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Challenges in Enacting Core Practices in Language Teacher Education: A Self-Study

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Challenges in Enacting Core Practices in Language Teacher Education: A Self-Study

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In this study, I explore my practices as a teacher educator in one course both before and after returning to the K–12 classroom to teach secondary language learners for one academic year. By examining the intersection of self-study and practice-based teacher education, I illustrate how I used self-study as a mechanism for innovation and change and focus on the challenges I encountered in implementing the use of practice-based education in my work as a teacher educator. Qualitative data analysis revealed that in redesigning my approach to my course, I stopped short of my goals to make the course more practice-centered. Although I provided students with many opportunities to practice planning, I did not provide enough focused opportunities to practice implementation and to participate in giving and receiving feedback. I learned that engaging teachers in practice-based teaching requires teacher educators to be both specific and deliberate in setting their own purposes for establishing the centrality of practice in their courses and to explain these clearly to teacher candidates. Further work in which teacher educators study their use of practice-based pedagogy would benefit from using a self-study lens. Other researchers are urged to add to the limited body of research about the use of practice-based pedagogy with teachers of language learners, particularly English language learners.

Keywords: teacher educator; self-study; core practices; language learners

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Ironically, although teacher education is a field in which we strive to help others learn to teach, there is often little or no guidance for teacher educators as they enact their professional roles or engage in professional learning (Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006a; Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, & Placier, 1995; Korthagen, 2001). Examining their own growth, the growth of the teacher candidates in their programs, and the relation between the two (Ball, Hill, & Bass, 2005; LaBoskey, 2012) would seem to be of critical importance to teacher educators, particularly in an atmosphere that questions the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2013).

For at least 30 years, teaching and teacher education have been challenged by a crisis of faith from the public and policy-makers (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) as student outcomes have been construed as results to be blamed on teachers and the performance of teachers blamed on the institutions where they gained their teaching credentials (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2013). These discourses have led the field of teacher education to consider its practices, the impact of its work with teachers, and ways to document the effects of teacher education (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Two of the more

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promising efforts are self-studies of teacher education practices (e.g., Loughran, 2002; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004) and focusing on those core teaching practices that are most likely to influence student learning positively (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). I examine each of these fields and the ways in which they complement each other in the two sections that follow.

The Challenges of Enacting Core Practices

In contrast to the relatively large number of studies about the development of teachers throughout their careers (e.g., Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Day, 2013; Huberman, 1989; Moore Johnson, 2004), there has been limited work on the learning processes and socialization of teacher educators (Korthagen, Loughran, & Lunenberg, 2005; Korthagen & Russell, 1995). This includes a small but growing number of self-studies in which teacher educators have examined the development of their practices in their roles as teacher educators (e.g., Berry, 2007; Bullock, 2007, 2009; Bullock & Christou, 2009; Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Dinkelman et al., 2006a; Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006b; Kitchen, 2005; Murray & Male, 2005; Ritter, 2007, 2009, 2010; Williams & Ritter, 2010; Wood & Borg, 2010; Zeichner, 2005). Fewer still are published studies in which teacher educators return to K–12 classrooms and explore the implications of these experiences for their teacher education practices (e.g., Cazden, 1976; Christenbury, 2007; Loughran & Northfield, 1996; Peercy, in press; Pinnegar, 1995; Russell, 1995, 1997, 2009; Scherff & Kaplan, 2006).

In this article, I examine my practices as a teacher educator in one course, EDUC 600, before and after returning to the secondary classroom to teach language learners full-time for one academic year. Those experiences inspired my desire to focus more intentionally on the *how* of practice (see Peercy, in press), which led to my discovery of the research in practice-based education (also called core practices, high-leverage practices, ambitious teaching, intellectually ambitious instruction, and high-impact teaching; e.g., ALLIES, 2012; Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013). These terms have been defined in the literature as those practices that are essential to successful classroom teaching and student learning, and are possible for novices to learn and enact in their teaching (for instance, leading a whole-class discussion or communicating with parents and guardians; see TeachingWorks, 2013a).

As explained below, I found self-study to be a useful approach to innovation and change, in part because of the intersection between self-study and practice-based pedagogy. I explore how both place teacher learning at the center of the practice–theory relationship. Self-study was particularly helpful in illuminating the challenges I encountered in my early attempts to use core practices in my work as a teacher educator.

Intersections of Self-Study and Practice-Based Education

Just as self-study places the *practices of teacher educators* at the center of inquiry, so practice-based teacher education positions the *practices of teachers* in classrooms as the centerpiece of study for novice teachers. Education researchers working in the area of core practices have asserted the need for teacher education experiences to focus more on *doing* the actual work of teaching and less on talking *about* teaching or developing the knowledge and dispositions of teachers (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Sleep, 2009). Common to both self-study research and work in practice-based teacher education is the aim to work within the dynamic practice–theory dialectic to inform the work of teacher education and teachers and ultimately to have a positive impact on student learning.

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The central importance of practice in teacher education has been discussed for decades (Ball, 1993, 2000; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Lampert, 1985; Putnam & Borko, 1997; Wilson & Berne, 1999). More recent is the recognition that teacher education programs must not merely pass along "knowledge about good teaching practices," but instead "must also include the development of the novice teacher's ability to exercise his or her judgment about when to use particular practices and how to adapt them to the specific circumstances in which they are teaching" (Zeichner, 2005, p. 118). So, too, is the *deep* exploration of what should be identified as core practices (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Ball, Sleep, Boerst, & Bass, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). Scholars at the University of Michigan have recently identified 19 core or high-leverage practices for teaching across content areas (TeachingWorks, 2013a). Further, the exploration of *content-specific* core practices is in its early stages (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2011; Lampert et al., 2013; TeachingWorks, 2013b; Thompson, Windschitl, & Braaten, 2013), and work on core practices for teaching language learners is just beginning to emerge (e.g., ALLIES, 2012; Glisan & Donato, 2012; Hlas & Hlas, 2012; Understanding Language, 2013). Most of this work relates to the teaching of world language learners. To date, there is little work about core practices for teaching English language learners (ELLs; for exceptions, see ALLIES, 2012 and Understanding Language, 2013), an area to which I contribute in the study described below.

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Perspective: Uniting practice and theory

This study is shaped by a sociocultural understanding of learning, a lens through which I frame the learning of teacher educators as occurring within a social context and mediated through interaction with other people, texts, and tools. I align this work with other research from a sociocultural perspective that investigates teacher learning and professional development, and recognizes that learning is social, situated, and distributed (Johnson, 2006, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural work does not attend only to social processes; it also emphasizes that learning occurs in the dynamic interplay of our social activities and our "mental lives" (Johnson, 2006, p. 236). As Johnson states, "in order to understand human learning ... one must look at the social activities that the individual engages in and see how they reappear as mental activities in the individual" (p. 238). Reflection, therefore, is an important component of sociocultural framings of learning because of the opportunity it provides to externalize and examine our mental processes and to explore how our practices both reveal and serve as the embodiment of the interaction of our mental and social processes.

This work is therefore also influenced by frameworks grounded in reflective practice (e.g., Korthagen & Kessels, 1999; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Munby & Russell, 1993; Russell, 2005), which construct reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987) as affording practitioners the opportunity to learn from exploration of their personal experience and, in so doing, to address important questions about the relationship between practice and theory. It is their shared interest in uniting practice and theory that inspired me to bring together self-study and practice-based teacher education, the major bodies of work that undergird this study. Self-study research in teacher education emerged as a field two decades ago (Russell, 2004), and it has been recognized as a powerful transformative force in teacher education (e.g., Elliott-Johns & Tidwell, 2013), with the potential to shape both the individual practices of those who undertake self-study of their work and the larger field of teacher education (Zeichner, 1999). LaBoskey (2004) has aptly illustrated the importance of the relationship between

practice and theory in self-study work, as well as the notion that self-study is not merely self-serving nor only self-focused: "Self-study researchers are concerned with both enhanced understanding of teacher education in general and the immediate improvement of our practice. We are focused on *the nexus between* public and private, *theory and practice*, research and pedagogy, self and other" (p. 818, emphasis added). Furthermore, those who engage in self-study affirm the central role of practice not only for teacher educators, but also for teacher candidates, recognizing that teacher candidates must have opportunities to engage in practice because "experience precedes understanding" (Berry & Loughran, 2002, p. 15).

Similarly, foundational work on practice-based teacher education concerns itself with uniting practice with theory, by making what teachers *do* (their practice) more central to the endeavors of teacher education, and building a "practice-based theory of knowledge for teaching" (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2009, p. 503). Indeed, Troyan, Davin, and Donato (2013) assert the importance of experience from the perspective of those working in the field of core practices: "No amount of 'teaching about teaching' or reflection on teaching can replace the enactment of teaching" (p. 155). It is this intertwining of sociocultural understandings of what teachers and teacher educators do, in the interest of bringing together practice and theory in meaningful ways, that frames this study. This attention to uniting practice and theory shaped the methods I used to engage in my inquiry, described below.

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Approach to the Research

After almost a decade engaged in teacher education, with the intermittent and uneven exposure to the energy of the K–12 classroom that is often typical amidst the demands of faculty life, I recently had the opportunity to take a leave of absence for one year. During that year, I returned full-time to my roots as a teacher of Spanish and ELLs, to teach Spanish to secondary students. I was eager to examine my experiences as a teacher from my perspective as a teacher educator. I wanted to explore the gaps that existed between my ideals and my actions (LaBoskey, 2004; Zeichner, 1999), and to discover if I "really knew what I was talking about" in my work with teacher candidates (Scherff & Kaplan, 2006, p. 155).

In this work, I use self-study as the guiding methodological framework to examine the changes that my secondary teaching experiences inspired me to make in my teacher education practices and the challenges I encountered as I attempted to refocus my work as a teacher educator. Self-study provided a compelling basis for this work, given that practitioners of self-study assume that, "we have a pedagogical responsibility to continuously monitor our progress; to check for discrepancies between our ideals and our practice [in ways that] … result in, or not, the reframed thinking and practice of our students and ourselves" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 839).

Self-study's focus on the critical examination of one's own practice guided my approach to data collection and analysis. I used the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify themes that emerged in my teacher education practices both before and after my return to the secondary classroom (see Table 1). To explore the changes in my teacher education practices, I examined my course syllabi; lesson plans; journals, memos and notes; texts; assignments; rubrics; and informal and formal evaluations from students. Here I focus specifically on data from one course, EDUC 600, which I taught both the year before and the year after my return to the secondary classroom. EDUC 600, Literacy for Elementary English Language Learners, is a Master's-level course required of teacher candidates who are studying to be ESOL (English for

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Table 1. Data sources, themes, exemplars, and codes.

Coding stage	Data sources	Emerging themes	Data exemplars	Codes
Open coding	Syllabus, reflective journal	Changes to course and reasons for changing course	Reflective journal: • "I feel like I am really relearning the intensity of teaching every day and it is making me think a lot about the kinds of assignments and quantity of reading I require, especially for the [intensive Master's program] students." Syllabus: • Added objectives, application, and extension for each class meeting.	• Reduce theoretical load • Increase focus on practice • Increase peer engagement
Axial coding	Syllabus, lesson plans, assignments	Student learning	Syllabus: • More assignments that require reflection. • Weekly reflection assignments about practice–theory relationship. Assignments: • Share lesson plans with peers.	• Practice-centered • Reflection
	Syllabus, lesson plans, texts, assignments, rubrics	Changes to course structure and content	Syllabus: • Reduction in the number of reading assignments. • Focus on enduring understanding. Lesson plans: • Warm-ups and think-aloud activities followed by explicit debriefing.	• Assignment order • Assignment purpose • Scaffolding
	Memos, notes, reflective journal	Reasons for changing course	Reflective journal: • "I don't know how much one thinks about theory when they are just trying to survive as a teacher … there has to be some time for reflection … [In my life as a teacher educator] I have gotten used to not having to have something ready to teach every single day and to being able to think about things in more peace and quiet rather than the almost constant din of kids."	• Core practices • Teacher workload • Reflection • Practice–theory relationship • Community of practice with peers

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Table 1. *(Continued.)*

Coding stage	Data sources	Emerging themes	Data exemplars	Codes
Selective coding	Syllabus, lesson plans, reflective journal, memos, notes, course evaluations	Affordances and challenges of course changes	Course evaluations: • "I would have liked to devote more class time to discussing the content rather than meeting in groups to discuss our assignments." Memos: • I did not consider *repeated* opportunities for EDUC 600 students to *enact* their lessons.	• Organizational changes • Epistemological changes • Practice-centered changes

speakers of other languages) specialists, both those seeking K–12 certification in the USA and those who are not. (Some already have initial certification in another area, others are planning to return to an international setting where US certification is not necessary.) The course attracts primarily novice teachers; most have no teaching experience, but some come with limited experience teaching in an international context or with tutoring or assisting experience. The course also enrolls novice teachers who are in an intensive Master's program and are concurrently teaching for one school year while taking a full course load. A smaller subset of students who sometimes enroll in the course are already experienced teachers seeking a Master's degree and taking EDUC 600 as an elective. To provide a context for the secondary classroom experiences that inspired me to change my teacher education practices (for elaboration, see Peercy, in press), I examine data sources from my year spent teaching 8–12th grade Spanish learners, drawing especially from my reflective journal.

I began data analysis by comparing changes in my EDUC 600 syllabi as well as examining my reflective journal for insights about what motivated my changes to the focus and organization of the course. As I noted the changes I made to the syllabus, I first engaged in open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), identifying and listing descriptive changes between the syllabi. During the axial coding stage, I created initial codes centered around the types of student learning the changes were intended to promote (e.g., practice-centered, reflective), changes to the structure or content of the course (e.g., assignment order, assignment purpose, scaffolding), and reasons for changing the course (e.g., core practices, teacher workload, reflection, practice–theory connections, community of practice with peers). As I began to notice patterns in the types of changes, I engaged in selective coding of the data, coding for organizational, epistemological, or practice-centered changes (i.e., changes I made to the course to create a greater focus on the *doing* of teaching). I also compared the numerical scores and open-ended comments from formal student evaluations of the course before and after my classroom year. Additionally, I examined the evaluations from the two previous times I taught EDUC 600 and noted trends in the numerical scores and comments as well as areas that were particularly low-scoring. I supplemented the formal course evaluation feedback with anonymous informal written feedback that I solicited from EDUC 600 students at the midpoint and end of the semester. I triangulated my examination of the data regarding changes to the syllabus by looking at my lesson plans, my reflective journaling, and my notes after teaching lessons regarding the success of the lesson, student learning, and questions.

Finally, I examined the differences in assignments, assessment, and course texts from before and after my classroom year and noted any changes in my approach. I categorized changes as relating to either the framework of the course or to the way the students and I engaged in the actual work of the course. While in this study I did not work with a critical friend to engage in data analysis and compare interpretations, such additional triangulation can strengthen the trustworthiness of the interpretation of the data, and strong examples of collaborative self-study work provide important models for self-study work (Bullock & Christou, 2009; Bullock & Ritter, 2011). In the sections that follow, I examine the findings that emerged from my examination of the various data sources.

Doing the Work of Teaching

Analysis of my journal entries from my time in the classroom indicates that, given the personal reminder of the daily demands of teaching and reexperiencing how challenging it was to be a teacher again (Peercy, in press), I felt that I was not approaching my teacher

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education courses from a perspective that considered carefully the needs of new teachers. My journal entries during the year I spent teaching indicated that I felt overwhelmed by the sheer time and energy that teaching requires. One of my goals had been to attend to how and in what ways I drew upon the research-based knowledge I taught in my teacher education courses in my classroom teaching. Reexperiencing the daily pace of teaching caused me to attend more carefully and deeply to how little time new teachers have for this:

> I don't know how much one thinks about theory when they are just trying to survive as a teacher … there has to be some time for reflection … [In my life as a teacher educator] I have gotten used to not having to have something ready to teach every single day and to being able to think about things in more peace and quiet rather than the almost constant din of kids.

I also journaled about my greater awareness of the demands that new teachers in my courses face: "I feel like I am really relearning the intensity of teaching every day and it is making me think a lot about the kinds of assignments and quantity of reading I require, especially for the [intensive Master's program] students." Given my secondary classroom experiences, I felt I needed to make some deliberate and thoughtful changes to how I approached my work as a teacher educator. Thus I decided to begin by redesigning the work and purpose of EDUC 600, which is a methods course about literacy for language learners that I had taught three times before.

One of the changes I found necessary involved focusing more deliberately on *how* to do the work of teaching (Peercy, in press). At the time, I was unfamiliar with work on practice-based pedagogy, but as I was considering how to center the course more on classroom practices, I encountered this body of work and immersed myself in it. I used the work on practice-based pedagogy to help frame changes that I thought would make the course more concrete and practice-centered, with more explicit connections between practice and theory. Below I present findings related to changes to the overall framework of the course, the ways those changes were enacted during and outside of class, and student reactions to the changes.

Changes to the Framework of the Course

I changed the course framework in three ways: organization, epistemology, and making the course more practice-centered. From an organizational perspective, I attempted to make the syllabus more explicit and interconnected. Rather than listing only course expectations, readings, assignment criteria, and deadlines, as I had in the past, I added objectives, application, and extension for each class meeting so that students could see a more holistic relationship between how their readings, time in class, and assignments all connected to one another, as well as how they would apply their learning outside of class to their subsequent assignments and class meeting. In the past, I had addressed the interconnections between readings, class time, and assignments through an agenda for each class period, but I felt that showing those connections on the syllabus allowed students to see a more global vision for the purpose and direction of the course for the entire semester.

Epistemological changes to the course syllabus arose from my emerging thinking about the developmental needs of the teachers in the course, the demands of the early years of teaching, and my growing sense of urgency that teacher education programs need to be more responsive to these issues. These changes were less obvious on paper, but were evidenced in several ways. One was a reduction in the overall quantity of assigned reading, with the intent that students would have more time to read each assignment more carefully, reflect on it more deeply, and consider their "enduring understanding" (Wiggins &

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McTighe, 2005) from the reading. In some cases, I moved reading assignments that I had used previously to other places in the semester where I thought they would be more meaningful to students, or I added reading material about certain topics that I thought would better support student learning. In other cases, I eliminated reading assignments that seemed too far removed from what students needed to know in the early years of teaching. I also added new, almost weekly assignments that engaged students in a variety of questions about the relationship between theory and practice and asked students to post a brief, but carefully considered reflection on a shared online discussion space (e.g., "What is your personal definition of the word 'theory'? Can you give an example of a theory? Where do theories come from? Does everyone have theories?" and "Do you use educational research to inform your teaching practices? Why? How?").

The practice-based changes I made to the course structure arose from my nascent understanding of the importance of more directly and frequently addressing classroom practices with teachers in my course. One change involved including a warm-up activity at the beginning of each class period in which students engaged with a prompt, sometimes individually but more often with other classmates. Warm-up activities usually required students to ask or answer a question (sometimes discrete, sometimes open-ended). My purpose in creating and using warm-up activities was to build classroom community, to model a way to initiate class, and to "think aloud" with my students after the warm-up about how different activities placed a variety of linguistic and content demands on them and, by extension, on their language learners. Although this was a small change at the beginning of each class period, student feedback indicated that they found this valuable (e.g., "I liked the warm-up idea, I will use it in my teaching practice," "I particularly liked the inventive warm-ups").

Another practice-based change in the course structure involved several opportunities during the semester for students to share lessons they were designing at various stages of planning, to teach them to peers, and to receive peer feedback. This was one of my most concerted attempts to center the course more solidly around opportunities to engage in practice and to really *do* certain aspects of teaching. Previously, early in the semester, students had turned in a proposal for a three-lesson unit plan (the culminating project for the course) that included details about the target instructional setting and learners, objectives, activities, and assessments, and they received feedback from me about their ideas. Throughout the semester, they used this outline and my feedback to build various parts of their unit, and in two class meetings they worked in small groups to receive feedback from classmates on a draft of their objectives and a draft of their literature review that supported their instructional decisions. They also taught a part of one of their lessons to peers at the end of the semester, but this was a presentation and not an opportunity to carefully discuss and analyze instructional moves. This time, although I kept the unit plan project as the course's major assignment, I infused several in-class assignments throughout the semester that required students to bring drafts of their lesson plans (that would become part of their unit) to discuss with peers, sometimes teach them to peers, and receive feedback from their peers on both written and orally presented lessons.

One of the lessons that students created and discussed with peers focused on learner-based differentiation. Students defined their target language learner population (age, English-language proficiency, etc.) and then considered what adaptations to content, process, product, or learning environment were necessary, based upon their learners' readiness, interest, or learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2000). In addition to readings and class discussion about what differentiation is and how it looks in a lesson, the concept of differentiation was further developed by watching two video examples of teachers using

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differentiated instruction in elementary classrooms. After watching the videos in class, students shared drafts of their differentiated lesson plans with peers and gave one another feedback and ideas for writing the final version of their differentiated lesson. Both the content and approach in this assignment were intended to develop a core practice of differentiating instruction by giving students more hands-on experience and understanding of lesson differentiation. Student feedback indicated that this experience was meaningful. In their informal evaluation, several echoed the response of a student who said that, "the differentiated lesson plan assignment helped me really focus on and understand how to implement this." Nevertheless, as I explain below, my attempts to make EDUC 600 more practice-centered resulted in limited engagement in core practices by students. Instead, students often talked *about* teaching rather than engaging in the actual *doing* of teaching.

Engaging in Peer Interaction

Although I tried to make EDUC 600 more practice-based, analysis of my syllabus, lesson plans, reflections on my lessons, and student evaluations revealed that my attempt to use practice-based pedagogy was not as effective as it could have been. I thought that creating more opportunities for peer-to-peer analysis and feedback on lesson drafts and other parts of their unit plan assignment would begin to provide students with additional support about the *hows* of practice by generating opportunities to try different aspects of practice, to receive peer and instructor suggestions, and to reflect upon these suggestions. However, I did not consider deeply enough how important it is for students to have *repeated* opportunities to *enact* their lessons (students had approximately three in-class opportunities during the semester to work in peer groups and spend 5–10 minutes teaching part of a lesson and then provide one another with feedback), nor did I explain clearly enough why they were doing this.

While some students appreciated peer-to-peer time spent teaching and examining their lessons, at least some had neither fully understood my purpose for small-group practice teaching, nor seen the value in it. This was evident in my observations during class time and in student course evaluations. As one student stated, "I would have liked to devote more class time to discussing the content rather than meeting in groups to discuss our assignments. I didn't find the discussing of our assignments helpful." This comment, which did not perceive course content and practice-centered work done in groups as tightly intertwined, suggests that course content (such as readings, video, graphic organizers and text shared via *PowerPoint*, and other materials) and activities intended to engage students in understanding and applying the course content were not integrated clearly enough. This same student's mention of "*discuss*[ing] assignments" (emphasis added) also brings to the fore a related problem that emerged during the time in which peers were supposed to teach segments of their lessons to one another. My observations and informal student feedback indicated that at times students talked *about* their lessons rather than teaching their lessons and receiving feedback on their *doing* of the lesson. That is, they discussed the *intended delivery* and lesson content rather than engaging in the *actual delivery* of the lesson and then discussing lesson delivery. Thus, I found that I needed to be more deliberate about explaining the rationale for the practice teaching of lessons, as well as providing a strong foundation for how to engage in deep examination and discussion of the lessons they taught to one another. I did not have the purpose set clearly enough in my own mind that highlighted the importance of students going through the steps of teaching the lesson, and I had fallen into the familiar routine of teaching *about* teaching, but not engaging course participants in *doing* teaching (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Troyan et al., 2013).

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Furthermore, I did not realize until my subsequent analysis of the data and deeper examination of the literature that my practice-centered attempts in EDUC 600 might have been more successful if I had identified a few specific core practices, shared examples through modeling, video, and case readings, and then engaged course participants in rehearsals in which they enacted the same core practices. Through this more structured cycle, we could have examined small segments of their enactment of practices by deconstructing them and considering them in careful detail (Grossman et al., 2009; Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Troyan et al., 2013). Through data analysis, I also came to realize that identification and elaboration of a few focal core practices in EDUC 600 would have bounded and focused the conversation, perhaps allowing students to be more specific and incisive in their feedback to peers.

Additionally, modeling and critiquing examples of the enactment of those core practices (either modeling by me, or through the use of video or cases) prior to enactment with peers might have allowed students to be less reluctant to offer constructive criticism to one another. Thus, I learned that engaging teachers in practice-based teaching requires teacher educators to be specific and deliberate in setting their own purposes for the centrality of practice in their courses and programs and to explain these clearly to students. Another important feature of this study was how students responded to the innovations that I attempted in my practice, which I present below.

Innovation in Practice?

Despite my attempts to make this course more practice-centered and thereby sidestep the common complaint from teachers about the lack of practical information in university teacher education courses (e.g., Anderson & Herr, 1999), formal end-of-course evaluations showed a trend of scores that were lower than the three other times I approached the course in a more traditional way, in which we did more talking *about* teaching. Lower scores were prevalent, particularly on four course evaluation measures: "The course was intellectually challenging," "I learned a lot from this course," "The instructor was effective in communicating the content of the course," and "The instructor helped create an atmosphere that kept me engaged in course content" (see Figure 1).

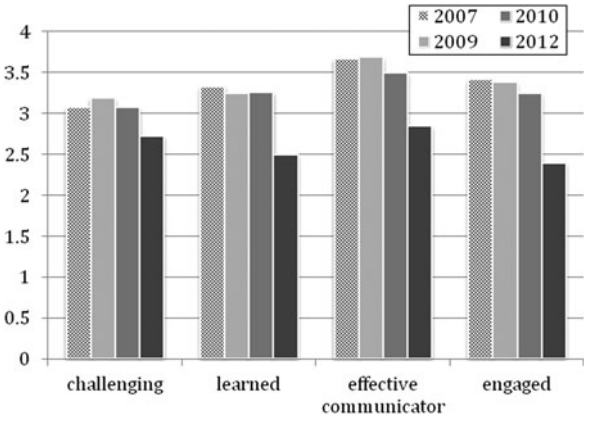

Figure 1. Formal course evaluation scores for three traditional semesters and the 2012 practice-based semester.

This outcome may, in part, have reflected student discomfort with the format of the course, which is in keeping with what Troyan et al. (2013) have found regarding the use of practice-based pedagogy with teachers of language learners:

> Given the novelty of the practice-based approach, specifically its departure from the expectations that preservice teachers may have for the nature of feedback and the role of a critical stance towards one's own practice, resistance should be expected. Rather than planning to avoid this natural part of the change process, it may be more prudent to establish clear norms for coaching and feedback, expect resistance in the process, and plan to respond to it as a collaborative community. (Troyan et al., 2013, p. 171)

Lower than usual course evaluation scores may also have been related to my limited execution of a practice-based approach, as I was still learning how to implement practice-based pedagogy and still discovering more about the research base on practice-based pedagogy as I developed and taught the course.

However, it is also likely that several contextual factors, and not just the practice-based changes I implemented in the course, contributed to this outcome on course evaluations. For instance, there were more students enrolled in the course who had no teaching experience and no experience with the school system than sometimes is the case. This was paired with the fact that also in the course were several experienced in-service teachers, as well as teachers who were in an intensive year-long internship program and in charge of their own classrooms every day. Thus, the range of experience and knowledge about classrooms was on a broad spectrum (more than some years), making it challenging to address the needs of both experienced and inexperienced teachers. Additionally, one-third of the class (six students) had taken a course the semester before that covered several of the same topics related to standards-based lesson planning and implementation and literacy development for language learners (but with a secondary emphasis, whereas this course focused on elementary students), and their formal course evaluation comments indicated that they felt the course content and assignments had not been well-differentiated between the two courses. For instance, one course participant commented: "I felt that this course was a complete review after taking [the course about] reading and writing in the secondary content areas. The classes should be blended or should focus on different content." Another student's comment echoed this sentiment: "The course content is very similar to [the secondary-focused course about reading and writing]. Even though the two courses are about different age groups (elementary versus secondary), the strategies, topics, and student work were very similar." Therefore, despite the attempts I made in this course to shift from the program's (and my own) usual focus on talking *about* teaching and to begin to make practice more central, at least some students did not perceive substantive differences between this course and their course about literacy with secondary language learners.

Overall, analysis revealed that in redesigning my approach to EDUC 600, I stopped short of my goals to make the course more practice-centered because I provided students with many opportunities to practice planning but not enough focused opportunities to practice implementation and participate in giving and receiving feedback. This raises important questions about how to give novice teachers more opportunities to implement the practice teaching of lessons, receive meaningful feedback, and also cover content related to the research base of the topic at hand. Recent work on core practices has put forth the principled use of rehearsals as part of a cycle of learning to teach through observation and analysis of exemplars, preparation and rehearsal, classroom enactment, and analysis of one's own teaching using video in order for novice teachers to gain experience with core practices (e.g., Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013; Troyan

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et al., 2013). In rehearsals, novice teachers practice enacting lessons and receive feedback from peers and teacher educators before they enact lessons with students. An infusion of rehearsal and enactment requires rethinking methods courses and, more broadly, teacher education programs (Lampert et al., 2013) in order to integrate practice meaningfully. Deeper integration of practice, therefore, is not just a task for EDUC 600, but is also a charge to consider for all courses and experiences in the larger program in which it is situated, as well as within other teacher education programs.

In Search of More Nuanced Understandings

Through this self-study of the challenges I experienced in attempting to use practice-based pedagogy in a course about literacy for elementary-aged ELLs, I have shown how the work in self-study and practice-based pedagogy demonstrate a shared interest in uniting practice and theory. I have also illustrated how further work in which teacher educators study their use of practice-based pedagogy could benefit from using a self-study lens. For example, while discussion of the importance of rehearsals is becoming more prominent in the work on core practices in teacher education, the field is in need of nuanced study of how teacher educators balance implementing such work in their courses and programs alongside the necessary depth of understanding teaching and learning and the social foundations that teacher candidates should have. Self-study can provide one powerful means of informing other teacher educators working to integrate core practices.

This work also contributes to the limited body of literature about the use of practice-based pedagogy with teachers of language learners, particularly ELLs. This brings to the fore the importance of further developing the field of study regarding the identification and teaching of specific core practices for language learners, as well as important questions about how core practices and new standards for teaching both content and ELLs (e.g., Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment standards for ELLs) intersect with one another. Questions about teaching language learners using core practices also raise the importance of identifying the commonalities and divergences in the core practices for world language learners and ELLs, a question on which the literature currently appears to be silent. Further, if more teacher education programs begin using practice-based pedagogy, it would be useful to generate a shared understanding of common pitfalls to avoid in redesigning courses. This study illustrates one such misstep by identifying my failure to take core practices far enough into implementation, as well as not articulating a clear vision (to myself or my students) about the components of and rationale for engaging in this work.

The field must also address how to balance the time spent on in-depth analysis of multiple opportunities to rehearse practices throughout the semester with the demands of establishing a profound knowledge of subject-specific content and the pedagogical moves that correspond with teaching that content. Perhaps, as more teacher education coursework moves into hybrid and online formats, this might allow for more flexibility in covering different aspects of coursework that compete for class time. However, as some teacher education courses move fully online, this begs the question of how to rehearse, discuss, and deeply examine practices together. In short, can core practices be taught and practiced in online courses or programs?

Finally, as several scholars have recently asserted, it is important that we achieve some common understanding of the ways in which we utilize core practices in teacher education. While some scholars have highlighted the importance of common terminology

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to unite our efforts in practice-based education (Grossman et al., 2013) and others have begun to identify both general and content-specific core practices (TeachingWorks, 2013a, 2013b; Troyan et al., 2013; Understanding Language, 2013), it is also essential that we add to the core practices literature regarding features for the actual teaching and use of core practices in teacher education (Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013; and Troyan et al., 2013 provide helpful cycles for using core practices with teachers). This brings to the fore the need to improve individual courses, such as EDUC 600, and to recognize the importance of more cohesive teacher education programs that provide opportunities for repeated use of core practices throughout candidates' programs. It also highlights the importance of future research that explores the short- and long-term impact of core practices work in teacher education on teachers' practices and on the learning of their students.

As Ball and Forzani (2007) argue, education researchers must "arm themselves with the special analytic skills that will allow them to usefully bridge the alleged divide between theory and practice. It is along this divide that education researchers have special expertise" (p. 537). It is up to us as teacher educators to think carefully about what core practices actually comprise successful teaching and learning, to interact thoughtfully with teacher candidates about the *doing* of these practices, and to engage with other teacher educators in exploring and enacting the use of core practices.

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