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"My assessment didn't seem real": The Influence of Field Experiences on Preservice Teachers' Agency and Assessment Literacy

J. Spencer Clark[1]

Abstract

To date, there is little or no research that specifically examines assessment literacy in social studies education, or the relationship between preservice teachers assessment literacy and their thinking about their own agency. This article focuses on three preservice social studies teachers who demonstrated a high degree of assessment literacy in their lesson plans, by developing assessments that supported their purpose for teaching social studies and their instructional decisions. The preservice teachers' thinking about their assessment decisions in their field experience classrooms was examined through artifacts, interviews, and reflections. The preservice teachers' thinking demonstrated that their assessment literacy was distinct based upon their views of the teaching profession. The findings from this case study highlight the ways that the authoritative discourses of assessment can influence the agency of preservice teachers. The discussion of findings highlights several implications for social studies teacher education.

Keywords: *Assessment Literacy, Preservice Teachers, Agency, Discourse, Field Experiences*

Introduction

Assessment is a vital component of effective instruction and a common concern for many preservice teachers (Grant & Salinas, 2008; Heafner, 2004; McGee & Colby, 2014; Mertler, 2003; Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Sigel & Wissehr, 2011). District, state, and national entities expect teachers to accurately assess student achievement, yet many novice teachers feel ill prepared to effectively and accurately assess their students upon leaving teacher education (Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Otero, 2006; Sigel & Wissehr, 2011). In many teacher education programs and social studies methods courses, inadequate attention is given to developing preservice teachers' knowledge of assessment and evaluation methodology (Heafner, 2004; Stiggins 2002). With limited time and an abundance of possible content to cover, curricular and instructional methodology is often given priority over assessment strategies in teacher education courses. As a consequence, preservice teachers inadequately understand the role of assessment in

[1] Assistant Prof., Utah State University, spencer.clark@usu.edu

their instruction and student learning (Campbell & Evans, 2000; Heafner, 2004; Stiggins, 2002), and are often left to learn more about assessment from their school experiences (clinical experiences, student teaching, their first position, their own schooling) than in their teacher education coursework (Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Sigel & Wissehr, 2011).

Preservice teachers' school experiences can shape their perception of assessment and significantly impact their assessment decisions, as well as many other instructional decisions (Campbell & Evans, 2000; Heafner, 2004). Yet, all teachers retain some agency and make decisions that mediate the accepted practices of schools, or even the official curriculum comprised in texts and mandated curriculum (Apple, 1992). The potential of a teacher's agency is subject to the range of their instructional capabilities, and their confidence in those capabilities (Danielewicz, 2001). For novice teachers, developing confidence in their capabilities to assess student learning effectively is an increasingly difficult component of instructional practice, primarily because assessment methods in schools are associated with many conflicting discourses, curricular influences, and accountability measures that are associated with "a wide variety of evidence-eliciting techniques" (Popham, 2009, p. 5).

Recently, researchers have examined preservice teachers *assessment literacy* to measure the assessment capabilities and knowledge of preservice teachers, and to better understand the assessment decisions they make with those capabilities (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Mertler, 2004; Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Sigel & Wissehr, 2011; Popham, 2009 & 2011; Sloan, 2009; Volante & Fazio, 2007). Many of these studies suggest that teacher educators should focus on preservice teacher's assessment literacy, or on gaps in their assessment literacy, to help preservice teachers make better assessment decisions. These suggestions are based solely on the preservice teachers' decisions and the assumption that their assessment decisions directly represent the extent of their assessment literacy and assessment capabilities. These studies have failed to consider preservice teachers thinking about their own assessment literacy, their thinking about the social and institutional constraints on their assessment capabilities, and how their thinking contributes to their assessment decisions and ultimately their own agency.

To date, there is little or no research that examines assessment literacy in social studies education (Anderson et al., 2014), or the relationship between preservice teachers assessment literacy and their thinking about their own agency. This article will focus on three preservice teachers who demonstrated a high degree of assessment literacy in their lesson plans, by

developing assessments that supported their purpose for teaching social studies and their instructional decisions. The preservice teachers thinking about their assessment decisions, in interviews and reflections, demonstrated that their assessment literacy is distinct based upon their views of the teaching profession.

Theoretical Framework and Related Literature

The initial research question for this study asked: How does preservice teachers understanding of assessment influence their thinking about their own agency? In consideration of this question, the study was designed through a constructivist lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) because the preservice teachers in this study were continually constructing their own conceptions of assessment and agency, while also considering how each conception is enabled and constrained in the curriculum development process. From this perspective, the theoretical framework for this study focused on the problematic discourses of the teaching culture (Britzman, 2003), the discourses associated with the assessment literacy of preservice teachers (Popham, 2011; Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013), and the ecological aspects of an individual's agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2006).

This study focused on the discourses used by preservice teachers to describe how they thought about their assessment and curricular-instructional decisions. Discourse, in the study, was broadly conceived as systems of thinking comprised of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that set the conditions by which decisions were interpreted and reflected upon to determine one's location in institutional, political, and social contexts (Britzman, 2003; Foucault, 1986). Assessment, and thus assessment literacy, represents a formalized discourse that requires educators to understand broadly "those concepts and procedures thought likely to influence educational decisions [and] things apt to make a real-world difference in the day-to-day decisions" (Popham, 2011) they make. From a socio-cultural perspective, assessment literacy is:

> A dynamic context dependent social practice that involves teachers articulating and negotiating classroom and cultural knowledges with one another and with learners, in the initiation, development and practice of assessment to achieve the learning goals of students. (Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013, p. 242)

The preservice teachers' in this study made choices among a variety of assessment related discourses and demonstrated their priorities through their decisions. Britzman's (2003) discussion of contradictory and problematic discourses included the formalized discourses that constitute assessment literacy, and also incorporated the discourses that drive preservice teachers in using their assessment literacy in personally relevant ways, within the social and institutional constraints of schools.

Assessment Literacy as Problematic Discourse and a Basis for Agency

In teacher education and social studies methods courses, preservice teachers are confronted with a variety of discourses regarding assessment, curriculum, and instructional methodology. They have to negotiate any new discourses with prior discourses that have derived meaning from their experiences in schools. Often times many of these discourses can appear contradictory in teacher education, especially regarding assessment, and these contradictory meanings are at the heart of the "problematic nature of education and the language we use to describe our experiences" (Britzman, 2003, p. 38).

To distinguish between contradictory educational discourses, Britzman (2003), borrowing from Bakhtin, described two types of discourse used by individuals: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Britzman (2003) described authoritative discourse as "discourse that demands allegiance, an *a priori* discourse that operates within a variety of social contexts and partly determines our 'symbolic practices,' or the normative categories that organize and disorganize our perceptions" (p. 42). Authoritative discourse is always in dialogue with internally persuasive discourse because they occupy the same space. Internally persuasive discourse "is denied all privilege" and "pulls one away from norms and admits a variety of contradictory social discourses" (Britzman, 2003, p. 42). Internally persuasive discourse represents a starting place for preservice teachers' thinking, or "the site of departure…. A tentative discourse, subject to negotiation and shifting contexts, and able to voice possibilities unforeseen…a discourse of becoming" (Britzman, 2003, p. 42). Preservice teachers bring experiences from both the K-12 classroom and teacher education, where they have encountered and used multiple and contradictory discourses – some authoritative, some internally persuasive.

When preservice teachers discuss and demonstrate their assessment literacy they utilize communities of discourse that influence their assessment decisions. As Britzman (2003) noted, "Our words signify communities of discourse that realize language as social and these

communities – authoritative and personal – are always in conflict" (p. 44). Social studies methods courses are often sites where these discourses come into conflict. Some recent studies have examined the context of a social studies methods course, and how preservice teachers negotiate conflicting discourses in their thinking about a variety practices (e.g., Fragnoli, 2006; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Pryor, 2006; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007; Slekar, 2009; Waring, 2010). While there are no studies that examine assessment literacy specifically in social studies methods courses, or the assessment literacy of preservice social studies teachers, there have been several studies examining preservice teachers assessment literacy in other content areas (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Mertler, 2004; Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Sigel & Wissehr, 2011). As a whole, the small body of research on assessment literacy indicates that preservice teachers often develop their assessment literacy more in their school experiences. Furthermore, preservice teachers viewed the process of becoming literate in assessment as more of an adoption of traditional assessment practices, or the practices and strategies of the school context where they taught. The research on assessment literacy demonstrates that preservice teachers prioritize the authoritative discourses associated with traditional forms of assessment (tests, quizzes, multiple choice, true/false, short answer, etc.) when they implement their lessons and related assessments (Sigel & Wissehr, 2011).

Assessment decisions are deeply connected to many other aspects of the instructional decision-making process, and a teacher's assessment literacy is just the starting place for those decisions. Teachers need to have assessment literacy in order to meet the needs of diverse learners, and teachers would ideally be able to use a wide "range of formative and summative assessment strategies" (Banks et. al., 2010, p. 74). Preservice teachers who fail to develop the ability to utilize a wide range of assessment strategies during their time in teacher education are susceptible in their school experiences to a variety of influences (colleagues, district outcomes, packaged curriculum, state and national standards, state tests, etc.) that may promote a narrow view of assessment or the use of traditional forms of assessment (Kenna & Russell, 2015; Sigel & Wissehr, 2011). Since social studies teachers have long used traditional forms of assessment – such as multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions on course exams – it is difficult to directly attribute the extent to which these influences have affected teachers (Grant & Salinas, 2008). A teacher's assessment literacy represents the assessment strategies that they are capable of implementing in the instructional decision-making process, but not necessarily the strategies

they will decide to use. A teacher's awareness of their capabilities to develop and use assessments are important because, in coordination with their purpose or rationale for teaching, these capabilities open-up possibilities for agency. Danielewicz (2001) noted that a novice teacher's agency is heavily dependent on their belief that they are capable of a specific decision or action. Yet, how teachers' use their assessment literacy to make assessment choices is much more complex, and encompasses a process in which they consider not only their capability to make assessment and instructional decisions, as well as the possibilities of their agency, but also the perceived constraints of their own school context (Cornbleth, 2001; Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013). A teacher's agency, then, represents a constant process of negotiation, which "can only be understood if it is conceived…as an effect of particular social and institutional practices" (Donald in Britzman, 2003, p. 53). Thus, assessment is one of many instructional components that teachers' constantly have to negotiate as they gauge their capabilities in the classroom and the variety of social and institutional constraints that vie to control and normalize their practice. With an increased focus on accountability and high-stakes testing in many social studies classrooms (Doppen, 2006; Grant & Salinas, 2008), new teachers' understanding of their capabilities to make decisions about assessment can be especially conflicted and constrained by the perceivably accepted assessment practices of their mentors, colleagues, districts, and states (Cornbleth, 2001).

The concept of agency is helpful in making sense of individuals' actions, decisions, and practices within societal and institutional constraints. This study is informed by an ecological conception of agency. Biesta and Tedder (2006) have most recently theorized about an ecological perspective on agency combining several well-known agency theorists (Archer, 1995; Bourdieu, 1977; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Giddens, 1984). Biesta and Tedder (2006) described agency as an achievement of action under particular ecological conditions. They described that even if actors have appropriate capacities, their ability to achieve agency depends on the interaction of the capacities and the ecological conditions. Therefore, Biesta and Tedder (2006) view agency as an individual's personal capacity to act in combination with the affordances of the environment or context of action. Priestley et al. (2012) noted "viewing agency in such terms helps us to understand how humans are able to be reflexive and creative, acting counter to societal constraints, but also how individuals are enabled and constrained by their social and material environments" (p. 196). Human capacity to be reflexive and creative

empowers agents to be "influenced by, but not determined by, society" (Priestley et al., 2012, p. 197).

Research Methodology

Participants

In order to investigate preservice teachers thinking about assessment and agency in a social studies methods course, the study utilized a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2009). The participants were selected because they were students in a secondary social studies methods course, which was taken immediately before their student teaching experience. This specific methods course was the second social studies methods course the participants had taken and it focused specifically on curriculum development, whereas the first social studies methods course focused more on the content, rationale, and purpose for teaching social studies. These criteria were important because the researcher wanted participants to have had a significant amount of time to think about their purpose for teaching social studies outside of the current methods course, while also beginning to think about the transition into student teaching and the teaching profession. These students were part of a cohort and had taken education courses together for three full semesters by the conclusion of this study.

Middle States University (MSU), a public research university in the Midwestern United States, was the site of the methods course and study. The students were part of the main secondary teacher education program at MSU, which represented the most common path to secondary social studies teaching. Therefore, the sample was both purposeful and convenient because of my role as instructor of the students' second social studies methods course. Merriam (2008) noted that samples chosen purely out of convenience can lead to poor information and lack credibility; however, since the researcher primarily chose the sample due to its representation of the average participant associated with the study's focus, then the limitations brought on by the convenience of the sample were less relevant. There were twenty undergraduate participants who provided informed consent to take part in the study. Six of the participants were female, and fourteen were male. The participants were mostly White and from the state that MSU is situated, with one Asian student and one Black student. The study focuses on three participants – Buddy, Franny, and Holden – in this paper, due to the amount of descriptive data collected for each participant. The three participants were chosen for this paper

based on the similarity of their purposes for teaching social studies – to facilitate student-centered and discussion based learning. They were part of a larger group that similarly identified as facilitators; however, their purpose for teaching was evident in each of their data items and provided triangulation (Merriam, 1998) between their purpose statement, lesson plans, reflections, in-class activities, and interviews.

Data Collection

Case study methodology does not set aside specific procedures for data collection (Merriam, 1998) and it has often been labeled "eclectic" (Bassey, 1999, p. 69) and specific to the context and judgment of the researcher. The data collection for this study was confined to a semester, and all data was collected within the context of a secondary social studies course and the related field experience. There were four main sources of data collected for this study, which included a purpose statement for teaching social studies (1), student developed lesson plans and related reflections for both the methods course and field experience teaching (6), in-class activities (8), and individual interviews (1). Each participant interviewed with the researcher individually at the end of the semester using a semi-structured protocol. Each interview was audio-recorded and ranged from 30-60 minutes in length.

Data Analysis

The study utilized the constant comparative method as a qualitative data analysis procedure (Creswell, 2002; Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 1998), which allowed me to compare the various data sources collected in this study and identify related themes across the data sources. The data of each participant was analyzed in four distinct stages. First, the researcher began by analyzing the participants' statement of purpose for teaching social studies and identified initial codes that would be used to analyze the rest of their data sources. For example, the statement of purpose for each participant in this article produced the codes facilitator, student-centered, and discussion/deliberation. Second, the researcher used the codes established in the participants' statement of purpose to analyze their lesson plans, lesson plan reflections, and in-class activities. This demonstrated that the participants understood how to articulate their purpose for teaching social studies in their curriculum development and thinking about curricular-instructional issues. Third, the researcher initially analyzed the interviews as a means of triangulation to verify the participants' statements of purpose and their thinking about curricular-instructional decisions. The analysis of the interviews also produced new codes, which

were compared across participants and narrowed to codes that were found across each participant's data sources. These codes included assessment, acceptance, and resilience. Finally, the codes that emerged from the interviews were used in the last stage of analysis to re-analyze the other data sources.

Findings

Buddy, Franny, and Holden each developed a lesson that they intended to use in their field experience classroom. They each demonstrated their capacity to create lesson plans that fit their purpose for teaching and that would also be relevant to the students in their field experience classrooms. When Buddy, Franny, and Holden implemented their lessons in their field experience classrooms they each *achieved* agency in different ways as they engaged with the context of their classrooms. The transaction between each preservice teacher and the context of their field experience classroom resulted in three distinct modes of achieving agency, which are made evident by their assessment decisions in the classroom context.

Buddy: Assessment Decisions as Pursuing Acceptance

Buddy entered his teacher education courses with a distinct view of what a teacher's role in the classroom would be. He noted this in his interview, "Like I said in my paper [purpose statement], I just assumed teaching history would be like 80% lecture, like…maybe 15% discussion, and 5% of the other stuff, but now…like there is so much other stuff." In both his interview and purpose statement, Buddy described how he had become an advocate of student-centered learning during his time in teacher education. Buddy also demonstrated his devotion to student-centered learning in the lessons he developed for the methods course utilizing methods and activities that would all be categorized as discussion and "other stuff" that had been discussed in each of his methods courses. Buddy was very confident in his capacity to develop and implement student-centered lessons; however, he was also very sensitive to the context of the school. Buddy stated in his interview, "all my experiences in schools are like mini job interviews…getting a job is priority number one," and in this way professional acceptance was important Buddy, even as a preservice teacher.

Buddy planned to teach a lesson on the controversy surrounding the building of an Islamic Cultural Center in New York City. He developed a multiple perspective reading on the

issue, and centered the activity on the simple question "Should New York City allow for the building of an Islamic Cultural Center?" The goal of the lesson was to discuss first amendment rights, while situated in the context of a current event. The culminating activity was to have the students deliberate the question in a student-run town hall meeting, which was an activity he had adapted from a model we had engaged with in our methods course. The assessment he had planned for the lesson asked the students to right a politician at some level. Buddy asked the students to provide their perspective using points and arguments from the reading and the class discussion. In the requirements for the letter, Buddy asked that students "2) Provide three – five reasons for your opinion… 3) Recognize and discuss your understanding of at least one perspective that you do not agree with… 4) Provide two – three actions you would like the congressman think about or support…" (Controversial Issue Lesson Plan). Buddy was optimistic about implementing his lesson in his field experience classroom when he reflected on the development of the lesson, "My cooperating teacher said that the students will be learning about first amendment rights all week…then I will do this on a Friday, so I think the students should be ready to have a good deep discussion about a heated issue" (Buddy, Lesson Plan Reflection). Buddy was a little concerned that the issue may be "too hot" or that the students wouldn't use their "background knowledge of first amendment rights" (Lesson Plan Reflection). More importantly, Buddy was concerned that it would not fit with his cooperating teacher's goals and stated in his reflection, "My teacher approved the lesson, but you never know how it will go. He is very concerned about wasting class time, so hopefully he doesn't see it as a waste" (Lesson Plan Reflection). Regardless, Buddy had developed a student-centered lesson, which involved deliberation, a current controversial issue, and an authentic assessment that he was excited to implement it in his field experience classroom.

In his interview, Buddy discussed the implementation of his lesson. Overall, he was happy with the students' level of engagement and was thinking of ways to improve it for use in the future, "I think all of the students participated and they used the reading and stuff we talked about in class…so I think it went well and my teacher did too" (Buddy, Interview). After discussing some of the logistical issues with his lesson, I asked Buddy about the assessment that he used and how it illustrated the students' engagement with the lesson. In his response, Buddy explained that he did not use the assessment that he had originally developed, "Most of the students' did well with the matching and struggled a little on the short answer, but I think most

of the class got above 80%. I think they got it" (Buddy, Interview). I asked Buddy "What happened to the assessment in your lesson plan?" Buddy explained that he could have used it and replied:

> I had planned on using it. My teacher…said it sounded like a lot of grading and that the students would spend most of their time writing instead of thinking about the content. He showed me his quiz…worksheet that he usually uses. It had the students' match the clauses of the first amendment to definitions and then it had court cases which the students were supposed to describe what happened and what rights were discussed. It seemed OK, I mean I had put some of the court cases in the paper for the deliberation and they had spent all week talking about the first amendment, so, I figured it was a good compromise…and it was probably better because the students don't write papers very often in there. It was how they are usually assessed. (Buddy, Interview)

Buddy compromised his assessment decisions due to his cooperating teacher's comments. Even though he did not authentically assess the students as he had planned, Buddy thought that the lesson was effective and that the assessment was appropriate.

In his interview, I asked Buddy if he would use his original assessment (letter to a politician) when he had his own classroom. Buddy shifted the conversation to discuss the social studies profession and thought that social studies educators have difficultly choosing and using appropriate assessments:

> I would have to think of a proper assessment, probably. I think assessment in social studies is…kinda tricky. In talking with others in the class I feel like social studies teachers don't know how to assess, and they'll just have them write a paper…like I did…or we always hand students worksheets that focus on vocab, which is fine I guess. I want to create awesome assessments, but I find it challenging to come up with an assessment that is appropriate, but interactive and relevant to student's interest.…Ideally I hope I can find a happy medium between mine and Mr. Brights assessment. (Interview)

Buddy was frustrated with assessment strategies and thought that it was not only a problem for him, but for the whole social studies profession. Despite having a suitable assessment (letter to a politician), Buddy questioned its appropriateness within the social studies profession. Buddy thought there were appropriate assessments that he would have to use to be accepted in the social studies profession. Buddy's concern with future acceptance into the profession influenced his

decisions, and even changed his assessment decisions in order to achieve agency within his field experience.

Buddy's assessment literacy would be limited to the authoritative discourse of schools that would allow him to be accepted by his colleagues into the profession.

Franny: Assessment Decisions as Seeking Improvement

Franny described her purpose for teaching social studies truly as a negotiation between two discourses. Franny viewed the authoritative discourse related to assessment much like Buddy and Holden – lecture, worksheet, and test based. Yet, Franny viewed these aspects of the classroom as something she would have to accommodate, "my colleagues will more than likely be the lecturing type, and like, that is fine, I will do it at times too to develop certain skills and bits of knowledge" (Interview). Regardless, Franny thought that she would teach with student-centered methods often:

> [Teacher education] helped me explore new areas and like, now I'd be definitely more open like, to having students research and discuss things…to be honest, like, two years ago I would have never like really thought of doing that at all. So it's changed from before. (Interview)

Franny framed her purpose for teaching between the two perceivably different discourses regarding social studies education in secondary classrooms and teacher education. She explained how aspects of the two discourses would be articulated in her teaching, "Ideally, I want to be someone who, like, is there to give information in a traditional way but also get the students to build on the knowledge they have, apply it, and then kind of facilitate inquiry or a discussion" (Interview). Even though Franny identified primarily as an advocate of student-centered methodology, it was clear that she planned to incorporate traditional teaching and assessment methods into her future teaching of social studies.

In comparison to Buddy and Holden, Franny demonstrated a more history-oriented approach to her curriculum decisions. For example, she developed an inquiry-based lesson around the concept of *immigration*. Franny used primary sources related to immigration in different periods of American History (e.g. The Alien and Sedition Acts 1798, The Chinese Exclusion Act 1882, President Roosevelt's Gentleman's Agreement 1907, a Jane Addams excerpt, a Caesar Chavez Speech, the Dream Act 2010). Franny wanted students to read three or four of the documents and then develop an inquiry question related to immigration, research the

question, and then present it to the class. Students would then discuss immigration policy in small and large groups after the presentations. Franny thought that this lesson fit her purpose for teaching well, as she described in her lesson plan reflection:

> I think the best part of my lesson is the activity because the students get to learn facts, read primary sources, research their interests, and discuss a relevant topic. I think it is a good mix of critical thinking, discussion, and research…. I am just not sure if the documents will provide enough information or be a good way of creating questions. (Inquiry Lesson Plan Reflection)

To assess her students beyond the presentation, Franny would also have her students keep a reflective journal throughout the lesson, and then write a two-page explanation of immigration in the United States after they had heard all of the presentations. Franny also noted in her interview her satisfaction with this lesson and said, "I did not think I could develop a lesson like that, like, it had so much stuff going on and it made sense…I definitely hope I can use it again" (Interview). Franny was surprised at her ability to develop lessons and assessments that effectively supported her purpose for teaching, and she gained confidence in her ability to develop curriculum.

Franny used her immigration lesson in her field experience classroom and negotiated the classroom similarly to Buddy. Franny thought that she had successfully implemented her lesson in her field experience classroom:

> I got to teach it [lesson] in her American History class and they were discussing the Progressive Era, so it fit pretty well. My teacher let me have three class periods, and that was barely enough. But she seemed impressed with it and said she wanted copies of the documents I used. (Interview)

To follow-up, I asked Franny about the effectiveness of her assessments and she said:

> Well, that was a mess. I wanted to create one with Mrs. Haas so I could learn more about classroom assessments, and we ended-up just making a graphic organizer that students could record information as they listened to their classmates' presentations. All we assessed was that they paid attention! (Interview)

When I complemented her use of assessment in her lesson plan for the course, Franny said:

> My assessment didn't seem real. I mean, I liked them too…hopefully I can use those down the road…but like, I want to learn the basics because I will use that stuff more

> often…you know like true/false, multiple choice, map tests…and I really like a good DBQ [document based question]. That is what I hoped Mrs. Haas would help me with. (Interview)

I asked Franny about her purpose for teaching and how "the basics" related to it:

> Well – I will still do the activities I planned, I will just assess differently…that is why I want to learn the basics so that I can create really effective test questions that combine my purpose and get at the critical thinking that I focus on in my activities. I mean I will have to test like my colleagues, right? …but I want to learn to do it really well. I want my activities to help my students do better on the tests, and I don't think my assessments will help. (Interview)

Franny's thinking about assessment was surprising given the detailed assessments she had created in her lesson plans. She clearly had separated the discourse on assessment into two distinct perspectives. Franny thought that her ability to create more traditional forms of assessment was deficient, especially in terms of assessing for key outcomes, such as critical thinking. Her desire to use more traditional forms of assessment stemmed from her thinking that she would have to formally assess her students similarly to her colleagues, once in a school setting. Unlike Buddy, Franny was not concerned with being accepted by her colleagues. She viewed her assessment decisions that utilized "the basics" as a trade-off for using her student-centered activities. She thought that the combination of student-centered activities and traditional assessments would possibly make her a more effective teacher than her colleagues. Franny had a clear vision of her teaching in the future and she was using her field experience to work toward and achieve that future.

In trying to learn "the basics," Franny was similar to Buddy in that she struggled with developing assessments that she thought were appropriate for her curriculum decisions. Franny was disappointed with her field experience and hoped to gain more insight about assessment strategies from her student teaching experience:

> Finding a good assessment strategy I think is hard. You got to…be able to say like… does this work for this kind of lesson or what you're trying to have the students learn – A lot of times I just…don't know? Hopefully, I will learn some of the basics from like… my teacher in student teaching. (Franny, Interview)

Franny thought that she could preserve her purpose for teaching by developing the capacity to utilize "the basics" of assessment much better than her colleagues.

Holden: Assessment Decisions as Resilient Reinforcement/Improvement

Holden entered teacher education with a clear vision of how he wanted to teach. In clarifying his purpose for teaching social studies, Holden took an oppositional stance toward some of his own social studies teachers and the teachers he had observed in his field experiences. Much of his purpose for teaching was shaped by his dissatisfaction with methods he had observed in his own experiences. For example, Holden noted that the emphasis in his school experiences was traditional and focused on facts, instead of focusing more on essential questions. When Holden was asked what he would change about social studies education, he responded:

> Teachers still focus on dates and facts, and don't bother with causes and consequences. I had a teacher in high school, who would…drill dates and names into our heads, instead of having us think about why. I look back now and just think about how ineffective his teaching was for all of those students all of those years. (Interview)

Holden identified worksheets and tests as part of traditional assessment methods. His observation of these types of methods in his field experiences further contributed to shaping his purpose for teaching, "I sat there and watched worksheet after worksheet…and the funny thing was that I can hear Mr. Ford saying each time…'It'll be on the test'…. It was just shameful, I could never teach like that" (Interview). When Holden thought about his own experiences with what he perceived to be the norms in classrooms, his opposition to what he experienced consequently justified his intentions to facilitate a student-centered classroom.

In his field experience classroom, Holden chose to teach a lesson that combined problem-based inquiry and Socratic questioning. He was in the same classroom as Franny and taught his lesson one week after her. Holden chose to have the students discuss the issue of racial/ethnic violence in America from the late 1800's through the Progressive Era. Holden wanted his students to think about the ways that racial violence took place and think about the role of citizens and society in preventing such acts. He planned on having a Socratic Seminar as the culminating activity for which the first question would be: "How could ethnic/racial violence have been prevented?" Holden was happy with his lesson plan:

> I like the combination of activities best, I have never seen it before. Students will be able to learn from each other. They will come together after reading and researching the topic,

discuss their views with their classmates, and then make a decision. (Lesson Plan Reflection)

When Holden implemented the lesson in his field experience he provided some resources on topics such as lynching and the experiences of Chinese, Irish, and Latino/a immigrants. He then allowed the students to use one class period to engage in their own inquiry about the topic. Holden then facilitated a Socratic Seminar in the next class period. To assess his students learning, he asked them to track the discussion topics of the Socratic Seminar and create a concept map of the discussion. Lastly, Holden also asked his students to write a one page position statement on: "How could violence against minorities be prevented today?"

In his interview, Holden described the implementation of his lesson as fairly successful, "It went pretty well, I mean I need to improve several things." When I asked Holden what he would improve to make it better, he replied, "Don't worry, my teacher liked it.…The research part went well, they had a good discussion, but their papers were not that good" (Interview). When I asked Holden what was wrong with the papers, he replied "I think next time I need to make a stronger connection between the historical topic and the present…before I have them try to write something like that. They just didn't get it in several ways" (Interview). To follow-up and compare Holden's experience with Franny's, I asked Holden what his cooperating teacher thought about his assessments. Holden said, "Her only comment was that is would be a lot…and she was right, it took me a long time to explain the concept map, which took away from explaining the paper…but now I know for next time and I can make it work" (Interview). Unlike Buddy and Franny, Holden maintained his assessment decisions in his field experience classroom, and in the process, he identified ways in which he could improve his lesson.

In comparison to Buddy and Franny, Holden was more focused on his own professional growth. He had a clear vision of the teacher he did not want to be, not necessarily the teacher wanted to be. Holden was not concerned with fitting in to the profession or competing with his colleagues on test scores. Holden wanted to improve the assessment methods he thought were most effective for his teaching.

Discussion

Buddy, Franny, and Holden represent three distinct views of assessment literacy. For Buddy, assessment literacy meant assessing like his colleagues. He foresaw his continual

challenge as an educator to be finding an appropriate assessment for lessons. Appropriate meant accepted by his colleagues and other stakeholders in his school context. Thus, Buddy prioritized the authoritative discourse of professional acceptance (Clark, 2013; Clark et al., 2015) in developing his assessment literacy. Franny also prioritized the authoritative discourse to develop her assessment literacy. She wanted to be the most effective teacher possible, which also meant using traditional assessment effectively. Holden, on the other hand, prioritized his internally persuasive discourse in developing his assessment literacy. While he utilized assessment strategies that were part of the authoritative discourses of either traditional assessments or teacher education methods courses, he viewed his assessment literacy as the ability to assess the needs of his students. In this way, Holden differed from Buddy and Franny in that his assessment literacy was reflexive and responsive to his students, instead of static and normalized.

Another distinction is that Buddy and Franny both defined their assessment literacy in terms of summative assessment, whereas Holden defined his assessment literacy in terms of formative assessment. Both Buddy and Franny were concerned that they were measuring their students' learning in line with the authoritative discourse: for Buddy, measuring in ways acceptable to his peers and administrators, and for Franny, measuring in ways that demonstrated she was an effective teacher. In the spectrum of assessment literacy, Buddy and Franny viewed the use of formative assessment as the equivalent to being able to speak a language, but not being able read or write in a language. Holden created, and actually used, summative assessments to assess his students, but used these assessments as indicators about how well he formatively assessed his students. At no point did Holden use the summative assessments to measure either his students or his teaching, they were purely used to assess his students learning.

This distinction between assessing and measuring students is important (Kohn, 2013), especially in terms of discourse and assessment literacy. Assessing students can happen without grading or tests being the sole determinate of success. However, measuring requires grading and testing, and implies judgment about a teacher's accountability, acceptance, and effectiveness as a professional. Measuring students, and thus teachers' effectiveness, demands that learning outcomes be quantifiable, controllable, and competitive, which has little to do with learning and more to do with counting the bits of knowledge students know, managing a classroom of students, and sorting students (Kohn, 2013). The authoritative discourse of assessment has morphed the acts of assessing and measuring, which makes developing assessment literacy a

confusing and often contradictory endeavor for preservice teachers. Many preservice teachers believe the sole purpose of assessment literacy is not to be able to assess students' learning effectively, but to be an accepted and effective member of the profession. For these preservice teachers, assessment literacy represents a measure of their own ability to be part of the teaching profession.

Regarding agency, the preservice teachers all *achieved* agency, by working to develop what they perceived to be their assessment literacy. Buddy, Franny, and Holden each used their field experience teaching to further develop their assessment literacy. Each chose to prioritize certain discourses regarding assessment to achieve goals within their field experience. For Buddy, he viewed the field experience as a job interview in which he needed to be accepted, make connections, and fit the mold in order to get hired. Franny viewed her field experience as an opportunity to effectively learn how to use assessment strategies she had not learned in teacher education. She felt by becoming an effective assessor of student learning she would also be a highly desirable candidate for a teaching position. Holden wanted to use his field experience as a means to become a better facilitator of learning. He believed in his own lesson development and thought that the field experience was an opportunity for him to test and improve his lessons for student learning. Each effectively achieved agency in their field experience and used it to develop their assessment literacy in ways that would perceivably make them better professionals.

Implications

There are a few implications for teacher education and the development of preservice teachers' assessment literacy. First, and possibly the most difficult, is to help preservice teachers understand the authoritative discourse associated with assessment in schools and the ways that it seeks to separate learning from assessment. This would include helping preservice teachers think about and understand the purpose of formative and summative assessment inside and outside of the classroom. Second, and related to the first, teacher education needs to help preservice teachers think more about connecting assessment to student learning, and thus their practices in field experiences, student teaching, and their first jobs. It is important for student teachers to understand assessment literacy as the ability to effectively assess and facilitate student learning, as opposed to simply measuring student learning. Third, in thinking about the field experiences, teacher educators should help preservice teachers understand that assessment literacy is

contextual and reflexive in relation to the students. Therefore, practice in field experiences should not be seen as generalizable to other contexts, because they are "articulating and negotiating classroom and cultural knowledges" with the specific learners of their classroom, "in the initiation, development and practice of assessment to achieve the learning goals of students" (Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013, p. 242).

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