma-informed pedagogy work. This work is significant, as it documents how the ongoing stress with remote teaching has dramatically intensified, for both ourselves personally and as teacher educators, and naturally, for our teacher candidates (TCs), many of whom had families to care for at home and jobs to juggle alongside coursework. Through our self-reflections and dialogues, we observed how the traumas and conflicts that our communities experienced urged us to shift and create space for mindfulness, socioemotional learning, and trauma-informed pedagogy. This self-study empowered us to begin necessary change and provide mutual support for each other as teacher educators.

Keywords: Teacher identity, caring, trauma, course transformation

In the Spring of 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 crisis, we, the authors, had begun an examination of our courses with an eye to transforming them to meet the needs of our teacher candidates (TCs) who will be entering 21st century classrooms. We were already critical of our courses that had been recently rewritten to address new Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) as required by the State Credentialing Commission, because we felt there was too much emphasis on standards that were not responsive to meeting the learning needs and differences of either our TCs, or of the children in their future classrooms. The call for this work was intensified when schools closed in March 2020, people were quarantined, and remote teaching became a requirement. Social and emotional learning (SEL) needs moved to the forefront as children and their families, teachers and teacher educators, all struggled to grapple with new learning and teaching challenges amidst uncertainties such as business closures, shortages, and difficulties meeting basic needs. Learning opportunities and gaps were spotlighted as children from low income families dealt with the lack of technology to support remote learning, and schools scrambled to provide even the basics like meals, learning materials (sometimes in the form of packets delivered to families' homes) or Internet connectivity and tools (such as hotspots, Chromebooks or laptops) for their communities. As teacher educators, we struggled to provide relevant learning opportunities for our TCs−many of whom also lacked sufficient tools to learn in a fully-remote environment−while grappling with our own personal challenges. This paper explores the changing priorities and identities of three teacher educators as they transformed their courses in a time of multiple societal challenges.

Conceptual Framework

Calling on Wertsch et al. (1993) to elaborate on why sociocultural lenses are valuable for educational research, Lasky (2005) notes that, "what individuals believe, and how individuals think and act is always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures" (p. 900). Similarly, Shepard et al. (2018) draw on the work of Vygotsky to argue that sociocultural theory "goes further in acknowledging how it is that one's cognitive development and

social identity are jointly constituted through participation in multiple social worlds of family, community, and school" (p. 23). In that regard, we locate our self-study within the specific social and cultural context of the United States in 2020, as the country grappled with various crises that fundamentally altered our day-to-day lives and called into question dominant frameworks for doing teacher education work. Significantly, the sociocultural context compelled us to consider our own identities as human beings belonging to various communities as we struggled to stay afloat and simultaneously adapt our courses. As a result of our varied social interactions, our team learned from one another and contended with our ways of knowing and doing the work of teacher education (Wetzel et al., 2019).

In a study of teacher educators' identities, Webre (2020) uses the concept of *curricularizing* to explore how teacher educators make choices in their courses and programs within the context of various and often conflicting forces. For example, argues Webre, sociocultural factors such as national environments−including ideologies, policies, and structures−might run counter to factors in the professional field, such as relationships, networks, and discourses prevalent in communities of practice. However, Webre (2020) reminds us that "the teacher educator is an individual, who brings all their experience, expertise, and personal beliefs to their practice" (p. 17); this accounts for the different ways that teacher educators curricularize—how they make choices about what will be taught and how it will be delivered. In other words, individual teacher educators mediate sociocultural factors in macro and micro contexts through the filters of their own lived experiences. Erickson et al. (2011) suggest that when teacher educators examine their own practices, and the meanings they attach to those practices, they become more aware of the "boundaries and definitions" of their own identities as teacher educators− a distinction the authors encapsulate as "doing teacher education" versus "being a teacher educator" (p. 106).

Research on teacher educator identities has expanded considerably in the last 15 years, building off the broader body of research about teacher identity in K-12 contexts (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Smit et al., 2010;

Zembylas, 2010). One of the first major explorations of teacher educator identity emerged in 2011, in a special journal issue that specifically attended to "the complexities of lived experience and theoretical plurality" of teacher educator identity-making (Erickson et al., p. 105). Indeed, both within the special issue and in studies since, studies of teacher educator identity highlight the ways teacher educators manage conflicting roles and expectations (Clift, 2011), as well as real-world challenges and emotional tensions (Izadinia, 2014). More recently, in another special issue, a collective of teacher educators addressed the theme of "transforming teacher education" (Baker-Doyle, 2019); some articles emphasized how teacher educators' own identities shaped the nature and transformation of their teacher education practices (Quan, et al., 2019; Navarro, et al., 2019). These recent studies further Webre's notion (2020) that individual life histories and identities are brought to bear as teacher educators "curricularize," making choices about what to include in their teacher education courses while also working within dominant frameworks or standards for the profession, such as Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs).

Breault (2013) calls for teacher educators to reflect on their beliefs and identities as they build their professional identity as teachers, and the present context reminds us that identity develops as a result of experiences and situations that provide opportunities for reflection (Quezada et al., 2020). In that regard, it is notable that many teacher educator identity studies in the last decade have used self-study as a meaningful and productive methodology. Chang et al. (2016) claim a key role for self-study methodology:

> This type of research is critical in the field of teacher education, as what university faculty say, do, and model has a tremendous impact upon future educators. Teacher educators taking on a self-study inquiry become actively engaged in the research and reflection process, rather than acting as passive evaluators. (Chang et al., 2016, p. 156)

Furthermore, "self-study research is an effective approach which significantly impacts on teacher educators' identity development" (Izadinia, 2014, p. 438). Put differently, when teacher educators engage in self-study, they become more aware of their identities

as teacher educators, which can activate their sense of agency (Martin, 2018).

In our self-study, we looked to the changing educational landscape over the last 15 years, as researchers and practitioners have called for holistic approaches to teaching that emphasize concepts such as social and emotional learning (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013), restorative practice (Mirsky, 2007), and mindfulness (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Likewise, the nation's ongoing reckoning with racism has led to educational interventions such as cultural responsiveness (Sleeter, 2011), antiracism (Kendi, 2019), abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019), and equity literacy (Gorski, 2018). Given the sociocultural context that has necessitated such approaches, trauma-informed pedagogies have also become essential, as teachers must take into account how trauma influences student behavior and performance. Lawson et al. (2019) argue that a trauma-informed approach aids educators in supporting the "mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being" of their students (p. 424). The authors lament that trauma-informed teaching has not been widely prioritized in educational policies or in preservice education of teachers. In their view, failure to integrate this approach has led to further *secondary traumatic stress* (STS), defined as "the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995, p. 7).

The various crises in 2020 highlighted the individual, collective, and generational traumas students may bring to the classroom and caused teacher educators to face additional challenges in their work with teacher candidates. During this time of substantial trauma, it is critical for teacher educators to reflect on their role in the shaping of future teachers, especially since "personal factors play a large role in shaping one's teacher professional identity" (Hsieh, 2016, p. 94). Thus, the traumas we experience, and the secondary trauma we face in our work with preservice teachers, compel us to rethink the dominant frameworks that have shaped teachers' professional identities and to confront the realities the current sociocultural context has unearthed.

Methods

Our purpose for this qualitative collaborative self-study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to explore how our identities as teacher educators acted upon and were impacted by the transformation of our courses. We had begun the process shortly before the COVID-19 lockdowns and other national crises moved to the forefront; our priorities necessarily shifted as the move to remote teaching changed the way we "do" education. Through individual planning and collective discussions via Zoom, we examined our courses for opportunities to co-construct curriculum with our teacher candidates, prioritize their identities and individual needs, and authentically serve them; all of these reflective and constructive acts contributed to this self-study.

Data Collection

The post-baccalaureate teacher education program in which we work is housed within a non-parochial, private Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), located in California. During the summer of 2020, we examined the courses prior to transformation through three data sources: course syllabi, journal entries, and transcripts of seven Zoom meetings among the three of us. Zoom meetings were utilized to discuss the status of our courses prior to the pandemic and to provide the point of departure for the transformation process. These sessions were also used to discuss ongoing issues amongst us as teacher educators. During this time, previous course syllabi were reviewed with the lens of course transformation. Identity work contributed to our conversations as we moved forward with this shift. We used personal journal entries to reflect after Zoom sessions, in which we discussed our transformation process, to consider interesting points of conversation with our TCs regarding identity work, and to record analytic notes during the reading of our transcripts. This writing practice allowed us to reflect throughout this phase one cycle. Transcripts of our Zoom meetings assisted us in this reflective process as we began the shift in focus of our three courses. Analytic notes which emerged from journaling were then shared collectively, discussed, and reviewed.

Data Analysis

We applied process coding (Saldana, 2016) and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014) to analyze and interpret data sets. This analysis involved examining transcribed meeting notes, course syllabi, and self-reflective journal writing related to course transformation. We met several times to discuss and code the transcripts, artifacts, and journal writing which were cross-referenced to determine patterns. We began with process coding of journal entries, course syllabi, and transcripts of Zoom conversations. Utilizing verbs during the coding process captured our doing in teacher education. "*Doing* teacher education involves engaging in practices that are characteristic of participation as a teacher educator" (Erickson et al., 2011, p. 106).

Initial categories of this first cycle coding included questioning credential requirements, allowing ourselves to prioritize self-care, and critically examining assignments and expectations in courses. Second cycle focus coding (Charmaz, 2014) developed these initial categories into themes: content and pedagogy, our identities as educators, and responding to needs of teacher candidates. Emic codes that arose from the data highlighted our ongoing trauma. These codes include: straining under tensions from outside forces, engaging in ongoing identity work, and disrupting the dominant course narrative. All three researchers met regularly to discuss and refine codes, determine categories, and develop themes using the focused coding method. Reflexivity was supported by coding all data individually and then meeting as a group to discuss our two cycle coding process.

One of the most essential aspects of research is the positionality of those involved in designing, conducting, and reporting on it. In our case, we are three teacher educators at a Hispanic-Serving Institution 35 miles east of Los Angeles. Christian is a gay, cisgender Latino male who worked as a high school teacher and teacher trainer in Los Angeles County for 10 years. His research agenda explores teacher movements, teacher activism, and teacher identity in both the United States and Mexico. Marga is a white, middle class, heterosexual female who taught middle school for 13 years and has now been a teacher educator for 19 years. The heart of her work centers around literacy and

supporting all students through an understanding of neurodiversity, particularly the ways that an understanding of neuroscience and education can support teachers in creating positive, engaging learning spaces, and the impact of social emotional learning for teachers and their students. Nancy is a white middle class heterosexual female who has worked in middle school for 8 years and in teacher education for 23 years. She focuses on the intersection of literacy, identity, and autobiographical work as a teacher educator in support of teacher candidates becoming change agents in the contexts of teaching and learning.

Findings

Our data revealed congruence across our work and within ourselves as teacher educators. In this section, we describe tensions that we felt in our sociocultural contexts, shifts we noted in our personal and professional identities, and possibilities we identified for disrupting dominant narratives and frameworks in our courses.

Straining Under Tensions from Outside Forces

A common theme in our course transformation work is the tensions from outside forces that impact our roles as teacher educators. One of the most dominant forces in California is the influence of the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs) and TPEs, which detail nearly 40 different skills/capacities across six main standards. In 2017, with the recognition that our program accreditation would rely in part on how well our courses aligned with all those standards, our teacher education program launched a reconfigured set of courses largely determined by the TPEs. This included ensuring that each standard was introduced, practiced, and assessed across our credential program of eight courses. We mapped this scaffolded approach via an extensive matrix that was submitted to the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) prior to our February 2020 accreditation visit, just one month before the COVID-19 lockdown.

Over the last few years since our program re-launch, our team had expressed critiques about the new curricular structure and alignment. For example, Christian was concerned that the TPEs

were dominating the curriculum too much, making it difficult to address the unique needs and perspectives of his students. He wrote in a journal entry, "Covering so much loses the holistic perspective of teaching and modeling best practices. To engage kids, we need to show care." In other words, in trying to teach to all the various TPEs, teacher educators lose the capacity to adapt and respond meaningfully to the needs of our TCs, making the learning experience fragmented and disconnected. In one session with the research team, Christian asked, "When you spend time covering all of these requirements, when do you address care and how to survive as a teacher educator?" His comments reflect how teacher educators contend with dominant frameworks that may not include what they personally know or believe to be essential to good teaching.

These dilemmas emerged for Marga and Nancy as well. In a journal entry, Marga wrote:

> I could write about tensions all day. Where to begin? I feel like a puppet with multiple strings: we have university requirements about how to teach and what tools to use, commission requirements about standards we have to cover, and preparing our candidates for the TPAs and assessments that they have to pass.

These dominant frameworks led Marga to feel pressured to teach to the tests by focusing on test-prep strategies as well as content that specifically related to test questions or themes. Nancy noted that these pressures affected TCs as well:

> I felt that my TCs were so consumed with trying to pass the state examinations that they missed learning opportunities in my courses. I realized that I needed to shift the priorities in the course and focus on the bigger picture of literacy instruction. I also was sensitive to the stress of my students trying to pass the state exams, and that has taken its toll on me.

Nancy's desire for her students to have a well-established foundation in literacy led her to focus on strengthening and diversifying her teaching methods in both in face to face and remote settings to achieve this goal. Alongside the TPEs, however, are various other frameworks that shaped the nature of our courses.

For example, Marga talked about having also to introduce students to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as well as disciplinary standards such as the NGSS.

As a result of the pressure felt from dominant frameworks such as the TPEs, state examinations like the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA®), requirements for TCs to pass the TPAs, and standards in the different disciplines, we felt that the way we were teaching about teaching reflected a technical approach that did not prioritize enough of what we believed to be the most crucial aspects of the teacher's role. This includes caring and responsiveness, which can positively impact K-12 students, particularly those who come from traumatic backgrounds (Cozolino, 2013). We also felt that these technical frameworks were decontextualized from the changing social and political climate in the United States and neglected more contemporary approaches that made space for antiracism, neurodiversity, and trauma-informed teaching. Nancy wrote, "The TPEs feel like a reflection on an older time, an outdated idea that significant inequities in our schools could be resolved through mandated processes and procedures. The standards don't reflect on what teaching and learning needs to be." Nancy's initial concerns about the TPEs led her to create conversations and applications using a funds of knowledge lens (Moll et al., 1992) where teacher candidates draw from their knowledge and the knowledge of their students. Though each of us had made minor changes to our courses—or what Marga called "rearranging pieces on a chess board"—we did not feel a real sense of collective effort to meaningfully transform our classes in ways that challenged dominant narratives or frameworks.

Ongoing Identity Work

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) explain that "a teacher's identity shifts over time under the influence of a range of factors both internal to the individual, such as emotion…and external to the individual, such as job and life experiences in particular contexts" (p. 177). We previously noted how standards, frameworks, and examinations inhibited our sense of teaching from a holistic and responsive point of view. COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter

movement, and the economic crisis deepened these concerns and caused emotional turmoil as we tried to adapt to new national and global contexts for both our home and work lives. We realized that our course transformation called for self-reflection with new lenses and a deeper examination of our goals for the courses, particularly our roles within them. We began to feel the strain of trying to adapt courses for remote teaching, while acknowledging the needs of our traumatized students, supporting our colleagues, and struggling with our own senses of self. The awareness of this strain allowed us to be more open about considering and validating other types of trauma, which in turn has reshaped our understanding of our identities as teacher educators.

One way that our personal experiences with trauma changed our identities was through the prioritization of care and social emotional well-being. Nancy said:

> I think now more than ever, relationship building is critical in our teaching. For the first time in teaching this class, I noticed students showing up to the class early and staying after class to talk to myself and each other. There seems to be a need to connect and share both the positive and negative updates in our lives.

Nancy identified that her role had shifted into that of a caregiver providing space for honest conversations about the impact of the pandemic as well as discussions about how to prioritize care as a key dimension of the classroom environment. Christian concurred with this idea:

> The pandemic revealed that we were not talking about how to care enough in our courses. Our courses talk about RTI and PBIS, and these systems are necessary, but they appear as add-ons and don't reflect the holistic picture necessary to demonstrate care. This fall, we need to ask ourselves if we are modeling care for our students, so that they can show that same care for their students.

Marga noted a unique level of challenge at the start of the fall session:

> This was *the* hardest beginning of the semester. Ever. It was the perfect storm of remote teaching, larger class load, recruiting and supporting adjuncts to cover new classes,

> and providing support for them as they got added to the University's systems. I am feeling stretched thin.

As a result, Marga realized that she needed to be very particular about prioritizing time for self-care, and to be even more explicit about teaching her TCs how to balance their own needs with the pressures they were facing during the pandemic and will face as classroom teachers. Marga's statement aligns with Beauchamp and Thomas' (2009) argument that particularly emotional periods in teachers' lives affect their senses of self, and shape how they feel about the profession.

The shifting priorities and emotional turbulence brought on by the dual pandemic deepened Christian's sense of identity crisis. In a journal entry at the start of the fall semester, he wrote:

> I recognize that I am experiencing a lot of trauma and so are my students. I need to consider my own needs and how I will survive the year ahead. I cannot help my students if I don't take care of myself. That means setting up healthy boundaries and being willing to say no to things or recalibrate my capacities to do certain tasks.

Christian's comments align with Zembylas (2003), who defines emotions "not only as matters of personal (private) dispositions or psychological qualities, but also as social and political experiences that are constructed by how one's work (in this case, the teaching) is organized and led" (p. 216). In this instance, the social and political context of the lockdown, the civil unrest across the nation, the tensions around the presidential election, and the ways teaching was reconstructed in the remote environment all shaped Christian's need to redefine his personal sense of self and his professional identity. As a result of these emotions, Christian had to reconcile that, in the context of the "new normal," he must change his sense of responsiveness to include forgiveness, flexibility, and experimentation. This included resigning from committee and leadership positions to provide more time for self-care.

As we grappled with how to adapt to rapidly-changing conditions, some of them positively impacting our TCs, such as the postponement of high-stakes credential assessments, we realized that being able to focus on our students' well-being would

fundamentally change the kinds of pedagogy we were modeling. In other words, by focusing less on tests, we were able to elevate aspects of the TPEs (2016) that had not been prioritized, such as "fostering a caring community" (2.1), "opportunities for students to support each other" (4.4), or exhibiting "positive dispositions of caring, support, acceptance, and fairness" (6.2). For example, Nancy noted that pulling back on the RICA "allowed more space to learn more about my students and how they see themselves as teachers moving forward in their careers." As she dedicated more time to building connections with students, she made some adjustments to her curriculum to incorporate discussions of teacher identity, recognizing that teacher candidates needed to better understand not only the students they teach, but themselves as well. Nancy observed:

> Many of my students realized how their current situation will continue to shape how they see themselves as educators and consider the support that they will need to be successful in the classroom. They are just beginning to understand how the identity of school can conflict with their personal identities.

Nancy realized that these discussions with her TCs would not have occurred without the shift in curriculum and her reprioritizing the role of identity in the shaping of a teacher. Nancy continued to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to deconstruct, reflect and consider how their own experiences inside and outside of school can be utilized to enrich their instruction and inform their navigation of school culture.

Marga's work in the neurosciences and the implications for how current research in learning and the brain can shape teaching was also highlighted by the shift to remote learning as the world went into lockdown. Marga recognized that it was essential to share the research on the negative impact that both short and long-term stressors have on learning, especially in regards to her TCs who were challenged by any combination of the following: 1) managing their own children's schooling at home; 2) struggling economically; 3) dealing with their own illnesses, and/or their family members' illness or deaths; 4) a sense of helplessness and isolation. Furthermore, Marga realized the importance of sharing

the work by Cozolino (2013) in regards to the social nature of learning, and Shankar's (2017) work on "limbic contagion." These concepts are important. As TCs recognize the importance of their own emotional state and the impact their level of wellness has on their students, they can become—through self-care— fulcrums for more emotionally balanced students in the classroom, thus supporting increased learning outcomes. Therefore, time was spent every week to address SEL. This included different self-balancing techniques such as mindful moments (e.g. Five Finger breathing, or GoNoodle Empower Tools 2016), uplifting activities and check-ins such as a shared Google doc in which TCs post links to sites they enjoy when they are taking a break, and playful activities like Kahoot! games to review content.

Overall, the complex societal shifts we experienced as a nation reshaped our teaching and reconfigured our teacher identities. We prioritized social-emotional well-being, care, and reflection as essential components of teaching and learning and allowed ourselves some grace when we became overwhelmed with expanded responsibilities and expectations. Our conclusion was that, in modeling pedagogies that focused less on test-taking and more on caretaking, we were challenging dominant narratives about what it means to be a teacher.

Disrupting the Dominant Course Narrative

Over the course of the Spring 2020 semester, the three of us revised our course syllabi to respond to the changed environment. While we knew that our courses needed to remain standards-based, we felt able to prioritize responsiveness and personal care for our TCs. The continued postponement of state examinations for credentialing through Fall 2020 opened up further space for transforming our curriculum in ways that spoke to the current moment, in which the country grappled with the massive trauma of the COVID-19 crisis, a depressed economy, increased violence, reckonings with systemic racism, and shuttered schools. The dominant narratives of the past, which aimed to professionalize teachers via technical frameworks that deprioritized elements like care, healing, or activism, needed to be set aside as we reimagined our curriculum and pedagogy for the present and future.

For Christian, "meeting the moment" meant overhauling the themes and topics in his Foundations of Teaching course. As a gay Latino educator, he wanted students to develop vocabulary about systemic racism, antiracism, trauma-informed pedagogy, mindfulness, and care and to cultivate the "ability to self-reflect on how these ideas relate to their own personal experiences and the professional practices/identities they will manifest in the classroom/school setting." To achieve these goals, Christian added new articles and resources into the course, starting the first week with Tatum's "The Complexity of Identity" (2000). Paired with an article on teacher identity, the focus of that initial session was for students to acknowledge that their personal and professional identities are dynamic and informed by one another. To maintain the throughline of teacher identity, Christian then incorporated articles about diverse teachers in American history to examine how they grappled with social and political tensions of their respective eras, e.g., Eurocentric curriculum in Native American schools (Gere, 2005), the roles of women teachers (Preston, 1993), and the injustice and inequities in African-American schools during Reconstruction (Fultz, 1995). To follow up on the ways that these teachers negotiated their personal and professional identities, TCs then read an article defining equity, in the "Glossary of Education Reform" (2016), as a precursor to writing more extensively about the ways they have experienced privilege or inequity in their own lives. Later in the course, Christian added new readings about antiracism that offered discipline-specific ideas for educators, overviews of abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019), and a resource on trauma-informed pedagogy. These texts speak explicitly to the ways teachers can teach from an antiracist stance and actively work against systemic racism to cultivate their students' capacities, in an effort to redress historical and contemporary traumas. Pedagogically, Christian also included short breathing and stretching exercises at the beginning and middle of live synchronous sessions and explained how these strategies aimed to reduce stress and promote wellbeing. He located this work within the framework of *border pedagogy* (Ramirez et al., 2016), a culturally-sustaining approach that emphasizes holistic teaching and learning grounded

in *cariño*, or authentic care.

As Marga reflected on how she transformed her syllabus, she was moved by the question, "How can schools be places where students want to be?" (Milner et al., 2019, Introduction). She kept coming back to that question as a central theme in her discussions with students. In the first few weeks of the semester, students were introduced to and explored Moll et al.'s (1992) article on funds of knowledge (FOK), to examine how their lived experiences shape and are shaping their evolving teacher identities. TCs then read an article about "funds of identity" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) which furthered conversations about their own background and life experiences, allowing them to reframe how they might perceive their students' FOK. To that end, TCs completed an activity created by a colleague called, "Adding Up Assets: Considering Cultural & Linguistic Funds of Knowledge" (Personal Communication, 2020), which validates experiences such as translating for a family member or having had one or more extended family members play a significant role in raising them. This task allowed TCs to practice turning skills traditionally considered as "deficits" into assets, which they then reflected on in journals where they connected personal and professional identities to their own lived experiences. To extend this dialogue, and provide strategies TCs can apply in their classes, TCs chose to complete either a "Self Portrait" activity or a "Significant Circle" activity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Both of these activities support TCs' exploration of how their identities are enacted, and how their experiences connect to their learning and discipline; these activities can easily be implemented in TC's future classrooms to similarly build asset-based mindsets grounded in funds of identity.

Reflecting on these assignments and students' responses, Marga found increased support for her holistic view of teaching and learning, which coincides with the research in the neurosciences for whole-person engagement. Marga's teaching history has been founded largely on building relationships with students and demonstrating caring for them as individuals (Noddings, 2013), and this self-study process supported Marga's personal view as an educator, allowing her to bring this level of teacher

care to the forefront. Another significant change to Marga's course was the addition of *"These Kids are Out of Control:" Why We Must Reimagine "Classroom Management" for Equity* (Milner et al., 2019), which replaced a more general classroom management book. Through the new text that specifically applied the lens of equity to classroom management, Marga wanted to give students a framework for creating classroom environments that are engaging and collaborative. Her students also participated in literature circle discussions (Daniels, 2002) with transformative texts about learning through a neuroscience framework (e.g., Whitman & Kelleher, 2016), or through culturally responsive lenses (e.g., Muhammad, 2020). These revisions in the course established a framework for conversations around equity in public schools. Candidates used these texts as leaping off points for a Social Justice in Education assignment. This assignment replaced a more general paper on disciplinary literacies, designed to give TCs the opportunity to merge their identities and target their research on an underserved group highlighted in the texts. In this three-part assignment, TCs found a video to watch related to their chosen topic, then explored research articles and online sources to write a paper that highlighted an issue and included recommendations for classroom practices to support success for all students. This work is exactly the reason Marga became a teacher—to empower students (or TCs in this case) to pursue topics of interest and partake in personal and engaging assignments that serve the needs of both the individuals and the community as a whole.

In her course, Nancy also made significant adaptations to better meet the present moment. She noted that the pressures of covering so much content to meet standards and prepare TCs for required credentialing assessments had limited her capacity to build connections with students. When the assessments were postponed, she realized she could finally give relationships more energy and focus. One way Nancy now cultivates stronger connections is through socioemotional check-ins at the beginning of every class. She observed that, "students share their daily struggles balancing demands of the course, their jobs, and overseeing their children's education plan for that day. The stress

and anxiety is palpable." In further reflections on her students' emotional wellbeing, she suggested that, although it can sometimes be overwhelming to hear about the struggles and traumas of our students—leading to our own secondary trauma—it was essential to model for students what it means to be supportive and caring. Like Marga, Nancy also integrated a funds of knowledge article (Moll et al., 1992) to generate discussion about how teachers can draw on students' assets and knowledge to cultivate stronger relationships, demonstrate a caring disposition, and reflect on their own identities. She used a textual lineage exercise borrowed from Tatum (2009), to have her students reflect on the ways text and identity are interwoven. In that vein, Nancy added critical literacy discussions, feeling that, "my students struggle with shifting information about COVID and the current political climate. This is giving us many opportunities to discuss strategies for validating credible news sources and how we will work with students to do the same." It was apparent to Nancy that she needed to increase her skills in evaluating online sources in order to deepen her TC's understanding of digital literacies so that they, in turn, could model becoming skilled consumers of information for future students.

To conclude, our course transformations were specifically designed to challenge former or normative ways of teaching our classes. This included removing texts to make space for newer, more complex approaches to teaching and learning, especially those attuned to equity and inclusion at a time of great societal discord. Our curricular innovations also emphasized the importance of identity and the ways that reflection on our identities can lead to greater understanding and stronger community bonds in and outside the classroom. Pedagogically, we elevated care and empathy to the forefront of our practices, making space for our TCs to reflect on and care for their emotional well-being through our recognition that the various, overlapping traumas we were all experiencing to various degrees needed to be addressed. These choices also activated our personal sense of professional agency; our capacities to be creative and responsive shifted our own identities as teacher educators and empowered us to make choices that reflected our commitments to healing, care, and activism.

Discussion

When we first began this study in early 2020, many of our course transformation conversations emphasized the need to dismantle systemic barriers to the success of our TCs, and provide guidance for supporting the typically underserved students they will teach in K-12 schools. With the onset of the pandemic, our shared work intensified as we grappled with stay-at-home orders, racial and social unrest, and the need to support students who did not have equitable access to resources needed to engage in online, remote learning. We recognized that our course transformation work was inextricably linked to the paradigmatic shifts in our everyday lives, as well as in our conceptualizations of K–12 and higher education practices.

As we reflected on our data, we found three key themes that surfaced in all of our journals and conversations. The first, tensions from outside forces, has been present for all of us as educators for many years. We have all felt constrained by the requirements to teach to standards imposed on us by remote commissions and policy makers, coupled with the need to "teach to the test" to prepare our TCs for the multiple assessments required for credentialing. Each of us identified practices or components we felt were missing or undervalued, and in many ways these pieces reflected our own personal trajectories as educators. While Christian felt that the program courses failed to adequately address the theme of care, Nancy felt that funds of knowledge needed to be meaningfully incorporated into her classes, and Marga wanted to deepen the focus on how what we learned through the neurosciences impacts literacy development and social emotional learning. As a group, we concurred that dominant frameworks such as the California TPEs, while helpful as a starting point for describing best teaching practices, were missing the kinds of holistic or culturally-relevant pedagogies we knew our TCs needed to experience so that they could better address the sociocultural contexts of their own teaching in the future.

The second theme, identity, came from our own need to examine who we are as teacher educators, and reflect on how our identities have shifted throughout our careers, especially in the present context. The move to remote teaching forced us to

consider how we built relationships with students in ways that were empathetic and humanizing, in recognition of the multiple traumas we were all feeling and bringing with us to the virtual classroom space. This led to shifts in practice, such as making more time for social-emotional check-ins, both in class and through individual conferences to learn more about students' lives. In changing the ways we did teacher education, we inevitably looked inward and reconfigured our identities as teacher educators, elevating dimensions like care to the forefront of our remote interactions with students. Our analysis surfaced the ways that our beliefs or emotions shaped our practices, which in turn, reflected aspects of our personal and professional identities.

Finally, we recognized a need to disrupt dominant narratives that define K–12 teaching, as well as teacher education. Through our shared work, we realized that in spite of the privileges we each have as tenured faculty members, we nevertheless felt challenged to confront normative thinking in our field. Working as a team allowed us to engage in creative and critical thinking that cultivated a shared sense of agency. We empowered one another to make changes best suited for the new sociocultural contexts of our teaching. Each of us felt that our work was missing a holistic approach, but how we addressed that gap varied considerably. Christian looked to culturally-sustaining frameworks like border pedagogy, which aligned with his personal identity as a Latino educator, while Nancy and Marga focused on concepts like funds of knowledge and funds of identity that reflected their commitments to asset-based teaching. As we reflected on our experiences, we recognized that a trauma-informed approach was necessary, not only to address the traumas our students were sharing with us in and outside of class, but also to take better care of ourselves as teacher educators.

These major themes provide further evidence that teacher educators' practices are intertwined with their teacher identities, and both are shaped by the sociocultural contexts of teaching and learning. While we had already identified major concerns with the dominant frameworks that underpinned our teacher education courses, the crises we experienced in 2020 generated deep traumas that compelled us to lean in to our desire to adopt more

holistic and humanizing pedagogies that we knew to be at the heart of good teaching. Moreover, working together revealed to us the benefits of collaborating in a self-study, namely "the availability of a variety of perspectives on an area of concern or interest related to teacher education, the opportunity for collegial dialogue around teacher education practices, and the space… for community building" (Chang, et al., 2016, p. 156).

Implications and Future Research

In our combined 87 years in the field of education, we have never met anyone who became a teacher because they wanted to help students learn standards or pass tests. In our experience, teachers are drawn to the field because–like us–they are passionate about wanting to support the students in their classrooms and give them the tools they need to be successful in their lives. In order to do that, we need to equip our TCs with the skills, know-how and dispositions to connect effectively with their students so that engaged teaching and learning can happen. We concur with Quezada et al (2020) that "as teacher candidates expand their sense of identity, they become empowering influencers for K-12 learners and advocates for social justice and cultural relevancy" (p. 5).

As we move forward, through and beyond the current COVID-19 crisis, we need to consider the implications for teachers and teacher educators post-COVID. As individual faculty, we recognize the need for continued focus on FOK and building relationships with our teacher candidates. Taking these discussions back to our teacher education unit, we plan to reconfigure how our courses apply standards in order to meet accreditation requirements with an eye for maximizing and centering students' individual identities. We want to model how to build relationships and honor our TCs so they are equipped to do the same in their classrooms. One approach is to target key standards for each course that would take our content deeper instead of broader, designing assignments and activities that are scaffolded throughout the program. Personally, we need to continue to honor our own needs as teacher educators. Taking the pressure off by reducing the sheer number of standards (and assignments) covered per course is a good beginning. Continuing to have conversations,

such as during department meetings, about self-care and mutual support, is another step we will take. As individuals, we all bring different strengths and expertise to the program, and we can better maximize on each other's FOK to build our revised courses, rather than working independently as "course leads."

As far as assessments go, we will continue pushing at the state level to create new policies that allow programs to get waivers for gatekeeper credential assessments. Our college is already working with our Arts and Sciences colleagues to design alternatives to high stakes teaching to prove subject area competency. Giving TCs alternate pathways to earn their credentials is paramount for us, and our university is working to provide these opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

We realize that we need to continue exploring our own identities as teacher educators and document the ways we are shifting the sociocultural contexts of our classrooms and our work in schools. As we continue this journey, we acknowledge the importance of utilizing a trauma-informed pedagogy lens, as it prioritizes care for ourselves as teacher educators and for our teacher candidates. Our future research will include more self-examination with lenses of gender and racial identity as well. As we address conversations about who we are and who are our TCs and their students, we humanize the field and bring the focus of teaching and teaching education back to where it belongs—the people.

References

Baker-Doyle, K. J. (2019). "We want transformation, not reformation": Re-centering teacher education on equity and racial justice–Special issue introduction. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 41*(4-5), 211-217.

Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 39*(2), 175-189.

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*(2), 107-128.

Breault, R. A. (2013). "She was great, but…": Examining preservice recollections of favorite and most effective teachers. *The Professional Educator, 37*(1), 11-24.

Civic Enterprises, Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Hariharan, A. (2013). *The missing piece: A national teacher survey on how social and emotional learning can empower children and transform schools.* Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). https://casel.org/the-missing-piece-a-national-teacher-survey-on-how-social-and-emotional-learning-can-empower-children-and-transform-schools/

Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teachers and Teaching, 21*(6), 700-719.

Clift, R. T. (2011). Shifting roles, shifting contexts, maintaining identity. *Studying Teacher Education, 7*(2), 159-170.

Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2009). *California standards for the teaching profession.* https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/standards/cstp-2009.pdf

Chang, A., Rak Neugebauer, S., Ellis, A., Ensminger, D., Marie Ryan, A., & Kennedy, A. (2016). Teacher educator identity in a culture of iterative teacher education program design: A collaborative self-study. *Studying Teacher Education, 12*(2), 152-169.

Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2016). *California teaching performance expectations.* https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/standards/adopted-tpes-2016.pdf

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Compton, M., & Weiner, L. (2008). *The global assault on teaching, teachers, and their unions.* In M. Compton & L. Weiner (Eds.), The global assault on teaching, teachers, and their unions: Stories for resistance (pp. 3-9). Palgrave Macmillan.

Cozolino, L. (2013). *The social neuroscience of education.* Norton.

Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups.* Stenhouse.

Elliott, K. W., Elliott, J. K., & Spears, S. G. (2018). Teaching on empty. *Principal, 98*(2), 28-29.

Erickson, L.B., Young, J.R., & Pinnegar, S. (2011). Teacher educator identity: Emerging understandings of person, positioning, roles, and collaborations. *Studying Teacher Education, 7*(2), 105-107.

Esteban-Guitart, M., & Moll, L. C., (2014). Funds of identity: A new concept based on the funds of knowledge approach. *Culture & Psychology, 20*(1), 31-48.

Figley, C.R. (Ed.). (1995). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized.* Routledge.

Great Schools Partnership. (2016, April 21) Equity. *Glossary of Education Reform.* https://www.edglossary.org/equity/

Goldstein, D. (2017). The education of Barack Obama. *The Nation, 304*(1), 64-68.

GoNoodle. (n.d.). *Empower tools.* https://family.gonoodle.com/channels/empower-tools

Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching & the brain.* Corwin.

Hsieh, B. (2016). Professional identity formation as a framework in working with preservice secondary teacher candidates. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 43*(2), 93-112.

Howard, T. C. (2019). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap.* Teachers College Press.

Izadinia, M. (2014). Teacher educators' identity: A review of literature. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(4), 426-441.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(8), 899-916.

Lawson, H.A., Caringi, J.C., Gottfried, R., Bride, B.E., & Hydon, S.P. (2019). Educators' secondary traumatic stress, children's trauma, and the need for trauma literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 89*(3), 421-447.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Martin, A. D. (2018). Professional identities and pedagogical practices: A self-study on the "becomings" of a teacher educator and teachers. In Garbett, D., & Ovens, A. P. (Eds.). *Pushing boundaries and crossing borders: Self-study as a means for researching pedagogy* (pp. 263-269). S-STEP. https://www.dropbox.com/s/qbea5ao6efj2l8g/Enacting%20self%20study.pdf?dl=0

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research.* Jossey-Bass.

Milner, H. R. (2012). Rethinking the achievement gap talk in urban education. *Urban Education, 48*(1), 3-8.

Milner, H. R., Cunningham, H.B., Delale-O'Connor, L., & Kestenberg, E.G. (2019). *"These kids are out of control:" Why we must reimagine "classroom management" for equity.* Corwin.

Minahan, J. (2019). Trauma-informed teaching strategies. *Educational Leadership, 77*(2), 30-35.

Mirsky, L. (2007). SaferSanerSchools: Transforming school cultures with restorative practices. *Reclaiming children and youth, 16*(2), 5.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice, 31*(2), 132-141.

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius.* Scholastic.

Navarro, O., Quince, C. L., Hsieh, B., & Deckman, S. L. (2019). Transforming teacher education by integrating the funds

of knowledge of teachers of Color. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 41*(4-5), 282-316.

Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education.* University of California Press.

Quan, T., Bracho, C. A., Wilkerson, M., & Clark, M. (2019). Empowerment and transformation: Integrating teacher identity, activism, and criticality across three teacher education programs. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 41*(4-5), 218-251.

Quezada, R.L., Buczynski, S., Medina, R.A., Stolz, S., Fabionar, J. O., & Jez, R. (2020). Editors' introduction: Teacher identity. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 47*(3), 3-6.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Sage.

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Roeser, R. W. (Eds.). (2016). *Handbook of mindfulness in education: Integrating theory and research into practice.* Springer.

Shanker, S. (2017). *Self-Reg: How to help your child (and you) break the stress cycle and successfully engage with life.* Penguin.

Shepard, L. A., Penuel, W. R., & Pellegrino, J. W. (2018). Using learning and motivation theories to coherently link formative assessment, grading practices, and large-scale assessment. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 37*(1), 21-34.

Sleeter, C. E. (2011). An agenda to strengthen culturally responsive pedagogy. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 10*(2), 7-23.

Smit, B., Fritz, E., & Mabalane, V. (2010). A conversation of teachers: In search of professional identity. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 37*(2), 93-106.

Tatum, B. D. (2013). The complexity of identity: Who am I? In M. Adams, W.J. Blumenfeld, C. Castañeda, H. H. Hackman, M.L. Peters, & X. Zuñiga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, antisemitism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism*, (3rd ed., pp. 6-9). Routledge.

Tatum, A. W. (2009). *Reading for their life.* Heinemann.

Valdez, C., Pour-Khorshid, F., & Cariaga, C. (2020). Crisis, change, and canceling the teacher performance assessment. *Rethinking Schools, 34*(4).

Webre, A. C. (2020). *Curricularizing language teaching and learning: Navigating sociocultural dilemmas in teacher education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Michigan.

Wertsch, J. V., Tulviste, P., & Hagstrom, F. (1993). A sociocultural approach to agency. In E.A. Forman, N. Minick, & C. Addison Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development* (pp. 336-356). Oxford University Press.

Wetzel, M. M., Vlach, S. K., Svrcek, N. S., Steinitz, E., Omogun, L., Salmerón, C., Bautista-Morales, N., Taylor, L.A. & Villarreal, D. (2019). Preparing teachers with sociocultural knowledge in literacy: A literature review. *Journal of Literacy Research, 51*(2), 138-157.

Whitman, G., & Kelleher, I. (2016). *Neuroteach: Brain science and the future of education*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Zembylas, M. (2003). Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective. *Teachers and Teaching, 9*(3), 213-238.

Zembylas, M. (2010). Teachers' emotional experiences of growing diversity and multiculturalism in schools and the prospects of an ethic of discomfort. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 16*(6), 703-716.