

Refracted Dispositions: A Preliminary Report on Pre-Service Educator's
Perceptions of Required Self-Reflection
Wisconsin Research Seminar
Wisconsin Dells
June 16, 17, 2008

Ahmad Sultan, Ph D
UW-Stevens Point, WI

ABSTRACT: Survey and interview data from preservice educators were tabulated and analyzed in response to the following research questions: what opinions do prospective educators have about required reflective statements in their pre-professional portfolios and professional development plans? What levels of reflections do they and their instructors find in their writings? Over 100 subjects were surveyed, interviewed, or submitted their reflective statements for analysis using methods of critical discourse analysis. Theoretical and technical issues are raised for instructors in courses on portfolio and plan development.

SETTING & PARTICIPANTS: Volunteers for this study were solicited at an undergraduate teacher preparation program based in a university in the Midwestern USA. Over one hundred students a two-course sequence for portfolio development responded to surveys and interviews, and offered their reflective statements for analysis.

OBJECTIVE: This presentation will summarize, analyze and draw inferences from surveys and writings by preservice educators in response to questions about whether they are prepared and willing to engage in critical self-reflection about their practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Reflection as a tool for professional development was made prominent in the works of twentieth-century psychologists and educators (Allport 1937, Dewey 1910), and became widely integrated into pre-service programs for educators during the past two decades (Schön 1987, Zeichner & Liston 1996). During the movement for standards-based education, a standard specifying reflection was adopted in the majority of the United States (INTASC 1992); in Wisconsin the standard read as follows:

#9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effect of his or her choices and actions on pupils, parents, professionals in the learning community and others and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

Knowledge: Teacher candidate explains the impact of his/her choices, beliefs and actions on pupils. Teacher candidate identifies resources for professional development in the school, community and beyond.

Skills: Teacher candidate critically evaluates lessons and make necessary adjustments. Teacher candidate critiques and modifies teaching based on reflections. Teacher candidate identifies personal and professional strengths and builds on them.

Dispositions: Teacher candidate appreciates the importance of reflection to improve the teaching and instructional environment. Teacher candidate values professional growth and development. Teacher candidate values and seeks advice and direction of others. (Wisconsin DPI 2000)

In this standard are embedded manifold theories of personal and social development. In this study, two theoretical strands were traced: mode of address, from semiotics; and critical discourse analysis, from sociologies of knowledge.

First, the concept of modes of address was invoked from semiotic theories. Mode of address is a term defined by semioticians as relations between addresser and addressee, or performer and audience; education involves multiple modes of address including pupils, colleagues, and communities (Ellsworth 1997). Educators,

from these theoretical approaches, construct modes of address in specific locales (Ellsworth 2005, Grenfell & James 1998, Lampert 2001, Newmann & Wehlage 1995; Sizer & Sizer 1999, Smith 2001). The focal point of these theories is *habitus*, as defined by Bourdieu (1977):

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g., the material conditions of existence characteristic of class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions... (p. 72).

As Grenfell and James (1998) summarize, *habitus* "...is only actualized through individuals and individual instances. In other words, social action always has a time and a place..." (p. 15). For reflection, therefore, the question is whether or not the modes of address correspond to the *habiti* of educators, and in particular, beginning educators.

Second, this project draws from sociological theories and methods of critical discourse analysis (Cherryholmes 1988, Luke 1997, Popkewitz & Fendler 2001). Also pertinent are theories of discourse and rhetoric (Bakhtin 1986, Bazerman 1994). In addition, the concept of "heteroglossia" was used to examine the "utterances" and "dialogues" that occurred in prospective educators' writings (Bakhtin 1990).

For the purpose of this presentation only some discourse analysis is utilized here.

DATA:

The attached survey (see appendix) was designed to yield data for analysis by gender, age, experience, and disciplinary specialty. In addition to survey data and portfolio excerpts, follow-up interviews will also be conducted and analyzed for this presentation.

The participants in this survey are students currently enrolled or were enrolled in one of the sequence courses on developing the professional portfolio; EDUC 200, EDUC 300, and EDUC 400. The total number of the participants in this survey is one hundred fourteen (114) students; 96 (84%) female, 18 (16%) male; 86 (75%) are under 25, 18 (16%) between 25 and 30, and 10 (9%) are over 30. The participants are further classified according to years of education at the university, and their major and minor fields of specialization to see whether years of experience make any difference in the outcome. (See the tables below).

Year at University	No.	%
First year	1	1%
Second year	9	8%
Third year	10	9%
Fourth year	46	40%
Fifth or more years	48	42%
Skipped question	1	1%
TOTAL	114	100%

Major	No. of students	Percentage
Elementary Ed	45	39%
Exceptional Ed	5	4%
Early Childhood Ed	4	4%
Secondary Social Science Ed	5	4%
Secondary Science Ed	5	4%
English Ed	0	0%
Family & Consumer Science Ed	8	7%
Foreign Language Ed	4	4%
Physical & Health Ed	5	4%
Math Ed	4	4%
Music Ed	10	9%
Speech/Language Pathology	19	17%

FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS:

Preliminary review of data show general dissatisfaction with required reflection. Gender, age, experience and disciplinary specialty do not seem to be significant factors in the results. A majority of students has a misunderstanding one way or another of the purpose of portfolio. As opposed to seeing it “as an assessment of

students' knowledge, skills and dispositions of the Wisconsin Educator Standards" (DPI, 2008) the sample's responses to question no. 25ⁱ indicate rather confused understanding of its function and role in their professional development. For most of them it is a meaningless requirement of extra work. For some of the respondents do not even know that reflection is a DPI requirement in the development of the professional portfolio for teachers. For still others, the development of the professional portfolio is perceived as a 'job interview tool'. As one respondent put it, "the state needs to take a good look at what interviewers REALLY look at and base the portfolio off that". Our finding here also corroborates with DPI 's result of the review of our teacher education program. One respondent reflects and summarizes the attitude of most of the respondents: "I know the term PI34, but don't understand what it is".

This finding is puzzling since virtually all the courses in the department of teacher education at our school connect their performance tasks to PI34 standards. DPI Program Review Report (2008) saw this as one of the program's strengths.

"The Wisconsin Teacher Standards are infused throughout each licensure program. Knowledge, skills and dispositions of each standard are clearly defined. Frequently, course syllabi list the standards and the KSDs that are addressed in each course. Interviews with student teachers revealed their understanding of the Wisconsin Teacher Standards".

The question, why such understanding of the Wisconsin Teacher Standards is not translated into dispositional acts applied to the artifacts of the portfolio now becomes the core of this investigation. Looking at the "fields of experiences of the professional development--which shape the candidates' "habiti" ;knowledge, skills and dispositions of reflection and reflective practice--will shed some light on the probable causes of this disparity in understanding and of the misperception of reflection. First, the professional culture seems to induce functional understanding of reflection. Reflection, perhaps, was conveyed by various instructors in the

program as a requirement, an instrument for improving teaching rather than an integral part of ongoing self and social learning and professional growth in society.

Most of the candidates seem to view reflection as an assignment which they have to add to the respective performance tasks of the courses they completed. Some students, who were registered for EDUC 300 for the spring semester (2008), expressed surprise when told to collect artifacts and write reflections on them. It is no surprise to see the majority of the reflections added by students are confined to the cognitive and behavioral aspects of teaching. Here are a few examples from the survey. When participants were asked to give “examples of a negative reflection” (question no. 20), some of them answered: “a math lesson not going as planned”; the lesson did not go as well as I was hoping for...”; “while doing my lesson, I discovered that it was better to give out handouts at the end, instead of at the middle, because the students were distracted by the handouts during the middle of the lesson”.

Very little was mentioned about the social and cultural context of the teaching and learning experiences (artifacts). In fact out of 89 respondents to the question above, not a single response was on race, gender, or ethnicity! Only one response to question no. 21, “examples of positive reflection”, reflected on the multicultural context of the classroom. In my review of the performance tasks artifacts submitted by my students in EDUC 300, the only artifacts on difference were on accommodating students with special needs, where it is the focus of the content knowledge of the course. In this context, it is worthy to note that the DPI Program Review Report (2008) observed that the required learning about and reflection on ethnic and cultural diversity in the contexts of learning and teaching is not met in the program. “Student interviews indicated a lack of knowledge, skills and dispositions in these areas.” (p. 5).

It is no surprise to see so many respondents displeased with this requirement of

reflection. “[I do not want to] reflect on every piece;” said one, while another suggests that including artifacts “should be made optional.” Similar responses are submitted in survey to question 25.

In their responses, most of the participants perceive of the performance tasks in their courses as course assignments rather than as evidences (assessment) of their understanding of the Wisconsin Teacher Standards. This is why when they write the synopsis and reflection on the artifacts for the performance task chart they write only description of the experiences rather than making a connection between the experience and the corresponding standards. They also keep their reflection to the minimum when they do it. Indeed, some of them have hard time grasping the meaning of reflection. Here are some examples from the survey: “get red of them;” “make them optional;” include fewer artifacts in portfolio.”

To conclude, while there is a disparity in the conception and practice of reflection, there are two general implications for curriculum and assessment of pre-service dispositions in required courses include: possibilities for improved examples and models of reflection, and possibly increased use of face-to-face peer-mediated discussion groups in the portfolio courses as well as the other course.

REFERENCES:

- Allport, G. (1937). *Personality: A psychological interpretation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bazerman, C. (1994) Systems of genres and the enactment of social intentions. In: A. Freedman & P. Medway (eds.) *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor & Francis. 79-101
- Cherryholmes, C. (1988). *Power and criticism*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dewey, J. 1910). *How We Think*. Boston: D. C. Hath Co. Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the power of address*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of learning: Media, architecture, pedagogy*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Grenfell, M. & James, D. (1998) *Bourdieu and education: Acts of practical theory*. London & New York: Routledge.
- INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assistance & Support Consortium) (1992). *Standards for Teacher Education*. Boulder CO: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Lampert, Magdalene. (2001). *Teaching problems and the problems of teaching*. New Haven: Yale University Press;

Luke, A. (1997) Theory and practice of critical discourse analysis. L. Saha (ed) International Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Education. London: Pergamon.

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/Luke/SAHA6.html>

Popkewitz, T. & Fendler, L. (1999). Critical theories in education. London: Routledge.

Schön, D. (1987). Educating the Reflective Practitioner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sizer, T. & Sizer N. (1999). The students are watching: Schools and the moral contract. Boston: Beacon Press.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2008). DPI professional education program Review report. Unpublished paper.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2000). Rules for Teacher Education Program Approval & Licensing. Madison, WI: author. Retrieved 3/26/08 from <http://dpi.wi.gov/tepd/pepi34.html#teacherstandards3402>

Zeichner, K. & Liston, D. (1996). Reflective teaching: An introduction. Mahwah NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

APPENDIX: Survey administered in April 2008 to students in two portfolio development courses.

This is a survey about your pre-professional portfolio. Your opinions will be used to improve courses EDUC 300 and 400, in which portfolios must be developed. To ensure your discretion, all responses will be kept anonymous at all times.

PART I. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Sex: Female ___ Male ___
2. Age: 18 – 25 ___ 26-30 ___ 31-35 ___ 40+ ___
3. Years at UWSP: 0-1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5+ ___
4. Teaching Major (check only one):
 - Elementary Education ___
 - Exceptional Education ___
 - Early Childhood Education ___
 - Secondary Social Studies Education
 - Secondary Science Education ___
 - English Education ___
 - Family & Consumer Sciences Education
 - Foreign Language Education
 - Physical & Health Education ___
 - Music Education ___
 - Speech / Language Pathology ___
5. Teaching Minor, if any (check only one):
 - Exceptional Education ___

Early Childhood Education ____

Social Studies Education, including broad-field

Any Science Education, including broad-field ____

English Education ____

Foreign Language Education, including ESL ____

6. Course this semester: 300 ____ 400 ____ 300 & 400 ____

PART II. PORTFOLIO COMPONENTS

7. I have made a cover page and introduction y ____ n ____

8. I have made a statement of my teaching philosophy y ____ n ____

9. I have made a chart of performance tasks, including reflective statements for each performance task included to date. y ____ n ____

10. I have read Chapter 3 in the textbook by Bullock & Hawk y ____ n ____

11. I have attended sessions at which my portfolio was discussed by instructors. y ____ n ____

12. I have discussed my portfolio with my instructors y ____ n ____

13. I have shown my portfolio to my peers. y ____ n ____

14. I have shown my portfolio to cooperating teachers. y ____ n ____

PART III. SELF-RATING (0 = no opinion to 10 = strongly agree)

15. My portfolio includes evidence of my knowledge for all ten Wisconsin Teacher Standards: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

16. My portfolio includes evidence of my skills for all ten Wisconsin Teacher Standards: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

17. My portfolio includes evidence of my dispositions for all ten Wisconsin Teacher Standards: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

18. My portfolio includes my reflections on each item of evidence: 0 1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8 9 10

19. My reflections are both positive and negative about each item of evidence. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a. An example of a positive reflection is:

b. An example of a negative reflection is:

20. I believe that my portfolio could be better. y ___ n ___

Comment:

21. I believe my portfolio will be useful in seeking a teaching position. 0 1 2
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comment:

22. If I could make one change in the DPI rules about portfolios, I would:

23. If I could make one change in EDUC 300, I would:

24. If I could make one change in EDUC 400, I would:

I hereby give an e-mail address at which I may be contacted about volunteering for a follow-up interview:

Thanks for your assistance with this survey!

ⁱ See Appendix for the statement of the question.