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Description

This article addresses the dilemma of promoting critical pedagogy within portfolio assessment, which has been implemented in many teacher education programs to meet state and national mandates for performance-based assessment. It explores how one teacher educator works to move portfolio assessment to a level of critical self-reflection that prepares teachers to address the complex issues presented by a multicultural society. First, this article describes the ways that critical inquiry methods, democratic dialogue, and portfolio assessment can be integrated to the study of theory and preservice teachers' self-reflection as a bridge to developing a critical lens for classroom practice and a democratic society. Second, it presents preservice teachers' narratives of critical self-reflection.

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Developing a Critical Lens Among Preservice Teachers While Working Within Mandated Performance-Based Assessment Systems

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the dilemma of promoting critical pedagogy within portfolio assessment, which has been implemented in many teacher education programs to meet state and national mandates for performance-based assessment. It explores how one teacher educator works to move portfolio assessment to a level of critical self-reflection that prepares teachers to address the complex issues presented by a multicultural society. First, this article describes the ways that critical inquiry methods, democratic dialogue, and portfolio assessment can be integrated to the study of theory and preservice teachers' self-reflection as a bridge to developing a critical lens for classroom practice and a democratic society. Second, it presents preservice teachers' narratives of critical self-reflection.

 The call by state and national accreditation policy makers for performance-based assessment has resulted in portfolio assessment systems in many, if not most, teacher education programs (R. S. Anderson & DeMuelle, 1998). It is important that teacher educators continually examine the impact of portfolio assessment on preservice teachers' knowledge, dispositions, and teaching performance. Critical to that examination is an examination of the standards that frame teacher education programs. In the case of this study, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium standards (1992) and the Indiana Professional Standards Board rules (2002) frame the portfolio assessment of preservice teachers' learning products. The standards drive the interpretation of curriculum and instruction as preservice teachers submit portfolios with 30 artifacts and reflections that connect learning with knowledge, dispositions, and performance considered characteristic of reflective teachers. Thus, this study brings to the forefront the importance of examining the interplay between the standards and portfolio assessment for critical pedagogical development, and it addresses the dilemma of promoting critical pedagogy¹ within portfolio assessment as a measurement for teacher certification.

As a teacher educator who is interested in preparing teachers to address the complex issues presented by a multicultural society as a form of critical pedagogy, I continue to ask myself how to move portfolio assessment to a level

of critical self-reflection² that is at the core of critical pedagogy (Breault, 2003; Freire, 1973/2003). Portfolio assessment promotes reflection on learning experiences (R. S. Anderson & DeMuelle, 1998; Camp, 1998; Moss, 2003; Moss & Nichols, 2002; Murphy, 1998), but aligning the process with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium standards (1992) does not ensure the development of critical pedagogy toward the goal of preparing citizens for a democratic society, especially if teacher educators and preservice teachers view the portfolio as a mandated product of mastery learning.

As committed to scholar-practitioner teacher education³ (Moss, 2004a; Torres & Mercado, 2003), I believe that teacher educators must play a leading role in preparing teachers as instructional leaders, critical inquirers, and researchers in educating and informing the public about best instructional practices by bringing relevant research-based perspectives to the public schools and community for dialogue and promotion of democracy in education. As such, three questions drive decisions as I design methods courses for preservice teachers: How can I engage preservice teachers in critical reflection on theory? How can I engage preservice teachers in critical self-reflection? How can I assess critical reflexivity among preservice teachers? With those questions in mind, I frame my courses in part by the critical work of Freire (1973/2003), Rodgers (2002), Shor (1996), Jenlink and Carr (1996), Burbules (1993), Issacs (1993), Giroux (1985, 1988), Nieto (1999), and Dewey (1915, 1916, 1938). This article first describes the ways that I have integrated critical inquiry methods, democratic dialogue, and portfolio assessment as integral elements to the study of theory and for preservice teachers' critical self-reflection. I argue that this integrated practice can serve as a bridge to developing a critical lens for classroom practice and a democratic society. Second, this article presents an analysis of preservice teachers' narratives of critical self-reflection of learning to teach within portfolio assessment.

Portfolio Assessment Systems in Teacher Education

Portfolio assessment in teacher education offers an alternative to test-driven instruction when it follows learning, rather than when it leads it (Stowell, McDaniel, Rios, & Kelly, 1993, p. 61). As portfolio assessment in teacher education evolved, a distinction was made between the formative developmental process and the summative exit point (Centra, 1996; Green & Smyser, 1995). Green and Smyser (1995) have argued that portfolio assessment could be an endless formative process throughout the life of a teacher. *Formative* focuses on the developmental process and provides evidence of continual improvement, growth, and learning. *Summative* assessment corresponds with a

decision point at which time the portfolio must meet criteria for advancement. In the case of teacher preparation, *summative* is the point at which the portfolio is submitted for evaluation for teacher certification. Guidebooks for developing a teaching portfolio, such as the one developed by Bullock and Hawk (2001), reflect the summative nature of portfolio assessment. The school of education where I prepare teachers has developed a similar guidebook for preparing the preservice teaching portfolio as a measure for teacher certification.

This use of portfolio assessment to assess learning and program development indicates the authenticity of the process. Krause (1996) focuses on the process as an "authentic and dynamic" process (p. 130) that draws the preservice teacher into a reflective process through which one shares responsibility for one's development.

Central to portfolio use is "a process of constant reflection and specifically documented action concerning one's teaching" (Zubizarreta, 1998, p. 183). At its best, portfolio assessment empowers preservice teachers to be creative and to know themselves in the process of becoming teachers (Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998; Zidon, 1996). At its worst, the pragmatics of implementation seems at times to quickly deteriorate into narrowly defined performance-based assessment (Klecker, 2000). Portfolio assessment is moved to the forefront and so drives instruction and learning, just as test-driven instruction resulted from standardized testing. How do teacher educators resist a minimalist approach to mandated portfolio assessment?

Developing a Critical Pedagogical Lens Within Mandated Portfolio Assessment

I continue to examine the possibilities of taking a critical stance with portfolio assessment in professional preservice teacher development by examining the use of portfolio assessment as a critical inquiry method within teacher education courses (Moss, 2004b). I define *critical inquiry* as authentic participation (G. L. Anderson, 1998, 1999; Kanpol, 1998) in the learning process for teacher preparation, engaged reading of texts dealing with cultural politics in education, and participants' self-reflection on the process and learning. I argue that it is within portfolio assessment, as integrated with inquiry-based teaching for professional development, that teacher educators and preservice teachers may approach critical self-reflection. I design my teacher education courses as those that are inquiry based, providing preservice teachers with the opportunity to read and write critical reflective-reflexive responses to relevant educational research, to dialogue with peers, and to reflect on their prior experiences as students and present experiences in urban field-based classrooms serving adolescent students.

Inquiry and Dialogue in Teaching and Research

I began the process of teaching preservice teachers in a critical reading class and in secondary English and social studies methods in the fall 2001. When I received my teaching assignment, I utilized an inquiry process to find current research literature for a variety of topics, such as collaborative and cooperative learning, critical literacy, alternative assessment, constructivist practices, and technology in instruction. Students were assigned to read two to four articles each week and write reflective-reflexive responses in preparation for class dialogues.

I explained to the students that reflection included reading for understanding and critical thinking. Students were asked to write a brief summary of the key points of each article, as well as an expanded analysis. I explained *reflexive* as using the article as a lens to examine their educational experiences, as a student and as a preservice teacher observing in classrooms. Some students moved beyond presenting summaries and expanded summaries the first two semesters I taught, but others continued to summarize the readings, trying to figure out what the teacher wanted to hear. The portfolio reflections were not much different. Students quickly reduced the three-part reflection process to formulaic writing, as noted by one student in his 2002 narrative essay.

Honestly, I feel as if I'm taking a standardized test. There's one way to put together your portfolio, and those that are assessing them are grading the portfolios with a number system. So, I ask myself the question, how can I get more points, currency, for my portfolio?

It reminded me of when I taught language arts to seventh-grade students. The Texas state writing test drove the curriculum to the point that students learned to write formula-like five-paragraph themes. Only when I engaged my seventh-grade students in critical dialogues about power issues concerning state testing did they grow intellectually—not only in their ability to examine the cultural patterns in the test but also in their ability to choose the standardized answer on the test while expressing their knowledge of multiculturalism in the classroom. That was an intersubjective, or dialogical, process of teaching. I think that *process* is in keeping with Freire's challenge to teachers (1973/2003) to move away from the narration of established knowledge to students and toward engaging them in an intersubjective narrative of learning.

Developing an intersubjective, dialogical process with predominantly White middle-class preservice teachers is not as easy as it was with African American seventh- and eighth-grade students, given that many preservice teachers come armed with defense. They want to blame public school parents, legislators, and children themselves for what they fear to come—the failure of their future students to achieve because of standardized tests. The pattern of standardization seemed to actually reinforce standardization and

minimalism. What is critical pedagogy for a teacher educator in that situation? I began by looking at the reading response assignment, expanding the responses to summary, reflection, quotes, reflexive stories of experience, imaging practical use of learning in the classroom, and eventually an optional creative response.

Critical Self-Reflective Narrative: A Different Kind of Course Final

I created a final experience inquiry project to replace the traditional final exam. The experience was intended to engage preservice teachers to critically examine the course processes and patterns, as well as the portfolio assessment system that was directly affecting them. I used postformal (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993) and narrative inquiry methods (Barone, 1992a, 1992b; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1995) to design survey questions to guide students in the construction of critical self-reflective essay stories of experience in the evolutionary change toward portfolio assessment.

Through the survey questions, preservice teachers were encouraged to examine the critical tensions that they experienced or understood in the program as it shifted from a testing system for certification to one of reflective-practitioner teacher preparation. Preservice teachers examined the challenges of being in a program in a state of change and the ways that political, ideological, pedagogical, and epistemological factors were evident in their education classes. They looked at the ways that culture might be affected by this change and the ways that local school cultures might resist their continued growth toward actualizing the work of reflective practice. In preparation as reflective teachers, preservice teachers examined the use of collaborative learning format, projects, portfolio assessment, synthesis papers, reading research articles, and dialogue for influence, impact, or effect. Finally, preservice teachers described memorable experiences and examined them for changes in their thinking or behavior.

Although all students completed the end-of-the-semester reflective assignment, the essay narratives were not used for a course grade. Even though the project could have received exempt status, I used institutional review board-approved consent forms to give students a choice about whether their critical narrative stories were to become data for the ongoing inquiry into teaching within mandated portfolio assessment for teacher certification. My intent was also to model for them engagement in teacher research as a way to encourage them to subsequently research their teaching practice, whether informally or formally. Usually, about 23 out of 25 students gave permission for their narrative essays to be examined. Over 350 essay responses had been collected at this point.

During the early years of inquiry, 2002 and 2003, I primarily examined students' narratives concerning the change to portfolio assessment and the

scholar-practitioner teacher identity (Moss, 2003, 2004a). I was looking for evidence of portfolio assessment and its affect on preservice teachers' development in a critical way—that is, producing critical dispositions toward teaching for democracy, equity, and social justice.

First of all, students' perspectives could have been interpreted as being critical and pointing out the injustice of mandated portfolio assessment—specifically, its being implemented during the senior year of their teacher certification program (multiple voices referred to portfolio assessment as having been “dumped in [their] laps”). One student reflected, “Portfolio assessment is not the answer. Monday in [class] you referred to workbook pages as ‘busy work,’ well that is basically what these portfolios are.” In 2003–2004, I identified those voices as being characteristic of a technicist teacher identity (Moss, 2003), and I interpreted those voices as being resistant to change (Moss, 2004a).

The tension of implementation blurred visions of what portfolio assessment is (its purpose), but at the same time the tension created a catalyst for exploring the potential of portfolio assessment for the professional development of preservice teachers. Members of the faculty had a margin of freedom to interject their perspectives as they integrated portfolio assessment into the stream of their teaching practices or simply participated the one day each semester to score the more than 100 portfolios submitted at the end of student teaching. For me, the process was a catalyst for totally integrating teaching and research.

Students' critical self-reflective essays became a source of data for me to examine the impact of my teaching practices on their understanding and dispositions toward critical pedagogy. The examination of the essays also engaged me in critical reflection for change in terms of required readings. For example, I began to see a pattern among the preservice teachers' responses to two particular assigned readings: Apple's 1992 article “The Text and Cultural Politics” and Tunnell and Ammon's 1996 article “The Story of Ourselves: Fostering Multiple Historical Perspectives.” Typically, students felt anger in response to the article and pointed out how it was “extremely biased and leftist.” Students saw the article as a “vessel for importing political notions” rather than “informing society for a greater good” (which begs the question, what is the greater good?).

Other students viewed the article with a new insightfulness about how textbooks subtly provide a biased view. One student in the 2003 spring session reflected,

I became increasingly angry when I read this article. But, as I became angrier, I also thought of strategies to counterbalance a text whose framework was subtly constructing a social reality. This is a, for me, brand new way of looking at a textbook.

As I analyzed the students' reflections—which I saw as part of the portfolio assessment process, given that these writings ended up as artifacts in the

portfolio—I considered the impact that assigned readings have on students' learning. Just as the assigned article made this one student think critically about the impact of textbooks on the way that students view the world, I realized that if I want students to consider critical pedagogy as a way of viewing teaching practice, it might be helpful to read a text that would provide the class participants an opportunity to openly explore the ideas of critical pedagogy. Thus, I assigned *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1973/2003) and wondered if this would be a way to move portfolio assessment toward a reflective and critical practice.

Preservice Teachers' Portfolio Assessment of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

I originally planned to refer to this section as Narrative Analysis of Critical Self-Reflection Among Preservice Teachers. The title is a source of critical self-reflection for me as I stop and think about how I have developed a pattern of methodically using the term *narrative analysis* in my research. The use of narrative analysis is well grounded in Polkinghorne's delineation (1995) of narrative configurations. In general, quantitative methods are stated and then followed by a report of findings with a kind of unquestioned authority and void of explanation; likewise, I use narrative analysis to refer to the story that emerges from analysis of the data narratives—in this case, the preservice teachers' narrative essays and reflective–reflexive responses to assigned readings during the course of the semester.

As I read the students' reflections, I look for their comprehension and critique of the texts, and I try to understand their developing pedagogical perspective. Although my use of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is clear evidence that I intentionally expose preservice teachers to a critical lens, I examine their responses for evidence of reflective thought rather than acceptance of the text from a “banking” disposition, the very disposition that Freire (1973/2003) critiques. For example, one student evidenced an examination of her personal experience through the lens of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Having come from a background where children are seen and not heard, my concern is that I be a liberator of the oppressed and not perpetuate the cultural problems in education and become an oppressor. The work I did in this class was very intense but it forced me to think about the educational process in a way I had never thought about it before. The class brought in the human side, especially through the reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

One could interpret the “forced” reference as a kind of coercive educational process (i.e., how the work in the critical reading class “forced” her to think differently). In other parts of her narrative, the preservice teacher provides evidence of having learned critical terminology, such as *liberator* and *oppressed*, but her reflection on the newness of considering the political role of

education in the perpetuation of cultural problems could be interpreted as a beginning awareness of the power that she has in her role as teacher.

Another preservice teacher expressed a similar impact from reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He reflected on the way that the assignments engaged him in critical examination:

Almost every piece of work I encountered in this class made me examine and reflect upon political, ideological, pedagogical, and epistemological factors. I then had to reconstruct my beliefs and values accordingly. Paulo Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was most likely the most profound piece I have read in a long time.

The preservice teacher went on to connect this new way of viewing as a change toward becoming a scholar–practitioner, and he described this as a desired change for education in the broader community where he may be employed:

I think it is important that scholar practitioners are created and made a part of the community at large. The preservice teachers should bring to the school this mentality. We also need to encourage graduates to pursue higher education to become people of power who actually can change the current “banking” method of education. I began to re-examine my words and behaviors before I spoke in class.

The student's language here indicates that a positive disposition toward critical pedagogy is not only a matter of understanding the text but one that requires thoughtful behavior. This shows evidence of moving portfolio assessment toward a critical perspective as knowledge, dispositions, and performance, as mandated by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium standards (1992). That is, the assessment can be viewed as (a) knowledge of the politics that are involved in the teaching principles and (b) dispositions that go beyond a positive attitude and toward the development of new behaviors and habits of mind that show consciousness. At the same time, I have to ask the question, am I “banking” critical portfolio assessment and scholar–practitioner teaching?

Whereas I do not overtly use the term *scholar–practitioner* during the course, students are asked to reflect on the concept as they write their narrative analysis. “How did the instructor's practice of scholar–practitioner teaching affect your perspective of teaching?” is among a set of survey questions to help guide the students in their narrative analysis. As such, I try to model scholar–practitioner teacher leadership in my course design and then identify what my students have seen modeled and what they have participated in as scholar–practitioner teaching.

The way that I am defining my teaching practices and course design is in line with Horn's definition (2004):

The term *scholar–practitioner* applies to those teachers and students who possess knowledge, know how to acquire knowledge, have the skills that promote the

effective processing of knowledge, and have the courage to use the knowledge to promote social justice, caring, and democratic participation for themselves and others. (p. 211)

Although this kind of critical perspective had been my goal, it was not until I introduced my students to multiple critical texts—especially, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—that they began to adopt a critical language and critically examine their educational experiences, as indicated by student reflection:

Reading journal articles and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* affected my view of teaching. I realized the importance of on-going teacher development because I have compared my own *mis*education to what scholars say and have noticed the huge gap between the two.

I feel cheated somewhat. But this class has made me feel in control of my learning. What is important is that I feel like I've learned things that will make me become a good teacher.

While I work with preservice teachers, I continuously mediate my role between meeting mandated portfolio assessment standards and taking a critical stance. Although I recognize the power I have to choose course texts that influence preservice teachers' professional development (as reflected in their portfolios), I recognize the power that legislation and accrediting agencies have on influencing education. By providing preservice teachers with the opportunity to develop a critical lens within mandated portfolio assessment, the process gains rigor and credibility as preservice teachers take ownership of their portfolios and the learning process. As one preservice teacher stated, "you know, I never thought about it in this way before! I guess I don't have to prove anything to the people that read my portfolio."

Final Reflection

Although the preservice teacher in the last quote cannot escape from having his portfolio read and scored by faculty, I think his voice reflects his freedom to use the portfolio assessment process for professional and personal development, as opposed to simply filling a binder with 30 artifacts for a grade. Preservice teachers can instead focus on authoring their teaching identities, as indicated in the following reflection:

The most critical experience in this class was when we wrote the five lesson plans. While creating them, I envisioned myself in the classroom doing what I was planning. It was very exciting but also revealed to me the importance of grounding everything in theory. It is important to continue researching as a teacher to find what works and using that to plan your lesson.

The preservice teacher's statement shows that he aspires to the standard of reflective practice as put forth by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), who conceptualize three perspectives of knowledge: knowledge for practice, knowledge in

practice, and knowledge of practice. Using the concept of knowledge for practice, the teacher educator works out of an assumption that knowledge exists in the literature as a result of one's research and that of other teacher educators who disseminate the knowledge to preservice teachers for practice. This can be true of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. The teacher educator is expected by the school of education and preservice teachers to provide the latter with a wealth of knowledge about teaching practices, instructional strategies, and planning—all decontextualized from an actual classroom setting. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) write, "teaching is a wise action in the midst of uncertain and changing situations" (p. 266). Can this kind of wisdom be disseminated in a university classroom? Can preservice teachers enter the teaching profession with wisdom in their "bag of tricks"? This concept aligns with Dewey's (1910) view of reflection as a kind of interruption in tacit knowledge within the stream of practice that results in changed action. That is the goal of moving portfolio assessment to the point of preservice teachers' developing a critical lens through which they can examine the knowledge banks that they are being provided and so eventually develop teaching stances that are ideally grounded in rigorous inquiry and visions beyond their students' passing standardized tests.

As I continue to analyze the reflective essays following the use of critical texts by Freire (1973/2003) and Giroux (1985, 2004), in comparison to those essays from eight sessions before the use of those texts, preservice teachers' reflections indicate that portfolio assessment alone will not promote critical perspectives. If portfolio assessment provides one set of standards for teaching development, they must be examined through multiple lenses, including a critical lens. The process may move portfolio assessment toward the intended goal of developing preservice teachers into reflective practitioners.

That said, I end with one last preservice teacher's reflection that describes how he has begun to publicly argue for his new perspective that values theory as well as practice. He reflected,

About halfway through the semester, after reading and reflecting upon articles, I began to see the value of a teacher education program centered on theory. I began to realize how I could use theory in the classroom. I became excited about promoting literacy in the classroom.

I began to think of teacher education critically, rather than just babbling from the "practical" teacher education camp. It was the emphasis on reflection that resulted in this perspective. **TEP**

Notes

1. Critical pedagogy has been defined within a critical theory framework, as presented by such scholars as Bigelow (1990), Britzman (1991), Kanpol (1994, 1998), Shor (1996), and Wink (2005). In reading these works following 13 years of classroom

teaching in a middle school setting, I felt tension. My practice in teaching African American students language arts in a state that systematically tested writing based on dominant English-language patterns, often referred to as "proper" English by preservice English teachers, addressed the ways that the test privileged middle-class English speakers and disadvantaged low-socioeconomic and African American students who spoke a dialect of English. I connected with the critical pedagogy literature because my teaching practice addressed cultural, racial, and social class issues. This pedagogical practice resulted in higher achievement for minority students.

2. In this article, *critical self-reflection* is defined as the examination of personal and professional growth (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standard No. 9 [1992]) toward becoming a scholarly teacher committed to democratic ideals of equality and social justice for all students. Evidence includes awareness of voice and participation in one's development, ownership of one's portfolio, and examination of self for cultural biases and for participation in inequitable practices, with the intent of changing toward practices that promote a greater participation of all students and the development of critical citizenship for democracy. See Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004), who "poses six principles of pedagogy for social justice" (p. 65).

3. Key elements of a scholar-practitioner teacher education program, as identified by preservice teachers, include portfolio assessment, engaging in scholarly practice, processing knowledge through dialogue, reflective practices, and participation in a developmental change process. A scholar-practitioner teacher is a reflective practitioner who thinks about what is happening during the learning process. She or he maintains a consciousness of power issues with regard to race, gender, and socioeconomics. The critical practitioner is conscious of the political structures influencing learning. He or she listens to students and examines his or her teaching practice. Research and teaching, theory and practice, and reflection and reflexion are inseparable in inquiry-based instruction, which is at the core of a scholar-practitioner approach to preparing teachers.

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