

Connecting Personal Theorizing and Action Research in Preservice Teacher Development

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Introduction

Many educators have suggested that teachers hold the authority, and thus the responsibility, for initiating the curricular and instructional changes made within their own classrooms (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Ross, 1994; Stenhouse, 1983). One implication of this suggestion is that teachers be reflective about their practice. Yet, reflection is a difficult process that requires critical thought, self-direction, and problem solving coupled with personal knowledge and self-awareness (Elliott, 1991). As classroom teachers, we believed that thorough reflection and teacher inquiry were important and related assumptions of quality teaching. However, we also realized as teachers that our daily obligations impacted how we implemented these processes as they, at times, became isolated and fragmented tasks. How then could we as teacher educators help our candidates develop their

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skills at action research and systematic reflection as an integrated activity within their preservice teacher education program? This article describes a study that utilized personal theorizing as a mechanism to guide the action research of individuals within an elementary preservice teacher cohort during their four-semester, teacher education program.

Action Research

Action research has been defined as the attempt by teachers to study and improve their practice as a result of classroom experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Numerous studies have indicated that practicing teachers conducting action research as part of their graduate education programs can improve teaching and enhance student learning (Burnaford & Hobson, 1995; Johnson & Button, 2000; Sax & Fisher, 2001). Others have indicated that graduate preservice teacher candidates benefit from completing action research as part of their preservice education (Crookes & Chandler, 2001; McEwan, Field, & Kawamoto, 1997; Valli, 2000), while others, more recently, have asserted that action research can even benefit undergraduate teacher candidates (Price, 2001; Rock & Levin, 2002).

Clearly, the benefits of action research are becoming well recognized and have prompted the call for action research to be included as part of preservice teacher development (Fueyo & Koorland, 1997). The responses to this call include a variety of strategies aimed at helping preservice candidates complete action research. Auger and Wideman (2000) describe how 42 elementary and secondary teacher candidates individually identified an action research question and developed improvement projects that were pursued during their student teaching experiences. Moore, Bartlett, and Garrison (1999) guided a collaborative action research process that was co-developed with six preservice elementary candidates in an attempt to better understanding their use of inquiry curriculum. Rock and Levin's (2002) study utilized a pool of five preservice candidates implementing a collaborative action research project designed to understand the perceptions of their students regarding their school.

Personal Theorizing

Personal theorizing, the systematic reflection process undertaken by teachers in an attempt to recognize and utilize personal understanding as part of instructional improvement, has gained value as a viable component of preservice teacher education (Kleinsasser, 1992; Ross, 1992). A number of studies suggest that teachers use a personal guiding theory to influence instructional actions and classroom decision making (Chant, 2002; Clandinin, 1986; Cornett, 1990a; Pape, 1992). Cornett stressed that personal theory exists as a result of teachers' personal and professional experiences and that such theory, once recognized and understood, could be utilized as a basis for the improvement of practice. Given Cornett's

assumption, then, the inclusion of personal theorizing may be a logical precursor to the completion of action research.

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Historically, the relationship between personal theorizing and action research can be linked to Dewey's (1938) suggestion that experiences influence teacher beliefs and, once these beliefs are reflected upon critically, provide the basis for professional growth (pp. 38-39). Schwab (1969) further emphasized the connection between beliefs and action when he recommended that teachers rely on reflection as a means to examine how personal understanding impacts curricular actions. Others have also expressed the opinion that teacher beliefs have an influential, if not the central, role in the implementation of curriculum innovation and change (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Fullan, 1982).

There is evidence suggesting that teachers bring into the classroom specific beliefs that have developed due to their own environmental influences and these beliefs have the potential to influence the classroom community (Danielewicz, 1998; Fickel, 2000). Research related to these influences, labeled teachers' practical knowledge, has recently emerged and incorporates teachers' beliefs as the center of inquiry (Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992). Teachers' practical-knowledge studies often examine how teaching beliefs develop into practical theories of teaching and how these theories influence teachers' decision making. Sanders and McCutcheon (1986) defined such theories as the conceptual structures and images that provide teachers with the reasons for acting as they do and for choosing the teaching activities and curriculum materials that are most effective for student learning. Cornett (1990a) later modified the term practical theories to personal practical theories (PPTs) because the theories represent contributions grounded in both the teacher's personal experience (outside the classroom) and practical experience (inside the classroom).

Cornett (1990a) completed a personal theorizing study that focused on gaining the participant's involvement in the identification and analysis of how her PPTs had developed, how they became manifested in practice, and how they influenced her teaching. The findings of the study suggest not only a strong relationship between the teacher's PPTs and practice, but they also provide insight as to how the teacher's beliefs developed and how they guided her instructional decision making. Cornett (1990b) completed a second study examining the personal theorizing of a first-year science teacher. The results parallel the previously cited study by Cornett in that the teacher utilized and benefited from an operational set of PPTs. Early in the study the participant had stated that knowing and understanding one's teaching beliefs was not important to instructional success. However, as the study unfolded, she became aware of the belief pattern that guided her teaching and said that understanding her PPTs enabled her to: "Control my teaching beyond my previous ability. I find myself analyzing all aspects of my teaching rather than just going through the motions" (p. 160).

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The aforementioned studies by Cornett and subsequent examinations (see Cornett, Elliot, Chant, & Stern, 1994; Stern, 1995) reinforce the notion that teachers rely on personal theory to guide their classroom actions. These studies focused on systematic reflection processes and the identification of personal theory and provided important information on supporting change through subsequent action research processes. These studies also help support the assumption that knowing one's personal theory would not only benefit but be essential to the completion of quality action research since action research essentially involves teachers within a highly focused, self-study of practice. Yet, studies connecting personal theorizing and action research have rarely focused on preservice teacher candidates, targeting instead practicing teachers already serving the profession. Because many of our teacher education efforts have been with preservice candidates, we have often considered the feasibility of having these candidates generate a baseline understanding of their practice through personal theorizing in an effort to initiate change as part of an action research process. If this is feasible, then what kind of impact would such processes have on their teacher thinking and actions as the candidates completed their student teaching and readied themselves to enter the profession? These questions guided our investigation as we developed a program of teacher inquiry and action research for our undergraduate preservice teacher candidates.

Context of the Study

This study utilized a cohort of 14 elementary education majors from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The candidates were enrolled in the internship/student teaching component of their four-semester, professional education program, during which they completed their field experience (semesters one through three) and student teaching (semester four) in a Professional Development School (PDS). The cohort completed content-specific methods courses as a group and met weekly for seminar under the direction of their university-based supervisors. All candidates within the cohort volunteered to participate within the study, and assignments related to the personal theorizing and action research processes were included as part of their program requirements.

The Process

This case investigation can be classified within Stake's (1995) description of intrinsic cases. Rather than testing abstract theory, the intent of this investigation was to improve understanding related to the value of personal theorizing and action research within a particular group (also see Merriam, 1988, p. 57). Due to the design, the research is not generalizable in rationalistic terms. Therefore, readers of this article are encouraged to recognize the similarity between one situation and the next in order to make appropriate inferences (see Eisner, 1998, p. 198).

To better understand the depth of the process, we have chosen to illustrate the

experiences of a single candidate, Stephanie Parrish, through the products and interpretations she developed over her four semesters in the teacher education program. However, all of the participants' artifacts (described in the following semester descriptions) were included as data sources. In addition, semi-structured interviews, assisted by an interview guide, were conducted with the participants at the end of each semester. Responses from the interviews were transcribed and included within the data set. Using Goetz and LeCompte's (1984) recommendations for initially organizing data, themes were identified that illustrated the impact of the personal theorizing process on the thinking and subsequent actions of the participants. These initial themes were further developed into categories by using what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as convergent thinking (finding multiple indicators within the data to support a category) and divergent thinking (removing any categories not supported by sufficient indicators) and are identified and described in the interpretations section. Trustworthiness was established by the inclusion of multiple data sources (including researcher field-observation notes, researcher and participant reflection records, participant artifacts, and participant interviews), the delineation of a chain of evidence, and member checking of researcher interpretations of the data. What follows are descriptions of the research process and related sources of data collection.

***Semester One — Getting Your Feet Wet:
An Introduction to Teaching and Reflection***

For many of the cohort's candidates, this semester's internship placement was the first opportunity to be in a school site on a regular and consistent basis. We wanted to provide the opportunity for candidates to observe their PDS teacher and classroom students in an effort to begin to identify what they valued as quality instructional practices. Through weekly reflection logs and class discussions during seminar, the candidates began the initial process of determining their individual definitions of valuable teaching practices. From these observations and discussions, candidates began to articulate their thoughts as they related to the following three categories: (a) what they deemed as effective instruction and why it was effective, (b) the differences in how students learn and the causes of these differences, and (c) the influence of the school culture and community on teaching and learning. At this point, we introduced the candidates to personal theorizing as a reflective practice process and provided an overview of their involvement of the project for the three remaining semesters.

***Semester Two — Defining Your Beliefs:
Development and Initial Analysis of PPTs***

Our goal for the second semester was to have candidates, based on personal experiences (e.g., their own K-12 and family occurrences) and professional experiences (e.g., university education courses and internship placements), de-

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velop their PPTs. We initiated this process by requiring each candidate to develop a written narrative of his or her teaching practice. Candidates then analyzed their narrative in an effort to list, define, and justify their PPTs. Stephanie's written narrative helped her identify the following PPTs:

1. A classroom is a community where all students have a role in its maintenance.
2. All students are capable of learning when given an environment conducive to doing so.
3. Students should feel a sense of ownership in their learning.
4. Students' optimal learning occurs when their tasks are meaningful and relevant.

Stephanie's written description of each PPT included her definition of the theory as well as an explanation as to why the theory guided her practice. For example, when defining her PPT related to the classroom community, Stephanie wrote: "Students will learn more effectively when they feel accepted and safe, despite their individual differences. Students learn at a higher level when the atmosphere encourages them to take risks and share their ideas without the fear of ridicule and censure." She continued by justifying this PPT, when stating: "I was a part of a community in my fifth grade science class . . . [the teacher] offered continual support and friendship to each of her students. The classroom was an open forum, where students created the rules and consequences for breaking them."

Once the candidates identified, defined, and justified their PPTs, we asked them to communicate the relationship among the PPTs through a graphic illustration. The candidates' illustrations ranged from a detailed concept map to a drawing of a mountain to a simple hierarchical list. Stephanie chose to complete a drawing of the sun to represent the relationship among her PPTs and explained her reasoning by saying:

The sun is a source of energy for all humans on earth. Similarly, I think a child's education is a central ingredient to his/her survival within a community. The greatest source of heat and energy is found within the center of the sun. Therefore, my strongest PPT, the belief that a classroom is a community, belongs in the center of the sun. This PPT is vital to my teaching philosophy. The rays of the sun feed off the sun's heat and energy source. These rays are produced by the sun. Similarly, when a classroom is a community, the other PPTs will thrive and survive. My other PPTs, all students are capable of learning, students should feel a sense of ownership in their learning, and students' activities should be meaningful and relevant, are thus the rays of the sun. It is my belief that, when a classroom is a community, other components of classroom learning will gradually develop and fall into place within that environment.

Once developed and illustrated, the PPTs became a focal point on which to base our weekly seminar discussions. Candidates discussed the similarities and differences in their beliefs and were able to articulate experiences grounded in their PPTs. These

discussions helped candidates challenge their own assumptions regarding their PPTs and solidify their values about teaching and learning.

At this point, we felt candidates were ready to begin to systematically analyze their PPTs to determine the amount of congruence between what they articulated as important (their PPTs) and their practice. Candidates analyzed lesson/unit plans and observation summaries conducted by their school-site and university-based supervisors in order to determine the level of congruence between their PPTs and practice. Each candidate developed a chart to guide and systematize this process. Stephanie's chart (see Appendix A) consisted of a matrix with her PPTs in the far left column, and the headings "Native American Unit Plan" and "Observation Feedback" in the center and right columns. Stephanie reviewed her unit plan with respect to each PPT and discussed their roles within her unit. For example, in her evaluation of PPT #2 she noted: "This PPT is evident throughout my Unit Plan... I attempted to provide a variety of activities (the right environment) to assure that the concepts of culture and citizenship were accurately and adequately presented." However, Stephanie identified a discrepancy between PPT #2 and practice when analyzing the observational feedback. Stephanie commented:

My on-site supervisor's observations seem to be incongruent with PPT #2. One weakness she (on-site supervisor) noted was that students needed more time within the lab to complete the task. I will ensure that this PPT is met by relieving my classroom of strict time constraints for meeting objectives.

At the conclusion of the analysis, candidates were asked to identify and describe any changes to their originally stated PPTs or to the instructional efforts they made during the semester. Stephanie chose to keep all four of her PPTs, indicating that they remained "essential to creating my ideal classroom environment." Stephanie did add that although she enjoyed developing activities that she believed to be congruent with her PPTs, she felt that she was limited in doing so because she was teaching in what she said was "another person's classroom." Stephanie commented: "Due to the constraints of the lesson structure and time guidelines established by my school-site supervisor, I was unable to fully implement my PPTs. However, if given my own classroom, this incongruence would not exist."

Semester Three — Self-Assessment into Action Research

The third semester began with continued in-depth analysis of the congruence between theory and practice. At the beginning of the semester, candidates created a rubric based on their PPTs as a tool for self-evaluation. Stephanie's rubric (see Appendix B) contained a "no evidence" column describing how her teaching would appear if her actions did not represent her PPTs, and it contained an "accomplished" column describing teaching actions that strongly represented her PPTs. For example, when describing how she would determine if students had a sense of ownership in their learning (PPT #3), Stephanie said that she would look for

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instances where students had little or no input regarding their learning activities (no evidence) and, conversely, look for instances where students had a voice in their daily activities (accomplished). Using the data generated from the rubrics, candidates completed a written evaluation identifying any contradictions between their PPTs and practice. Included within the evaluation were suggestions regarding how these contradictions could be decreased or eliminated through changed instructional practices.

At mid-semester, candidates met with their university supervisors to discuss their evaluations and specify one area of their practice that was open for improvement. From this conversation, candidates formulated a research question that would initiate the action research component of the project. Each research question began with “How do I . . . ?” and was an outgrowth of the candidates’ respective reflection processes and directly related to their PPTs. Stephanie developed the following research question: How do I use different methods of assessment to measure student learning? Stephanie felt strongly that students have a role in developing a classroom community (PPT #1) and that all students are capable of learning (PPT #2). Yet, her PPT analysis indicated that her assessment methods were dominated by traditional recall and retention strategies. Not comfortable with this approach and realizing that such dominance was not representative of her PPTs, Stephanie decided to focus on assessment strategies for her action research project. The remaining candidates, like Stephanie, were challenged to recognize that their beliefs about teaching (theory) did not always translate into practice. During this phase of the project, candidates were initiating change not randomly but, instead, systematically as an outgrowth of the reflection process.

The next step during this semester was for the candidates to complete an annotated bibliography related to their research question. Stephanie’s annotated bibliography identified 13 sources, including articles from traditional research journals, online and printed practitioner journals, and textbooks. One source, Hayden’s *One Child* (1980), made a particularly strong impact on Stephanie as she became interested in both journal writing and Kobold’s box (cited in *One Child*, p. 55) as methods of alternative assessment. According to Stephanie, she had “seen [journal writing] used in regular classroom settings as a means to encourage imaginative thinking and improve handwriting;” but the literature review affirmed the legitimacy of the strategy as a way to better understand student learning. Regarding Kobold’s box, Stephanie contemplated the idea of using a teacher mailbox that would allow students to, in Stephanie’s words, “comment on classroom strengths, include compliments for students, and make suggestions for improvements in other classroom areas (assessing our community).” Stephanie suggested that these strategies were supportive of her PPTs and helped guide her response to her research question.

The final component of semester three was the development of the action plan. The action plan, which was based on the findings of the annotated bibliography,

would be implemented during the candidates' student teaching (semester four). Essentially, each candidate based the plan on the following prompts: what? (a description of the plan); how? (procedures to implement the plan); when? (time period for implementation); and why? (justification supported by theory/practice for its implementation). After conducting her research, Stephanie chose a specific form of alternative assessment, portfolio assessment, as the focal point of her action plan. She decided that her action plan would incorporate the following portfolio components: student work (specifically journal responses), developmental checklists (focused on behaviors), her own anecdotal notes of student performance, Kobold's pieces (assessment and feedback via the teacher's mailbox), photographs of student action and growth, and feedback from parents. Stephanie's action plan indicated that at least 50 percent of her assessment strategies during student teaching would be comprised of portfolio assessment. Stephanie stressed that she would use portfolio assessment "in lieu of worksheet-based assessments because I feel that authentic assessments are more meaningful ways in which to evaluate growth and learning on a continuum."

***Semester Four — Student Teaching:
Implementation of Action Plan and Ongoing Reflection***

The implementation of the action plan occurred during the fourth and final semester (student teaching). The candidates were involved in weekly meetings with their university-based supervisors to discuss how the plan's implementation was progressing and, later in the semester, its impact on teaching and learning. These conversations illustrated both the successes and frustrations that the candidates encountered. Although each action plan was individually developed and thus unique, these weekly exchanges often helped make connections among the candidates' concerns as the discussions became an avenue to support a community of learners initiating instructional change. In many ways, cohort members did not view themselves as student teachers but more as professionals undergoing a professional project.

At the conclusion of student teaching, candidates provided a written statement on the implementation of their action plan. They analyzed the process of implementation, evaluated the successes and shortcomings of the plan, offered suggestions regarding how the plan could have been improved, and provided recommendations for implementing the action plan as first-year teachers. Stephanie had three major reactions regarding the action plan and its implementation. First, Stephanie evaluated her actions by stating: "This plan really impacted how I assess the learning of my students. I feel that the journal entries were the most positive result of the portfolio assessment." Yet, Stephanie also expressed frustration by saying that elements of her plan, especially the use of anecdotal notes, required much time and effort. Finally, Stephanie expressed optimism about using portfolios as a first-year teacher; and she suggested that her action plan, with revisions, would serve as a strong model.

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After implementing their action plans, candidates were asked to reflect on the overall project and how it influenced their teaching and classroom actions. The majority of the candidates indicated that they would be utilizing what they had learned during the project in their first year of teaching. Stephanie's words echoed the feelings of many of the participants: "Overall I am very pleased with the project. I have enjoyed being a participant in the reflective process. . . . I have developed, as a result, a clearer sense of my growth as an educator and my role as a teacher."

Interpretations

Three distinct categories emerged as a result of the personal theorizing and action research process completed by the candidates: defining self, defining reflection, and defining professionalism. By identifying and defining their PPTs, candidates were able to describe their values and beliefs about teaching. We refer to this category as defining self. Secondly, candidates were able to construct a personal definition of reflection. Originally, many of the candidates had viewed reflection as a reaction instead of a process. Lastly, reflection coupled with the action research component became ingrained in the majority of the candidates as not only a requirement of their preservice program but also a requirement of their profession.

Defining Self

Fundamental to the self-definition process was the articulation of PPTs and how these theories developed as a result of personal and professional experiences. Embedded within this process was the identification and labeling of values that guided each candidate's practice. These values helped the candidates define themselves as teachers and provided a framework from which to view and assess their practice. As one candidate commented: "Writing my PPTs has made me realize exactly what I value in teaching. Research on how to create a community in the classroom has certainly given me many ideas on how to use this in my teaching."

An analysis of the candidates' PPTs reveals multiple uses of words such as *collaborate, responsibility, obligation, empowered, caring, inclusive, and initiative* in an effort to define and justify their actions as teachers. These value descriptors repeatedly were used by candidates in written artifacts as well as class discussions as a way for them to not only reinforce what they originally believed, but to also challenge assumptions that had developed regarding teaching and learning. These challenges often became explicit when candidates, as a result of analyzing how their beliefs were manifested in practice, realized what they stated about teaching did not parallel how they taught. As a candidate in the cohort stated: "My PPTs helped me identify my weaknesses and discover methods for improving them. They have definitely helped in my understanding of what I value in my teaching."

Influencing the self-definition process was the individualized nature of the project. Although experiences were shared among the cohort, each candidate

completed a personal process generated from and implicating their own practice. Subsequently, each candidate became an expert in a particular pedagogical area and was able to relate this expertise to others from a position of authority. Candidates exuded a high level of confidence when describing how they coupled personal knowledge and self-awareness with a self-directed, problem-solving activity.

Defining Reflection

The phrase *reflective teacher* has a variety of definitions and meanings often focused on self-analysis and problem solving (Ross, Bondy, & Kyle, 1993). Yet, early within the candidates' process, we realized that they had a different interpretation of reflection. Our candidates considered reflection as something imposed upon them instead of a self-directed, learning activity. When asked about this, candidates explained that reflection is way to describe a written reaction to an artifact or experience. As one student commented: "Reflection is generally a description of what occurred during classroom observations. It's what we do in all of our education classes." In the first seminar during the project, candidates listed qualities that they felt were needed to be a successful teacher and reflection was not mentioned during this exercise. When we explained to the candidates that personal theorizing and action research are reflection tools, they were hesitant to participate in the project. They initially believed that a two-year reflection process would mandate an overwhelming number of written reactions that would, as one candidate described, "be a mammoth requirement that you just get through."

Resistance to the project did not fade quickly even after candidates realized that this process was unlike their original interpretations regarding teacher reflection. Candidates were very hesitant to analyze, describe, and share what they considered their PPTs, as seen when one candidate said: "What I believe about teaching is a personal matter and is not an easy topic to share with others." However, once candidates began to identify a relationship between beliefs and practice, their feelings regarding the project became positive. The turning point for most candidates was the development and use of the self-assessment rubric early in semester three. This process enabled the candidates to identify their own instructional weaknesses, and these findings initiated the research question for the action research component. As one candidate commented: "I am excited about learning more about assessment. This is my weakness since I have a limited knowledge of other forms of assessment. I need to know so much and now I have a means to do so. I can't wait to get started." Another student commented: "I struggle with balancing professionalism and friendship. Researching information about this balance will help me with the struggles I am facing in my classroom." From that point in the semester, candidates demonstrated a high level of comfort discussing PPTs as well as knowledge gained from developing the action plans. By late in the third semester, candidates interchanged the term reflection with personal theorizing and action research, and these terms became a part of their teaching vocabulary.

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Identifying Professionalism

During their student teaching experience, candidates were asked to create an integrated teaching experience for their students. The unit assignment was separate from the personal theorizing and action research projects. Nevertheless, the candidates' unit plans highly represented their respective PPTs. When asked about this level of congruence, the candidates had indicated that their PPTs depicted who they are as teachers and should guide their planning, instruction, and assessment of student learning. One candidate commented: "I realize that I will not be happy nor will I be an effective teacher if I do not take my theories into consideration and practice them in the classroom." By the fourth semester, candidates perceived that they had a professional obligation to understand why they acted as they did within the classroom, if these actions were appropriate and benefited learners, and what changes were needed to improve their instructional actions. As another candidate said:

This assignment made me think more about my personal beliefs about teaching and it disturbed me to see that my observations were not reflected in the things that I feel are important to incorporate into the classroom. I need to take more time to focus on my PPTs and to see how to implement them into my daily classroom instruction. I am glad that I have a guide to go by. It is something I can use to determine whether or not I am practicing what I believe.

To aid in their job searches at the conclusion of their student teaching, candidates developed teaching portfolios summarizing their teaching attributes. The candidates included within the portfolios, along with example unit plans and technology-related evidence pieces, their PPT definitions and justifications. When interviewing with principals, candidates described their teaching philosophy through their PPTs and explained how their PPTs represented their classroom actions. Shortly after an interview one candidate stated:

The principal read my PPTs and my action plan. He was very impressed that I clearly stated my beliefs. He also commented on my research. He said that most applicants and especially first year teachers were not capable of doing such complex research and self-assessment. I think my PPTs were the one thing that distinguished me from other applicants and certainly was a factor in me getting the job.

Another candidate added:

The principal who interviewed me read my entire PPTs. Can you believe that? She kept asking me questions about my PPTs. It was a great way to tell her about what I believe. I used my PPTs as a way to describe for her the lessons that I had used to implement my action plan.

The principals were interviewing preservice candidates who were already acting as agents for change. The personal theorizing and action research processes helped the candidates become teacher leaders. Such leadership was evident in how their school-based supervisors reacted to their action plans. Comments such as, "I am

impressed with my intern's ability to state her beliefs and put these beliefs into practice" and "I really think the PPTs helped better prepare the interns for student teaching" were frequently expressed during the candidates' student teaching experiences.

Conclusion

As we have indicated, over the four-semester project candidates developed a value for and commitment to the personal theorizing and action research processes. Candidates expressed that PPTs were integral to their teaching success and that the knowledge derived from the processes would carry into their first year of teaching as they continued being reflective practitioners interested in improving practice.

Our own reflections about this project concur with what the candidates have expressed. In addition, we believe that a number of factors may have influenced the outcome of this study. As members of a PDS cohort, candidates were able to make connections and develop collaborative relationships with their peers. Although this closeness may have caused some initial reluctance to share PPTs and identified shortcomings, it did provide the candidates with a level of security in that it was a common process for all candidates. As indicated, by the fourth semester the candidates valued the project and, in a collective manner, were eager to undertake and share their action plans. Furthermore, the cohort remained together under our direction for the full two years of the project. This allowed us to provide guidance regarding the project within their university seminars and connect it with their field and student teaching experiences at their PDS sites. We are unsure if the project would have been as successful if completed outside of a PDS context and if the leadership structure differed from what our candidates experienced.

The developmental readiness of the candidates may have additional implications for the success of the project. Not only was the project difficult for the candidates to complete, it was also at times difficult for them to understand. Initially, there was much resistance as the candidates struggled with our expectations of the project. By undergoing similar processes ourselves as teachers, we knew the potential benefits of personal theorizing and action research. Yet, articulating the benefits to preservice candidates with only limited classroom experience almost proved detrimental. Fortunately, through the trust that was established between the candidates and us during the first year, they persevered and by the third semester saw the benefits of the project. We continuously stressed to the candidates that they were completing an experimental process as preservice candidates and that our task was to support and guide them as needed. We believe this support was a key component of their success.

Clearly, tension did exist within the candidates and this tension will be considered when implementing similar processes with future preservice candidates. However, given adequate time and support, our candidates were successful at generating a baseline understanding of their practice through personal theorizing

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and were able to develop and initiate action research related to their teaching. Their efforts will hopefully guide us as we continue to better understand how teacher reflection and teacher inquiry impact preservice teacher development.

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Appendix A

Summary of Congruence between PPTs and Planning and Observations

PPTs	Native American Unit Plan	Observation Feedback
<p>A classroom is a community where all students have a role in its maintenance.</p>	<p>Although I dearly value this PPT, it is not consistently evident throughout my Unit Plan. I feel as though cooperative learning plays a vital role in creating a democratic classroom community. I planned this unit based on the needs of my OSIE. She is not an avid proponent of cooperative learning activities. Therefore, my task became that of scaffolding the activities to best correlate my teaching with her beliefs. In my own classroom, I intend to incorporate activities that facilitate the development of a community in the classroom. I want student to work together to pose problems, solve problems, and become more effective decision-makers.</p>	<p>My OSIE observed that all students were excited about the entire experience. The students did not work in groups, but she supported my choice of closure to the read aloud, commenting that "this activity ended with the students engaging in conversation about the story and checking their predictions." Although the use of collaboration, which I believe to be essential to creating a community for my classroom, was absent, my OSIE appeared to be well pleased with the type and amount of discussion that took place within my unit.</p>
<p>All students are capable of learning when given an environment conducive to doing so.</p>	<p>I believe this PPT is evident throughout my Unit Plan because I believe that all students within the classroom can successfully complete the activities involved during my teaching. Within my unit, I attempted to provide a variety of activities to assure that the concepts of culture and citizenship were accurately and adequately presented.</p>	<p>My OSIE's observations seem to be incongruent with this PPT. For example, one weakness she noted was that students needed more time within the lab to complete the final task, the culture creations. However, this critique was OSIE-induced because I was only allowed a certain time slot with which to fulfill the components of the lesson. Within my personal classroom, I will ensure that this PPT is met by relieving my classroom of strict time constraints for meeting objectives. I will give each student the time and experience they need to master each objective successfully, thus, ensuring that all students are capable of learning.</p>

<p>Students should feel a sense of ownership in their learning.</p>	<p>This PPT is present within the unit plan. The incorporation of the KWL (what you know, what you want to learn, and what you learned) chart allowed the students to pose their own inquiries about the subsequent activities in the unit. Students were empowered in their learning of the Comanche people to pose questions and possible answers to these questions as they were introduced to this culture. The "Create a Culture" activity allowed the students to use their prior knowledge in addition to their new knowledge of the concept of culture to actively engage students in learning. In addition, the use of the assessment website allowed the students to reflect on the read aloud from day one. The students were able to use their own opinions to discuss their beliefs about the book and how they read texts. By completing the "L" (what I learned) component of the KWL chart, the students were able to have a concrete example of the learning that took place throughout the unit's activities.</p>	<p>Individually, the students were required to create their own culture. My OSIE seemed very impressed with this activity. As she and I both observed, the students were obviously disappointed with the short time span in which they had to work. However, I must scaffold my activities to incorporate the desires of my OSIE; therefore, the computer lab time was shortened in order to accommodate her needs. The students felt empowered during this activity to formulate their own ideas and develop their own "identity" for their culture. Students became problem solvers as they attempted to convert their ideas, based on the Internet directions, into paragraphs to create their own culture. My OSIE also observed that the students "appeared to be excited about the entire experience." Thus, I feel that my students acquired a sense of empowerment with the activities involved within the unit.</p>
<p>Students' optimal learning occurs when their tasks are meaningful and relevant.</p>	<p>All of my lessons within my unit plans support my belief in this PPT. The students are always presented with authentic examples of activities and models for subsequent expectations. Through the study of other cultures, students learn to accept and appreciate the differences in others. They come to recognize as well as value their own culture and their role as a citizen with that culture. The unit's incorporation of the Nature Hike and Rain Dance allowed the students to apply their learning beyond the classroom walls. The final component of the unit, the creation of the students' own culture, allowed the students to participate in an activity that was integrative, challenging, meaningful, active, and value-based. Students were actively engaged throughout the many activities of the unit.</p>	<p>The activities within the Unit were developed to create meaningful connections with the students' lives. This became increasingly evident during the writing process as children were forced to examine their own cultures before beginning to construct the identities of a new one. In addition, the KWL chart encouraged the students to make relevant connections with their learning. My OSIE noted that the students were actively engaged in conversation about the read aloud. In addition, my OSIE observed the students anxiously sharing their knowledge of the Native American cultures. My choices to incorporate the KWL chart allowed the students to access prior knowledge, making the subsequent activities both meaningful and relevant to their connections with culture.</p>

Appendix B

Rubric for Assessment of Congruence of PPTs and Practice

My PPTs in Practice			
PPT	No Evidence	Accomplished	Comments
A classroom is a community where all students have a role in its maintenance.	Students do not seem to communicate well with one another. The students do not interact frequently.	Students communicate frequently and in a positive manner in cooperative learning groups. They are active listeners and respect their classmates.	
All students are capable of learning when given an environment conducive to doing so.	The classroom environment seems cold and obtusive. The students do not feel comfortable asking questions.	The classroom environment seems friendly and open. The students are allowed to ask questions and give opinions frequently and without fear of disapproval from the teacher or their classmates.	
Students should feel a sense of ownership in their learning.	Students are not allowed to request certain activities.	Students are allowed to have a voice in the daily agenda of the classroom. The students learn what they are interested in learning.	
Students' optimal learning occurs when their tasks are meaningful and relevant.	The tasks students are given seem trivial. The activities seem to be based only on a basal, disconnected from their daily lives.	Students are actively engaged in the tasks given to them. The tasks connect to background knowledge and apply to their everyday lives. Students are benefited by the instruction.	