"Where's the Line?"—Negotiating Simulated Experiences to Define Teacher Identity

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Teacher professional identity is a concept defined and researched in a multitude of ways (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). This manuscript approaches teacher identity formation from the foundations of situated cognition, social learning, and identity in community practice. Focusing on a unique teacher development intervention designed to simulate parent-teacher interactions, we examine emerging data on teacher professional boundaries and identity formation. Findings suggest that complex simulations and technology-enhanced video reflections provide novice teachers with opportunities to bridge traditional gaps between educational theory and classroom practice.

The struggle to define a professional 'self' characterizes the novice years of classroom teaching. New teachers need space and opportunity to develop personal and professional identity (Alsup, 2006). Not only are they learning to transition their pre-service philosophies into daily practice, but they are also engaged in the complex "integration of personal self, and the 'taking on' of a culturally scripted, often narrowly defined professional role while maintaining individuality" (Alsup, 2006, p. 4; Zembylas, 2003). Recognizing that professional identity is an individual process, schools of education use field experiences in multiple scholastic contexts to aide in the development of each professional. Despite efforts to provide novice teachers with

rich, formative experiences, there remains a crucial void. Teacher preparation programs fall short of preparing teachers for communicating with parents and caregivers (Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Maclure & Walker, 2000; McMurray-Schwarz & Baum, 2000; McBride, 1991; Tichenor, 1988). Establishing communication and forging partnerships between schools and families are topics typically addressed within the larger context of traditional methods courses (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Fredricks & Rasinski, 1990; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Nathan & Radcliff, 1994; Shartrand et al., 1997), and schools of education cannot guarantee their students will actually communicate with parents and caregivers during their field experiences. Consequently, novice teachers enter the classroom inadequately prepared to foster these relationships.

This manuscript examines the intersection of novice teacher professional identity and parent-teacher communication. We investigated preservice teachers' experiences in a clinical teacher education model specifically designed to address the gap in parent-teacher communication. Through this model, novice teachers participated in simulated conferences designed to place them in contexts where they practice and learn effective communication skills. The conferences placed the participants in the role of *teacher*; therefore, they were pressured to articulate professional beliefs, negotiate compromise, and feel the tension of professional boundaries. Their resulting reflections suggest that the intervention was valuable not only in preparing them for complex interactions with parents and caregivers, but also in helping them better define their professional identities. We begin by examining professional identity development through the lenses of social cognition and communities of practice. From those theoretical perspectives, we transition to the Parent/Caregiver Conferencing Model (PCM) and the resulting data on novice teacher identity development through simulated parent-teacher interactions.

SOCIALLY SITUATED COGNITION

Teaching is an inherently social profession that is dependent upon formative interactions between teachers and students (Nias, 1996). Preservice teachers begin their training outside a school community, learning content knowledge and methodology in university classrooms. They depend on field experiences to practice participating in the social interactions where teachers must execute pedagogical skills. Being at the front of a classroom imposes immediacy; therefore, novices quickly begin the process of formulating their teacher identity or professional self through discourse with students, social interactions with colleagues, and the presentation of self as *teacher* (Zembylas, 2003). Novices must code-switch almost immediately from the language of *student* to the language of *teacher*, and this transition produces feelings of self-doubt and instability. The formulation of

the professional self is messy work, as novice teachers make multiple decisions, wrestle with the resulting consequences, and search for ways to effectively articulate their new roles (Alsup, 2006). This identity work occurs at the intersection of their professional training, their own experiences as students, the teachers whom they hope to model, and their tacit images of *classroom teacher* (Bohl & Van Zoest, 2001; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Sugrue, 1997). The dissonance between these concepts places new teachers in a position where they must organize and make meaning of their past, present, and future experiences in order to construct an individual and coherent professional identity (Wenger, 1998).

According to Wenger (1998), "The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other" (p. 145). Thus, professional identity development cannot be discussed without considering the social interplay between the individual and the larger environment or community. The theories of *situated cognition* (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; von Glasersfeld, 1989; Wenger, 1998) and *negotiated meaning* (Mead, 1934) lend deeper insight to the process of developing identity within social contexts. *Situated cognition* suggests that identity continually develops and increases in complexity as a person engages with new experiences, situations, and activities (Brown et al., 1989). Thus, the development of a professional teaching identity hinges on a novice's individual exploration and meaning making of a new teaching practice. Mead's (1934) focus on the negotiation of self and one's environment further supports situated cognition. He connects social interactions between individuals and their environments, suggesting that identity development is strongly dependent on the type of environment in which one lives. In other words, the development of a professional self is dependent on the situations each novice teacher is placed within, but it is further dependent on the degree and manner in which the novice teacher engages with that environment.

Wenger (1998) ties together situated cognition and social interactions through his focus on identity development in *communities of practice*, where "members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants" (p. 149). For the purpose of this discussion, we focus on two of Wenger's (1998) characterizations of identity: *negotiated experience* and *community membership* (p. 149). The concept of *negotiated experience* asserts that identity is not solely dependent upon the labels we adopt for ourselves. Identity in practice immerses one within a professional community and asserts that professional identity is a collection of "what we think or say about ourselves,….what others think or say about us,…and a lived experience of participation in specific communities" (p. 151). Therefore, the individual is positioned as an active participant, and identity development is defined as a strenuous, continuous process. Reiman and Johnson (2003) posit that engagement and experience can be just as arid as lectures and readings unless accompanied by deliberate reflections on those experiences. Wenger's *negotiated experience* strikes at the same point, suggesting that identity development involves

both the lived experience and the deliberate negotiation, or reflection, of the meaning of that experience (1998). Thus, professional identity becomes more complex and integrated over time as the cycles of action and reflection build upon each other.

Wenger's (1998) second characterization of identity development—*community membership*—states that professional experiences take place within larger communities of practice, where established individuals operate competently in familiar contexts and are cognizant of how to communicate with fellow community members. New members to a professional community, such as novice teachers entering the teaching profession, are not fluent in the community's language or procedures. Thus, novices in communities of practice must develop techniques for engaging with others and confronting unfamiliar territories (Piaget, 1959; Wenger, 1998). Professional identity development, consequently, takes place as novice teachers work to become expert members of the teaching community—gradually learning the boundaries, expectations, and guidelines of a social profession.

Since the emergence of professional identity as a distinct research area in teacher education scholarship, it has proven to be a concept that researchers define and explore in a multitude of ways (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Beijaard et al.'s review of teacher professional identity studies yields three common tenets that align with the theories of situated cognition, social learning, and identity in community practice: identity development is (a) an ongoing process, (b) the relationship between the professional and context, and (c) active agency within a community. While we see relative convergence between Wenger's theoretical perspectives and recent studies of teacher identity development, there remains a need to continue exploring the relationship between *person* and *context* (Beijaard et al., 2004). In addition, previous scholarship assumes rather than explores "the relationship between professional identity and [the development of] personal practical knowledge" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p 123). We recognize the inherent lack of preparation future teachers receive with regard to school-family communications and parent/caregiver interactions. Numerous scholars have very clearly delineated the general lack of teacher preparation for school-family communication and involvement. In doing so, they also highlighted the short, episodic readings and lectures on the broader topic of parental involvement that are sparsely implemented across teacher education programs (Epstein, 2001; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; McMurray-Schwarz & Baum, 2000). We further recognize the call of Beijaard et al (2004) for more scrutiny of the relationship between professional persons (i.e., teachers), the practical contexts (i.e., school-family communications) they will encounter, and the resulting impact on professional identity development. In an effort to address the calls for more attention to teacher identity and school-family communications, we designed and implemented an extensive preservice teacher development intervention. This intervention places preservice teachers in multiple simulated contexts where they develop practical knowledge and articulate the relationships between their experiences and their evolving professional identities.

THE PARENT/CAREGIVER CONFERENCING MODEL

The Parent/Caregiver Conferencing Model (PCM) is a one-semester intervention that centers on helping pre- and in-service teachers develop their communication and parent conferencing skill sets. It is crafted from the medical profession's use of *standardized patients*, a signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) commonly employed to provide future physicians opportunities to practice their diagnostic and communication skills with individuals who portray patients (Barrows, 2000). In similar fashion, the PCM enlists carefully trained local actors to portray *simulated parents* during simulated parent-teacher conferences. The PCM is guided by a cognitive developmental framework that (a) recognizes that knowledge is constructed by individuals through experience; (b) emphasizes gradual skill development, as persons' organizing principles, interpretations, and reasoning become more complex and integrated over time; and (c) acknowledges that growth is not automatic, but instead occurs as a result of positive interactions within a supportive, yet progressively, challenging environment (Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1959; Reiman, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

The individuals who portray simulated parents do so in accordance with a carefully designed case profile. Multiple individuals portray the same simulated parent (SP) role; therefore, each case profile outlines exactly who they will be during the simulated conference, with specific attention given to the SPs' verbal and non-verbal mannerisms. While the SPs are provided with a very specific parent profile on which to base their actions during the simulation, the participating teachers are given a more general academic profile that describes a particular student. Although some PCM participants are in-service teachers who work with real students, the academic profile provides a general description of a hypothetical student—name, physical description, academic history, behavioral history, and a detailed rationale for why this student is the focus of the simulated parent-teacher conference. Utilizing the information in this academic profile, the participating teachers are encouraged to place themselves inside the case and operate from their specific contexts (subject area, grade level, etc.). Importantly, this academic profile is very different from the one written for the SPs in that it does not specify exactly who the teacher is or what decisions he/she makes regarding pedagogy or content. Therefore, participating teachers are given freedom to place themselves within the simulation and operate from their individual, professional perspectives.

The simulated parent-teacher conferences take place at Central Medical University's (CMU) Clinical Skills Center. Normally used for standardized patient simulations, this facility offers conference rooms with computers, cameras, and audio/video recording capabilities. Participating teachers use the computers to record their pre-conference expectations, goals, thoughts, and concerns. The audio/video equipment records each simulated parent-teacher conference, immediately resulting in a QuickTime video file of the simulation that is only available to the

participant. Additional conference rooms allow for post-conference debriefings with the reporting researchers. Various data strands generated from a single simulation include pre-conference responses, videos of the simulation, typed feedback from the teacher's SP, and videos of the post-conference debriefing.

Participating teachers are asked to review their data in preparation for a large group debriefing one week later. A semistructured reflection protocol guides teachers toward identifying strengths in communication and conferencing skills, areas in which they hope to improve, and sociocultural components (i.e., religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) presented by the SPs during the simulations. As teachers reflect on the past simulated parent-teacher conference, they also begin preparing for the next simulation. Each simulation is designed to build upon the teachers' increasing competency in parent-teacher communication, as the subsequent simulated conferences change in both context and content. Each new round of simulations offers teachers progressively more challenging scenarios, transitioning from initial "getting acquainted" conferences to later conferences that center on emotional distress, behavior management, academic progress, and designing an Individual Education Plan (IEP). For the purposes of this manuscript, we examine data resulting from the second PCM case, where a father shares concern for his daughter's emotional health. The case of Donald and Laura Bolden serves as a context in which participants explore professional boundaries in the midst of a parent's concerns, thus creating an opportunity to investigate the formation of novice teacher identity.

The Case of Donald and Laura Bolden

The simulated parent-teacher conference between Donald Bolden and each teacher participant hinges on Donald's concern for his daughter, Laura. Laura is an outstanding 10th grade student who is often stigmatized by others for her significant obesity. The conference is parent-initiated, and the actor portraying Donald expresses concern that Laura has not been her 'usual self' for several weeks. He recounts some of their history and lifestyle, emphasizing her recent changes— a sullen attitude, significantly reduced appetite, lack of normal interactions with friends, and crying at night. Donald shares his concern that peers may have teased Laura about her weight, and asks the teacher if and how the school can best support Laura. In short, Donald is a worried parent searching for solutions to help his distraught daughter.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The introduction of case-based simulations between teachers and trained actors denotes professional inquiry through a phenomenological lens. That is, we were interested in the teachers' interactions with other people (simulated parents) during particular situations (parent-teacher conferences), with specific attention given to the teachers' social constructions of identity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Moving beyond the broader phenomenological approach, we approach this inquiry from the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Mead, 1934). This perspective proposes that human beings construct meaning based on their individual interpretations of particular situations or contexts. Most importantly, the construction of the "self" grounds symbolic interaction theory, suggesting that "…the self is the definition people create (through interacting with others) of who they are" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 26). In this particular line of inquiry, we are specifically scrutinizing the formation of the "professional self" as teachers construct meaning through their interpretations of and interactions within a simulated parent-teacher conference.

Participants

Thirteen preservice teachers voluntarily participated in a simulated parent-teacher conference with Donald Bolden as part of the larger semester-length PCM intervention. We intentionally use the term *intervention* to describe the 15-week PCM for two reasons. First, the PCM experience is entirely optional. Participating preservice teachers were in no way obligated to take part in the PCM, but did elect to take the PCM in a one credit hour course format. Second, the term intervention is repeatedly used to emphasize the deliberate intent of the PCM. The PCM does *intervene* within the participants' traditional program(s) of study; their respective school of education is like many in that it seldom provides extensive teacher training beyond a content specialty focus. Participants taking part in the PCM had absolutely no prior training in school-family communications or interactions with parents/caregivers. Thus, the contexts presented in the PCM, and particularly the simulations that do not focus on content, are novel to the participating preservice teachers. The participants' pseudonyms, gender, levels of education, and professional concentrations are identified in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Teacher Candidate Pseudonyms and Professional Demographics.

Teacher candidate	Gender/level of education	Professional concentration
Susan	Female/junior	Mathematics education
Will	Male/junior	Social studies education
Lisa	Female/junior	Social studies education
Leslie	Female/junior	Mathematics education
Mandy	Female/senior	Mathematics education
Anna	Female/junior	English/LA education
Mitchell	Male/junior	English/LA education
Alice	Female/senior	Social studies education
Peter	Male/junior	Social studies education
Denise	Female/senior	Social studies education
Christy	Female/master's student	Mathematics education
Janice	Female/senior	Mathematics education
Casey	Female/sophomore	Elementary education (K-6)

Data Collection

Five forms of data were collected in association with the simulated parent-teacher conferences. Prior to each conference between a teacher and one of the two actors portraying Donald Bolden, the teachers completed three pre-conference questions about expectations, goals, and thoughts/concerns. Their typed responses were automatically submitted to CMU's Clinical Skill Center server for storage. Upon completion of the pre-conference questions, each teacher engaged in a parent-teacher conference with Donald Bolden. Following the simulated conference, each teacher participated in a ten-question structured individual debriefing with one of the two reporting researchers. This debriefing asked each participant to reflect on his/her thoughts/feelings, pre-conference goals and expectations, strengths/weaknesses, and any sociocultural contexts that emerged during the conference. Immediately following the individual debriefing, the participants were randomly paired together and took part in a semistructured dyad debriefing. The dyad debriefings prompted participants to reflect on the case itself and the process associated with the simulated parent-teacher conference. Importantly, it provided a forum for participants to listen to and reflect with each other on the case. Both the individual and dyad debriefings were video-recorded and stored on the Clinical Skills Center server, and were also made available to the respective participants. One week after the simulated conferences with Donald Bolden, participants gathered in a traditional classroom setting at the Clinical Skills Center for a comprehensive, large group debriefing of their experiences with this particular case. In conjunction

with this debriefing, each participant submitted a two-page written reflection on his/her individual conference that delineated strengths, areas for improvement, and future professional goals.

Data Analysis

Collected data consisted of eighty-eight pages of transcribed whole-class debriefings, written reflections, pre-conference questions, and nine hours of QuickTime video conveying the individual and dyad debriefings. Initial codes for the analysis were derived from the literature on situated cognition and "communities of practice" (Brown et al., 1989; Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; von Glasersfeld, 1989; Wenger, 1998). From these two initial codes—*negotiated experience* and *community membership*—additional subcodes emerged in consideration of types of participant responses. Thus, *perspective* and *ways of thinking* subcodes were added under each of the three primary codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). For example, *ways of thinking* subcodes fell under the negotiated experience primary code. These codes were applied to participants' comments on professional boundaries and their understanding of themselves and others within the simulation. *Perspective* subcodes fell under the *community membership* primary code, outlining the teachers' general points of view on other support professionals within the larger school setting.

With these established codes, 10% of the document data set and one hour of the video set were coded by the primary researcher. During this initial analysis, additional codes were added. For example, during the coding process, the researcher noted the presence of *event* codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), as the participants reflected on their attempts to either engage or disengage with the parent using specific verbal cues. Additionally, other *ways of thinking* codes were added to encompass the teachers' reflections on their professional knowledge base and how that knowledge was or was not accessed during the simulation. The entire set of codes was used to recode the document and video data sets, yielding the predominant themes that are discussed in the following section. It is important to note that several themes that emerged during analysis are not discussed below. Although these themes parallel the idea of novice teacher identity development, their focus on teacher preparation practices, teacher belief systems, and expectations of full-time teaching are beyond the scope of this manuscript.

FINDINGS

Exploration within professional experiences and the subsequent reflection processes shape the development of a teacher's professional identity. The simulated parent-teacher conference with Donald Bolden allowed each teacher to explore his/her professional interactions with a concerned parent on a topic that is possible in any

teacher's classroom, regardless of grade level or subject area. From these social interactions emerged three distinct strands of data that align with Wenger's (1998) themes of *negotiated experience* and *community membership* in the formation of professional identity. Teachers articulated doubt about their thought processes, verbalizations, and noted a reliance on other school professionals' expertise. Ultimately, they questioned the nature and position of professional boundaries.

Critique of Self and Professional Knowledge

Teachers critiqued their own efforts during the simulated conferences with Donald Bolden. In her individual debriefing, Susan noted that "…when he was leaving, I wanted him to be a little happier and he wasn't. So, I feel like maybe I could have done a better job to ease his stress." Later in the large group debriefing, she reflected that Donald left the conference room with "lots of negative energy which I wish I could have resolved better in this conference…he still left troubled." Molly's self-critique began in a more pointed fashion; "I completely dodged the mention of teen suicide and should have really sought further about this." One week later, she indicated the impact of time and reflection on her feelings about this conference. "I feel like I'm getting more and more critical with myself with each second after this conference… I just wasn't impressed with the way I presented myself I guess." Finally, Peter critiqued his insensitivity to Laura and the potential impact of a teacher's body language during parent-teacher conferences. "I need to understand sensitive issues such as weight, which I totally blew that! I made up for it in the end, but still, I had a smirk on my face. That was not good; that was not cool…I'm pretty sure he picked up on that because he kind of looked at me; I could tell by the look in his eye." Donald Bolden's obvious worry put the participants in a position where they needed to balance empathy and professionalism. The participants' reflections indicate doubt in their abilities to communicate effectively when parent conferences become personal or emotional.

A significant portion of the teachers' critiques of their conferences focused on identifying the gaps in their professional knowledge. General comments in the whole-class debriefing like, "I felt really unprepared for this" (Leslie) and "I didn't know what to do with that" (Mitchell) set the stage for conversations about school-based resources. Molly emphasized Donald's concern for Laura's emotional health: "…that kind of threw me off because I'm not exactly familiar with the precautions and steps you're supposed to take…I really wasn't sure what to say." Later, she noted for the entire group of teachers: "I don't feel I'm ready to have such a serious conversation about some serious issues; I guess it just really made me realize how unprepared I am." Will emphasized the need for more preparation with this type of situation: "…this was a totally nonacademic issue, so I need more experience dealing with nonacademic issues and knowing the right places to point parents." Mitchell

reported, "(Donald) kept asking 'what can I do?' and I said 'I don't know.' I felt really bad when he was leaving and thought 'I've got to find out.'" In a separate debriefing, Peter's comments mirrored those of Mitchell: "He was asking me for answers with what was going on with Laura personally. Like what he should do with the situation as a whole, like how can Laura get help. He was asking me all these questions and I was like 'Ok buddy, I don't have all the answers.'" Christy, the one teacher participant who holds teacher certification, noted, "I'd never had to meet with parents one-on-one during my other teaching experiences and that's all I kept thinking. Like 'Oh my gosh. I don't know what to say.'" Leslie's written reflection best captures the unexpected nature of Donald's concerns and the immediacy of those concerns within the simulation. She noted, "When Donald asked me what suggestions I had for his daughter, I froze. I was at a loss for words." Leslie's reflection highlights a feeling shared by many of the participants; the emotional conference and pressure for action stimulated feelings of immediacy and stress, thus (possibly) hindering communication.

By Default: The "Other Professionals"

As the teachers offered self-critiques and reflections on professional preparation, another dominant theme emerged. In at least one of the five mediums through which data were collected, all thirteen teachers noted their intentions to connect both Donald and Laura with "other professionals" who could better assist them. We, therefore, explore the teachers' references to the broader school community and ideas about student support systems.

In short, each teacher reflected on referring Donald and Laura to the school's guidance, counseling, or psychiatric services. Importantly, the teachers' reflections offer striking insights into their varied rationales for such referrals. Will emphasized the productivity of his conversation with Donald, noting that "…by telling Mr. Bolden all of the resources that the school offers Laura and the fact that I would help him contact these services made me feel like the conference was successful." Lisa noted the importance of Donald and Laura working with the school's guidance department, but later stressed a broader community-based approach. "I tried to kind of open it up more to resources in the community, not only counseling services here at the school, but elsewhere, like trying to find a doctor who was more supportive of her weight issues." Boldly speaking to the limitations of student support services, Leslie reflected, "I wanted to refer Donald to the guidance counselor and therapists in the school, but there was a point during the conference where I told him that sometimes there was nothing they can do."

In similar fashion, several teachers reflected on the overly general nature of their comments on supportive services within schools. Denise noted, "I told him there were different people he could talk to in the school…other than that, I really

didn't know how to approach it." Mandy indicated her relative lack of knowledge, stating, "I'm assuming that in a real situation, I would go and talk to the school psychologist or whoever handles the health things." More emphatically, Mitchell stated, "I need to know what to do if a parent comes in with concerns for his daughter…who to call besides the guidance counselor. Who else is available? I didn't know…If a parent were to come in, what options are there other than 'I don't know'? I think it would be better for me to know that anyway…." Peter emulated the teachers' general misunderstanding of who is available to help support students, saying "I was trying to say 'I'll get her to talk to the school psychologist' and I was thinking in my head, 'Wait, is it the psychiatrist or psychologist?'…"

As the reflections unfolded, it became clear that teachers consistently wrestled with referring Laura to 'other professionals,' suggesting a struggle with professional boundaries. Susan noted, "I'm going to be there for her, but at the same time I have to keep in mind you know, if it's getting really personal, maybe I'll advise her to the guidance office." Will drew a distinct line, noting that because Laura's concerns spanned beyond the walls of his classroom, the decision to refer her to others was clear. "There were a lot of issues outside of the classroom…this one is not in my classroom. It's not like I can check her homework and she's going to get better. This is a problem that really needs a third party." Christy relied on her professional training as she considered how to best advise Donald and Laura, noting "I tried to address it by saying she should probably talk to the school psychologist because I'm not trained in this and it should really escalate along that chain of command…." In her written reflection, Lisa emphasized a change in her future approach, noting "I was supportive and willing to help, but I crossed a professional line in making myself the main asset for advice, instead of referring him straight to the counselor…"

Where's the Line?

Lisa's reference to crossing a professional line highlights the concept of territory and boundaries within schools as professionals work to serve students. As they reflected on this particular case, the teachers often used the interrogative stem, "Where's the line between…?" The case of Donald and Laura Bolden produced more written and verbal references, reflections, and questions regarding the designation of professional boundaries than did any other PCM simulation. Specifically, teachers examined professional boundaries between teachers and parents and those between teachers and students.

"Just Between You and I"—Engaging in Difficult Dialogue

Denise, Mitchell, and Mandy reflected on the degrees to which they were able and/ or willing to engage in difficult conversation with Donald about his daughter's recent

behavior. Mandy plainly noted, "He could have really pushed the suicide thing and thrown me completely off. Luckily, I dodged that and he shut up…." Like Mandy, Mitchell recognized the gravity of the situation and took a similar approach, noting "You could tell that something seriously bad was going on…so I kind of kept it on a more distant level." In the same dyad reflection, Alice noted her reluctance to engage, turning to Mitchell and blatantly stating, "I didn't want to bring it up…I really didn't want to bring it up because that could lead to really uncomfortable (pause) conversation." Denise reflected on her distant approach to a conversation outside of her content specialty. "I was pretty unsure in terms of what is appropriate for a teacher to get involved in…I didn't want to overstep any bounds, so I don't know if I contributed as much as I could…." In contrast, Susan elaborated on how she would approach Donald in the future: "I tried to say things that would make him feel better, but if I was still nervous about how he was feeling, I would contact him if I was still not satisfied. I would reach out to him in some way." Her words not only reflect her willingness to continue dialogue with Donald, but also suggest a proactive, problem-solving stance. She explored this empathic position later in her written reflection, noting,

> …because I wanted to ease Donald's concerns I assured him that 'everything will be alright.' As much as I want to help Donald feel better, I cannot make these types of promises because, frankly, I don't know if Laura will bounce back and if everything will be 'alright.' For future conferences, I will have to be wary of the promises that I make; for I should only make the promises that I can keep.

While Susan's reflections suggest measured but empathic dialogue with parents in the future, Will's individual verbal reflection emphasized a distinct boundary:

> I was nice to Mr. Bolden and told him all of the things the school could provide, but feel that I was not as comforting as I could have been. I want to try and be more inviting to parents, but I still feel that at this point this trait is difficult for me. Finding the line between being too cold and too open is something that I have trouble gauging so staying closer to the cold line makes conferencing easier.

Will's subsequent reflection with Lisa indicated his tight hold on what he considers to be his professional territory and what he considers to be the responsibility of other school professionals.

> I told him I was perfectly willing to point to the people that are appropriate and necessary to talk to. I said I want to help but I can be like the 'helper.' I can't be the psychiatrist…I can't tell you what's going on in her life. I put up a boundary and said 'I'm willing to help out, like try to get her the help and I'll let you know what's going on.' But as a teacher, I can't go into personal lives.

In short, the teachers' reflections on the extent to which they should engage with the Boldens can be connected to the tensions between traditionally stoic professionalism and personal involvement.

Your Teacher and Your Friend

In addition to their boundaries between homes and schools, the participating teachers also reflected on the degree to which they would support Laura from the position of a 'friend' and a 'teacher.' Alice and Mitchell reflected on each other's gender-specific comments. Alice noted, "(Donald) mentioned that he had been raising (Laura) since she was two years old, so she really didn't have a female figure in her life. So I said that I really wouldn't mind stepping in and becoming that female figure for her…that I wouldn't mind speaking to her and being there for her." Mitchell very quickly responded to Alice, "You're much different because of that whole mother figure thing…I'm not gonna be a mother figure." Susan echoed Alice's position, noting her willingness to serve as female role model for Laura. "She doesn't have a mom, so when you want to go talk about those girl things, you don't necessarily want to do it with your dad. So, if she's willing to let me or if she's more eager to tell me girl things, I'm not going to say, 'No, no. I don't want to hear that.'" Perhaps the most striking position on the boundary between teacher and friend came from Lisa. Immediately following her conference with Donald, Lisa emphatically noted her willingness to forgo any boundaries in order to help Laura:

> It kind of took me aback because there is a place that I have as her teacher, but at the same time, I'm willing to stretch those boundaries just as much as he is…I wanted to make sure (Donald) knew there was a boundary there, but at the same time I felt she just needs someone to talk to…I felt like I was okay with stretching those emotional boundaries and being there as a person and not as a teacher…being more of a supportive figure as a friend and mentor, not so much as just a teacher. I'd noticed in class that she'd had problems paying attention and something was on her mind. You know, just let her know that while in school, while in class, after class, come talk to me about anything. Write her a little note 'I know you're having a hard time. Please come contact me in any way at any time possible'… somebody needs to break down those doors and let her know that she can get better.

Eight weeks later, Lisa completed her final meta-reflection for the entire PCM. She reviewed the Donald Bolden conference videos, post-conference debriefing sessions,

and her written reflections. Notably, her final meta-reflection was in contrast to her earlier willingness to bridge boundaries. She noted:

> I was appalled to hear myself say in reflection how relieved I was for Donald to be willing to get so personal and overstep that boundary, because now I acknowledge how important that boundary can be…I should have realized that I fell into a trap when he asked me to be there for her. I understand at this point that I need to stop parents, draw a line clearly and let them know I can't go there because it is unprofessional… there needs to be a line, and I'll now aim to draw it more clearly and accept that it is better and safer to be cold and less emotional in my conferences and to focus on the student.

Lisa's shifting definition of a professional boundary illustrates the fluidity of teacher identity. Fifteen weeks of simulated conferences and continued reflection challenged her to consider her definition of professional boundaries. These ideas will continue to evolve as she works toward becoming a professional educator.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In review of the data emerging from the simulated conferences between Donald Bolden and the thirteen preservice teachers, three striking themes center on the concept of professional boundaries. First, the data indicate a critique of self and professional preparation. Teachers were aware of the concern and emotion conveyed by Donald Bolden, they recognized the gravity of the conversation, and they clearly noted that Laura's concerns were not grounded in an academic content area. In short, teachers knew that this was a serious conversation, but many failed to engage. Many "froze," immediately recognizing that they were not "ready for something so serious." The teachers' self-critiques acknowledge there is more to being an educator than guiding students toward mastery of content, but they admit confusion about exactly what will be required of them beyond teaching a curriculum.

The result of this confusion of responsibility was a default referral to "other professionals." While the teachers correctly enlisted the services of professionals specifically trained to work with academically or emotionally challenged students, they made these referrals in very general fashion. They referred Laura to this "someone else," but admitted they didn't know what specialists are in place to help students like Laura, what their qualifications are, and what their responsibilities are for connecting Laura and Donald with these specialists.

While data indicate that most teachers either failed to engage with Donald or quickly defaulted to other school professionals, a few teachers referenced professional boundaries in terms of their desire to take action and provide assistance. Although these teachers were willing to engage, there is clear evidence that they still wrestled with the degree and consequences of such engagement. They reflected on

where the line is between being a teacher and engaging as a friend, and how to make professional assurances to parents that are realistic.

These data emerged from a small sample of preservice teachers, suggesting the obvious limitations for generalization to a larger population of novice teachers. Importantly though, these data represent the articulations of a larger sample ($n = 106$) of pre- and in-service teachers who engaged in at least two of the six PCM simulations, suggesting three broader implications for teacher education policy. The first implication focuses on identifying preservice teacher dispositions. Data suggest the teachers in this study operated at times from the *personal interest* schema (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), where they considered first their own comfort or discomfort in determining the degree to which they would engage with Donald Bolden. This aligns with Francis Fuller's (1969) theory of teacher concerns, where many professionals operate first in consideration of *self* before later transitioning to a greater consideration for the needs of *others*. As teacher education programs continue to wrestle with how to best identify and assess preservice teachers' dispositions (Johnson & Reiman, 2007), we suggest there is value in looking at dispositional judgment and action *beyond* typical classroom and field placement settings. Complex simulations such as the ones set forth in the PCM offer teacher educators another vantage point on novice teacher dispositions and their resulting actions. If we see and hear teachers operating in simulations from *personal interest* perspectives and failing to engage in professional inquiry because it is "too uncomfortable," then we have identified an area for dispositional growth. This additional perspective on how novice teachers are translating education philosophy into action uncovers misconceptions and identifies areas in which additional preparation is needed beyond content specialization.

The second implication for teacher education policy stems from the PCM itself. The PCM originates from a clinical signature pedagogy that is well established within the medical profession. Unlike teaching hospitals, the PCM is employed as a formative model designed to foster development of professional skill sets and is *not* used for summative evaluation purposes. Furthermore, to characterize the PCM as purely clinical limits the fundamental nature of this intervention. While the PCM cases are intentionally designed to target specific K-12 teaching contexts, they result in teacher reflections that extend well beyond the case and context, allowing for much broader and interwoven understandings of the teaching profession. For example, as Susan scrutinized her interactions with Donald Bolden, her reflections extended to encompass how a teacher balances serving one student's needs while also serving all her students. Susan's words indicate an emerging understanding of how both the teacher *and* student must work compatibly to affect learning and growth:

> I think this is just a question of teaching in the long haul – How much attention do you give to one student? It's easy for me to say 'Oh, I can stay after school. Oh, I can do all these things for Laura.' But in real life, you have time constraints and you also have to worry about the

> other students who are doing well…I get really frustrated because
> I've talked to teachers and they just like 'Oh, some are just going to
> fall through the cracks.' I don't want to be one of those teachers but at
> the same time I don't know. It might be inevitable. As a teacher, there
> is only so much you can do. A lot of it also falls on the student…

The PCM establishes a reflective atmosphere, where novice teachers bear the responsibility for critiquing what they said and how they said it. It offers the opportunity for young teachers to practice a variety of professional communications in a setting conducive to evidence-based feedback. We strongly believe that the PCM holds the potential to bridge the deliberate philosophical foundations of teacher preparation programs with the variable, pragmatic field experiences. Unlike field setting opportunities that traditionally differ in scope and quality from one classroom to the next, a PCM-like intervention allows a school of education to plan and account for a carefully designed series of negotiated experiences. It offers novice teachers a transition from writing personal education philosophies to negotiating, verbalizing, and reflecting on how their professional identities will take shape in real-world situations. In short, interventions like the PCM offer carefully structured simulations that reinforce both field practica and traditional teacher education coursework.

The third and final implication for teacher education policy stems directly from the data in this article and their connections to teacher identity development. Alsup emphasizes the tension between typically narrow presumptions about a teacher's role and the struggle for professional identity (2006). Similarly, participating teachers repeatedly noted their intense (and somewhat narrow) preparation for content and their knowledge gaps in the "other" aspects of public school teaching. Even though Anna is a preservice teacher, her post-PCM words reflect awareness of how her role and identity as a teacher will expand when she becomes a full-time teacher:

> This case brought up the whole idea that being a teacher is not the
> only hat we have to wear. It was kind of like – be the counselor, be
> somebody other than the teacher – and I think that's not the only
> different role we're going to be thrown into. And I think it's interesting
> to be aware of that before we're actually teaching.

Wenger (1998) notes that the education process centers on "the opening of new identities—exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state" (p. 263). Anna correctly suggests that teachers wear many proverbial hats; she now feels more prepared for other new identities and ways of being that she had not previously explored. Furthermore, Wenger emphasizes that identity formation occurs as we extend beyond our current reasoning. Anna's final comment points to the fact that she is now aware of the upcoming expansion of professional identity. She is beginning to realize that teaching encompasses much more than her current understanding of a *teacher as content specialist*. Importantly, this awareness is

taking hold *prior to* actually entering the classroom as a full-time teacher. We firmly believe that teacher educators can and should more deliberately prepare future teachers for the many "hats" they will wear beyond the role of "content specialist." Serving as one example of how this additional preparation could be implemented, the PCM provided exposure to and grounding within some of the 'other' teacher contexts. Introducing carefully designed simulated interactions into teacher education programs offers one additional venue for more deliberate and holistic teacher preparation.

This PCM case and simulation process allowed Anna and her peers to experience identity in practice—to negotiate their experiences within a social context. They grappled with the boundaries associated with serving as Laura's teacher, but were allowed to do so in a preservice forum that supported reflection and deliberation. They explored their professional identities, took missteps as they expanded on current ways of reasoning, and engaged with parents who are vital members of a teacher's professional community. This simulated case provided a professional jumpstart, allowing teachers to begin learning the rules of engagement, the norms of interaction, and the protocols for professionalism. The PCM process of negotiated meaning provided teachers the chance to reflect on the error of avoiding tough conversations and the fault of being too "cold." Participants were given the chance to examine their faults, to reflect on each other's points of view, and to ultimately work toward becoming educators who are aware of the breadth and fluidity of teacher identity.

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