

Assessment Inquiry Grant, 2022 – 2023 Report

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Project Title: Assessing Single Subject Teacher Candidates' Reflection on Teaching Practice

1) Introduction

Conversations around how to create caring classroom communities are often rare in academia and K-12 classrooms. Yet, when the COVID pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the 2020 U.S. presidential election beset society at large, it forced teacher educators to reassess not just what and how they teach, but how teachers and youth are cared for and care for one another within education.

For decades, Noddings' (1988) care framework has provided meaningful guidance for educators seeking to care for students. Noddings' arguments (1988, 2012) for an ethic of care in education have largely influenced how educators think about their role as teachers in schools. However, for reasons surfaced by the confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic and explicit examples of systemic and institutionalized racism highlighted in the murder of George Floyd and targeted political attacks within public education, the limits of previous frameworks of care have come into full view.

In 2023, we have seen the purposeful and repeated targeting of teachers, teacher educators, and students working within public school contexts across the United States - curriculum bans, threats of firing teachers, and legislation seeking to ban the inclusion of marginalized identities and stories in classrooms. One critical piece to combat assaults on inclusive public schools is the purposeful creation of spaces for future teachers to grapple with and debate authentic Problems of Practice related to education. In this work, we centered the idea of *caring* as we created sessions focused on Problems of Practice within a large public single-subject teacher education program. We considered caring as a set of specific practices and dispositions, and used a theoretical framework to ground and specify our work. We also considered caring within the scope of College of Education's Just, Equitable, and Inclusive Education (JEIE) framework, and how anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogy were linked to caring.

One of the cornerstone courses of the Single Subject Teacher Credential Program is a General Pedagogy course, taken by all candidates. This course is a field work related course that has gone through many iterations and been redesigned and reimaged for different formats, including online formats during the pandemic. We wanted to co-design a space that guided and supported students' critical reflection on practice.

In Fall 2022, we piloted a reflective seminar that occurred parallel to the regular course. The reflective seminar was an attempt to strengthen candidates' reflective practice as teachers and their ability to link coursework and their experiences in their student teaching placements. For this project we developed and implemented an assessment to understand how the reflective seminar impacted candidates' reflection and development as beginning teachers.

The assessment was co-designed with students in the Single-Subject Credential Program and implemented in spring 2023. Then revised summer of 2023 and implemented again in fall 2023.

This project allowed us to measure how the reflective sessions are impacting candidates' learning and practice. The designed assessment also serves as a model to measure candidates' professional development, to be used in other areas of teacher education.

2) Theoretical Perspectives

In this work, we used Walker and Gleaves (2016) the caring higher education teacher framework to purposefully guide our instruction and the spaces we created for students. Specifically, we were guided by the four components of the caring higher education teacher: (a) relationship at the center, (b) compelled to care; (c) caring as resistance, and (d) caring as less than. These aspects were modeled in our classrooms in hopes that students would take on these characteristics as future teachers. They also guided the design and implementation of each course session. Each component is aligned with the JEIE framework, which also helped create a purposeful and cohesive work space for our team and our students.

3) Methods

Drawing on design-based methodology (DBR), we elicited feedback from current students around how to design the three afternoon Reflective Sessions and create a space for authentic inquiry into their Problems of Practice. We framed the Reflective Session as: A) A space to discuss field placements in more depth; b) A place to make connections between field experiences and classwork; c) a place focused on getting to deeper conversations around

teaching; and d) to continue developing a network of critically reflective teachers around Problems of Practice. We defined problems of practice as something that teacher candidates authentically have questions about; something that you wish to dialogue with others in the group about.

The three afternoon sessions focused on Problems of Practice acted as interventions for teaching our teacher candidates about how to center care in their practice. Each teacher candidate had a chance to present, to their peers, a Problem of Practice that they each experienced in their student teaching placements, and then received insights and perspectives from one another. We collected data in the forms of audio recordings of teacher candidate dialogue, written communication between Teacher Candidates (TCs) on Problems of Practice, and records of the design decisions we made for our classes.

4) Results

Pre-assessment survey co-designed by current students enrolled in EDSC 440S.

As part of this work, we co-designed a pre-assessment survey (Appendix A) with students in the Single-Subject Program guided by the following purpose statement: “Reflective sessions that have a goal of helping you all make sense of your field placements and connections between your field experiences and university courses.” With this statement in mind we asked students to contemplate the following question: What questions should we ask to help us understand where you are right now in your journey to becoming a teacher?

The TCs and 440S instructors developed a list of 13 questions. The questions focused on a wide range of topics from programmatic topics, such as course overlap, to in the field, teaching topics such as “classroom management”. Due to the wide range of topics we felt that the

reflective inquiry sessions still aligned with the students and our own purposes for those sections. They gave students an opportunity to bring to the community a question unique to them that they wanted to critically explore with a small group of peers.

Analytical Findings

The three sessions provided spaces for TCs to deprogram deficit-oriented thinking as they presented problems of practice to their peers. For example, one student presented the Problem of Practice, “How do I keep problem students engaged?” This led to conversations that centered the practice of caring and helped TCs consider student labeling and deficit-oriented thinking. TCs referenced the over-labeling of Latino/a/x and Black students as “problem students,” and also helped one another consider how to reframe the Problem of Practice. By the end, the conversation which had started in a deficit-oriented framework had evolved to a conversation on how and why students are labeled, and how to build positive and affirming relationships with disengaged students.

5) Final conclusions

This work contributes to the development of a theory related to the higher education teacher. We believe that this work demonstrates that there is a possible transfer of caring and related dispositions to TCs through the three instructors’ modeling and course design. In addition, this work contributes to the scholarship on the centering of care in teacher education settings by demonstrating the link between Problems of Practice and establishing and extending care.

In terms of practices, the Single Subject Credential Program is one of two programs in our department and includes 200+ students a year. This project would both help evaluate a new

dimension of the program and provide an assessment aimed at both reflection and identity development, aspects not directly assessed by the program's current assessment tools.

References:

Noddings, N. (1988). An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements.

American Journal of Education, 96(2), 215–230.

Noddings, N. (2012). *The caring relation in teaching*. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(6), 771–781.

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Appendix A:

SURVEY (Questions developed during co-design session)

1. At this point in the program, how prepared for lesson planning do you feel? What aspects of planning are you struggling with? Which aspects do you feel strong in? How can we support you feel more confident and prepared with lesson planning?
2. How much overlap do you feel between courses (across current credential courses)?
3. Do you feel the field placement process is transparent enough?
4. How closely do you feel your MT and Clinical Coach align with your university coursework?
5. Do you want to know more about general pedagogy, antiracist practice, content specific methods? How do you about how these different topics are being taught/addressed?

6. What is the biggest takeaway from our program (disposition, ways of being, etc.)?
7. What kind of support do you need regarding “classroom management”?
8. What kind of support do you need regarding, talking with students in different difficult situations?
9. How can we support you develop your teaching persona, developing your teaching identity?
10. What can be removed from the program so that you are able to leave having rich learning experiences, but ALSO maintain a sense of sanity and balance in your life?
11. How has your experience been with gradual induction?
12. How has your comfort in the field progressed over the last two months? (think about comfort around working with students, talking with your MT, working with colleagues, etc.)
13. What do you feel like is really well in your practice?