

## **From Reflective Practice to Practical Wisdom: Towards a Post-Foundational Teacher Education**

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### **Abstract:**

The authors situate this paper within ongoing debates in related areas such as reflective practice, critical pedagogy, practical wisdom and critical theory. First, the authors identify some of the problems in the present notions of reflective teaching and progressive teacher education. They analyze and compare the traditional-technical and interpretive literature on teaching and teacher education. None of these conceptions deal with teaching and teacher education in a reflexive way. Some problems the authors identify are located in the history of the concept “reflective teaching” and its interpretive underpinnings. Others emerge from particular applications within teacher education itself. The authors’ critique challenges the prevalent conceptions of interpretive reflective teaching, and proceeds to offer a critical framework for further reconstruction of the theory and practice of reflective teaching. The final section offers an alternative conceptualization of teaching and teacher education as a post-foundational and moral-political philosophy.

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## Introduction

When I began working with preservice teachers, teaching methods courses and interviewing preservice teachers for my research, I soon learned they were eager to hear about real stories of classroom teachers and their experiences in diverse classroom settings. Whenever I talked to passionate preservice teachers, I noticed that they were also reluctant to share stories of their experiences in classrooms. I observed that many of these preservice teachers struggled to make sense of what they had learned in their university courses, at least with respect to how they could apply that knowledge to their field work.

According to Harrington and Garrison (1992) when entering the new teaching environment, preservice teachers engage in "an initiation into the practices, beliefs, and values shared by a culture" (p.730). The way in which preservice teachers learn these "practices, beliefs, and values" is complicated, in part because preservice teachers believe that they are receiving mixed messages in their teacher education courses, field experience, and from their own experience as students (Fieman Nemser & Buchman, 1985; Grossman, 1990; Kagan, 1993). Whether or not they are learning the "practices, beliefs, and values" that will make them effective teachers with a particular student body is even more difficult to discern. Problems exist between conflicting ideas (or preservice teachers' perceptions of conflicting ideas) found in university coursework, their prior experiences with schooling, and the views of the cooperating teachers and school districts within which they have their student teaching. Having based their teaching upon the theories and methods learned from university courses, academic books and research texts, preservice teachers have often mused why lessons work well with some students or classes while failing miserably with others (Kagan, 1993; Grossman, 1990). The problem has always been that there is no secret teaching formula, no fail proof method or strategy (Garrison,

1992). This, as I have learned from my teaching experiences and from the stories of other teachers, is because each student and each classroom is different. Many students respond to circumstances in a variety of ways depending to a large degree on issues/events outside of the classroom. What has joined me with other teachers and preservice teachers has been the sustaining influence of stories about classroom experiences, and how those experiences were shaped by cultural, moral-political, and ideological circumstances of school culture and by the students themselves.

Many of these stories addressed the disconnection between theory and practice, and the contradictions between formalized, complex, sometimes contradictory messages of teacher education programs on notions of “effective teaching” and “good practice.” And from those stories where teachers and preservice teachers were overwhelmingly white, female, monolingual, and middle-class, and where students in the classrooms were diverse in cultural identity, socio-economic class, and language, I learned how crucial it was for teachers and preservice teachers to understand teaching as cultural, social and moral-political practices in order to become an “effective” teacher. What I learned from those stories was that teachers must realize that educational policies and teaching practices hold implications for cultural, moral-political and ideological transmission. As such, teaching practices are not limited to the cognitive strategies and methods, but are products of socio-culturally and politically constituted knowledge.

This paper is about understanding teaching as practical wisdom from a hermeneutic perspective. It aims to argue why teacher educators need to think of teaching practice as more like deliberative, performed, ethical and aesthetic experience and less like technical, scientific and controlled activity. It is an attempt to show why the current literature on reflection and teacher education is inadequate, and why teacher educators need a multidimensional hermeneutic approach towards teacher education.

The paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, I explore the traditional-technical and reflective-interpretive views of teaching practice and teacher education, and then analyze the limitations of these views, and why it is necessary to move reflective practice to practical wisdom.

In the second section, I describe what practical wisdom is, and how it is related to hermeneutic philosophy. Then, I demonstrate what a post-foundational and critical view of a teacher education looks like, and what its main characteristics are, and how it differs from the reflection oriented teacher education. This section will also bridge the theoretical framework to the research methodology.

### **Traditional and Contemporary Understandings of Teacher Education**

Two contrasting epistemological approaches dominate the discourses and literature on teaching and teacher education: *traditional-technical* and *reflective-interpretive* (Carr, 1995; McLaren, 2000; Eisner, 2002).

In the first approach, teaching practice and teacher education are seen as a kind of instrumental and procedural activity that is the application of a technical, universal, and instrumental methods and procedures to teaching practice in order to gradually remove human error in the activity. Teacher education programs, which base their frameworks and philosophies on the characteristics of *traditional-technical* approach, require preservice teachers to develop a mastery of technical components that are applicable to all teaching contexts and student populations. These beliefs are captured in statements such as, "Treat all students the same regardless of who they are," "Let state standards and standardized tests to drive your instruction," and "Good teaching anywhere is good teaching everywhere." It is disturbing for some preservice teachers to overcome these beliefs, and to accept teaching as a highly

contextualized process. In fact, teaching is as much a social performance, a moral endeavor, and a cultural script, as it is a technical craft (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; McLaren, 2000; Eisner, 2002).

Much of the contemporary literature on reflective practice and teacher education, however, presents an explicitly oppositional stance toward these teacher education programs which are characterized as "technical" or "instrumental", where preservice teachers would be seen as the object of research or the implementer of techniques which others devise. (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Eisner, 2002; Noffke & Brennan, 2005).

Before 1980s, many teacher education programs integrated the technical and instrumental view of teaching practice and teacher education into their educational activities (Eisner, 2002; Higgins, 2001; Noffke & Brennan, 2005). These programs differ because of the varying definitions of teaching practice, and methods of implementation (Tom, 1991). Despite the theoretical and methodological differences, these programs aimed to reduce teaching practice and teacher education into individual and technical processes that can be instrumentalized (Eisner, 2002; Higgins, 2001). Thus, teacher education programs become structured around the premise that if teacher educators provide the correct stimuli, then preservice teachers would not only learn, but their learning could be measured through observations of their expected behaviors. The main practical consequence of the traditional teacher education movement was that it led to a long series of strategies for schools and universities such as assessment by drill-practice strategies and standardized tests, and management by objective, outcome-based education, and teacher performance evaluation systems. The traditional teacher education placed the responsibility for learning directly on the shoulders of teachers. Teachers were led to believe that if learning was not occurring, then it was their responsibility to restructure the environment,

determine the most appropriate objective reinforcement to promote the desired student behavior, or provide a negative reinforcement to extinguish unwanted behaviors.

It is usual to hear teacher education discussed in these traditional programs as the activity of an expert consultant. Teacher educators as expert consultants in these programs possess a special set of tools and competencies that enable them to transmit a particular kind of service to preservice teachers. These programs sustain a view of teaching in which children are to sit and listen while the teacher tells them what they need to know. The students play a passive role in their education and have no input on how or what they learn. This type of education does not recognize the differences in children's backgrounds as important to their learning. Nor does it acknowledge the different ways in which students process information and the fact that students will learn most efficiently from various methods of education. Freire (1972) call this type of education as "banking education" which isolates the learner from the content and process of education. It assumes that the teacher knows everything; the students know nothing. The teacher narrates, prescribes and deposits information which the student then must mechanically receive, memorize and repeat. This transfer of information becomes an emblem and an instrument of oppression that inhibits inquiry, creativity and dialogue. The purpose of reflection for the preservice teachers in this model of teacher education is to decide how to proceed in practice by making a selection from these bodies of knowledge provided by the teacher educator. In this light, teaching practice is understood as a matter of theoretical rationality, a problem-solving based on theoretical knowledge of how to achieve ends (Eisner, 2002). The practical consequence of this type of teacher education for preservice teachers is that after years of struggling to adjust the objective and context-free traditional teaching methods and strategies as classroom teachers, they fell short of producing positive effects within the complex context of the diverse classrooms and left feeling shortchanged and cheated by a system that placed the

guilt for students' failure to learn in their hands. As a result of this pressure and guilt, most of these teachers leave their teaching carrier by their third or forth-year of teaching.

Furthermore, social scientism in the traditional model of teacher education “allows” educators to make the very important assertion that teaching practice not only could be understood by using instrumental, content-free and objective teaching techniques but also could be fixed by using these techniques (Erickson and Gutierrez 2002). Generally, ontological issues—our ‘being’ in the world as moral, political, social agents—are not part of this model. In this technical and instrumental view of teaching, focusing only on "what works" and not paying enough attention on development of a critical, social and political stance toward teaching produces regulatory and disciplinary powers that serve as technologies to reinforce and inscribe resources to Eurocentric, universalistic and objectivist teaching practice and teacher education (McLaren, 2000). Because today teachers work in increasingly diverse schools where equity issues, multiple contradictory reforms, and power differentials abound (Ladson-Billings, 1999), teaching defined as a technical and isolated skill is inadequate to support meaningful teacher learning. Moreover, the experiences and status of racial and language minorities in schools require teachers to develop a political consciousness about the technical skills they are asked to acquire. In this way, teachers avoid having their work become "nothing more than the dissemination of rhetoric" (Morrow & Torres, 1995, p. 268).

Another commonly questioned assumption of the traditional view of teacher education is that preservice teachers best practice teaching by aiming to redeem teaching practice from the political, ethical, racial, and gendered discourses of everyday life (McLaren, 2000). This is to be accomplished by reducing or eliminating, the contingency, ambiguity, and situated particularity of teaching practice to a more rational activity. Making it more rational means using some procedure such as drill-practice activities or standardized tests that will not permit teaching

practice to be infected by subjective and political preferences, mere tastes, old habits, or desires (Carr, 1995). Teaching, then, is an individual, cognitive process in which one tries to make rational sense of an outside reality. The conception of teaching and teacher education does not generally take into account teaching on what it means to be a social and political agent in the world (Higgins, 2001). Rather than reflecting critically on the race-related and culturally diverse situations presented, they merely focus on what state standards and prescribed lesson plans for standardized testing ask them to do. And teacher educators play a key role in this rational process as the providers of the prescribed information and strategies necessary to shape and control the natural and social environments. This self-awareness of teaching practice is closely related to modernist definitions of educational experience. According to Schwandt (2002), "The kind of education assumed here is largely utilitarian and instrumentalist; it is an education in learning to solve problems. Education is about acquiring power so that one can manage and control environment, society, and self" (p.13).

The central constitutive component of teaching practice in this utilitarian and instrumentalist view is the acquisition and proficient utilization of certain techniques in the performance of identifiable teaching tasks. Practice can be well learned by teaching its parts and it can be well measured by its products. Learning to teach for preservice teachers is more a matter of what the good student can do at the end of teacher education program than of what he or she will become in the process. The teacher educators' pedagogical assumption in this traditional model is that a particular methodology, one that is experientially based within a replicated, but controlled, practice context will initiate good students into the constitutive techniques of practice and, most problematically, that this initiation will somehow provide a sufficient basis for generalization to all practice contexts. The teacher educators' assumption concerning the teaching practice is that once good preservice teachers are initiated into the



objective and universal techniques, further practice is needed only to complete the acquisition.

These teacher educators tend to ignore using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. For example, they do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum. It is precisely this version of teacher education that the concept of reflective teaching at the interpretive and progressive view has been developed to resist.

Adler and Goodman (1986) noted that the technocratic view of teaching and teacher education with emphasizes individualism; efficiency, rationality and objectivity dominated educational thought in the twentieth century. While school systems promote the use of pre-determined instructional programs, teachers merely assume the role of manager or technician of the pre-determined curriculum and do not question curricular decisions. This leads to the acceptance of teaching practices as "embodying the teaching domain, to be accommodated and adjusted too rather than revised or even restructured" (Beyer, 1984:37).

Today, the current neo-conservative political climate and federal legislative agenda presents teacher educators and teachers with many challenges to keep the efforts of educators promoting an alternative-liberal reflective teaching alive. Because of the neo-conservative backlash in education educators are currently experiencing in US, and the federal invasion into decisions concerning teacher education, educational assessment and classroom instruction (Allington, 2002), there may be little room left for the alternative reflective teaching and its proponents. Federal and state neo-conservative agendas that focus on accountability through standardized tests and scripted instruction designed by commercial testing companies may

provide little opportunities for liberal democratic teaching and teacher education. It seems that teachers are being told what to teach and how to teach it, leaving little room for teacher intellectualism and instructional decision making; both hallmarks of an alternative reflective teaching movement. Standardization would eventually lead back to the technical view of teaching and teacher education that educators were trying to avoid when they envisioned reflective practice in the first place.

### **Understanding Reflective Teaching and Limits of Interpretive Teacher Education**

Since the early 1980s, an enormous amount of reflective practice literature has surfaced, and reflective teaching became popularized in the literature on teacher education. In the last 25 years, many different philosophical and political underpinnings of the versions of reflective practice and teacher education have been promoted (Eisner, 2002; Noffke & Brennan, 2005).

The advocates of reflective practice and reflective teaching mainly argued that the view of educational and teaching practice implied in the "traditional and technical view of teacher education" – i.e., the idea of teaching and education as an intervention or instrument that is an objective and universal means to bring about pre-given ends – is not appropriate for the field of education. For them, what is needed for teacher education is a progressive view of teaching practice which is able to acknowledge the non-causal, social, moral and political nature of educational practice and inquiry. What is needed, in other words, is an acknowledgement of the fact that teaching is a practical and interpretive accomplishment, rather than a mere technical or technological activity. In this progressive and interpretive view, the most important question for teacher educators and preservice teachers is therefore not only about mere technical and procedural evaluation of efficacy of their practices but also about the potential social and practical value of what they do. For the proponents of this view, this is why the instrumentalist

and universalistic conservative agenda of teaching and teacher education is insufficient, because teaching practice is more than the simple application of strategies or techniques to bring about predetermined ends – there is always the question about the educational, social, moral and political value of such techniques and there are questions about the specificity of particular contexts in which problems need to be addressed. For example, one of the preservice teachers in my teacher education class recently described the students in her fourth-grade student teaching placement: Of twenty students, three were Latino, five were African American, three were Asian American, seven were European American, and two had just immigrated, one from Turkey and one from Pakistan. Five of the children were receiving instruction in English as a second language. Two children had significant learning disabilities, so a special education teacher provided in-class support for two hours every morning. As a White, middle-class, monolingual woman who had grown up in a predominantly White neighborhood, attended relatively homogeneous K-12 schools, and been in an overwhelmingly White teacher education program, my student was somewhat in shock by the diversity of students in the actual classroom. Not surprisingly, she worried about how she would meet the needs of these diverse students. Moreover, having gone to elementary and secondary school before the beginning of "inclusive education," she was not used to the presence of children with disabilities in general education classes. It was evident for my student that if she did not design her lessons specifically for these diverse students, and incorporate culturally mediated activities, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in classroom instruction, she would miserably fail in that class. Her experience in the class helped her understand that teaching is more than the simple application of strategies or techniques, there are questions about the moral, social, cultural and political issues and problems need to be addressed in particular classroom contexts. It is precisely the version of teacher education that the concept of reflective teaching at

the interpretive and progressive view has been developed to help teachers understand and deal with the complexities of teaching in diverse classroom settings.

For Dewey (1933), the purpose of reflective practice is to change teacher's classroom practice or actions, and their process of arriving at the decisions they make concerning curriculum and instruction based on the specific case at hand. If reflection did not lead to action, it was simply a waste of time. In this sense, the purpose of reflective practice is concerned with the actions taken by the teacher, the process of arriving at these decisions and the various consequences and outcomes of those decisions. Reflection must be linked to action; if not, teachers are simply reflecting for the sake of reflecting and not using their new understandings to improve instructional practice. Following Dewey, Schon (1983) made a similar suggestions and argued that

When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends upon a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. (p. 68-69)

According to Schon, professional (teacher) education undervalues practical knowledge and grants privileged status to intellectual scientific and rational knowledge forms that may only be marginally relevant to practical acting. Schon's approach represents a significant departure from positivist and technological views of practitioners as technicians who consume university-produced knowledge, and are dependent upon experts for future professional development.

Following Schon's interpretive approach towards reflective practice and teaching, many research studies developed and analyzed the dialogical, interpretive, inquiry based and pragmatic models of reflection and teacher education. For example, Jay and Johnson (2002) analyzed the use of the reflective seminar in which reflective practice is modeled and developed through

dialogue and the implementation of a portfolio that requires reflective writing in multiple iterations with support and scaffolding from a mentor. According to the authors, in this way of thinking, dialogue and deliberation are procedures or means; in fact they are regarded as the best means to enhance the use of reflective practice. Similarly, Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) explain how tools such as cognitive apprenticeship, interpersonal skills, collaborative problem-solving, and coaching and supervision illustrate their posited framework for teacher reflection. Tremmel (1993) describes some of the most important tools he uses like free writing in which stream of consciousness is recorded on paper so that attention can be paid to what is in the mind, here and now. Loughran (2002) studies the development of reflective practice emphasizing modeling as a pedagogical tool. Investigating his own practices like thinking aloud and maintaining a teaching journal, he concludes that reflectivity can be developed if teacher educators practice what they preach. Another example of this kind of work can be found in LaBoskey's 1994 study where she studies the development of reflective practice in preservice teachers as evidenced through the tool she terms inquiry based case investigation.

Even though these research studies successfully demonstrated the interpretive and practical dimensions of reflective teaching, in practice there remains a tendency in many teacher education programs and research studies to misinterpret reflective practice and reduce it into an individual epistemological process that can be instrumentalized (Eisner, 2002; Higgins, 2001). Many theorists have suggested that the concept of reflective practice in these studies and programs is often so vague and ill-defined that it is practically devoid of meaning (Rodgers, 2002; Zeichner, 1992; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Bullough, 1989; Calderhead, 1989). For example, at one extreme is Cruickshank's (1985) reflective teaching, a series of highly prescribed steps that take place in decontextualized settings. Roth (1989) describes twenty four procedures of a reflective practitioner. The procedures range from those that correspond to cognitive models of

reflection and teaching techniques to an embracing of uncertainty like "adapt and adjust to instability and change," to more formal procedures like "hypothesize," "synthesize and test" (p. 32). The list reads much like the upper levels from Bloom's taxonomy, and while it does seem to take into account the notion of different time frames, it does not locate the processes in the day-to-day work that constitutes professional practice. Griffith and Tans (1992) provide a very comprehensive way of categorizing reflective processes that considers both time frames and purpose. They identify the dimensions of rapid reflection, repair, review, research, and retheorizing, contending that all are cognitive accomplishments.

These labels imply how reflection occurs in individual teacher's mind, and that the intersection of such dimensions influences action.

In all these studies, reflective practice is seen as a kind of individual activity which relies too much on the "inner-cognitive" processes of teachers and not enough on social and political dimensions of teaching. These studies mistakenly suggest that once traditional structural relations and classroom practices are transformed in the reflection oriented activities and procedures, preservice teachers would have nothing left to challenge and develop reflective action toward the classroom practices and materials. Promoting a policy of encouraging teacher reflection, while instituting cognitive assessment strategies over preservice teachers and teacher education courses by using procedural and individualistic techniques, serves to obscure the nature and growth of teacher educators and preservice teachers under a rhetoric of "reflective practice". Perhaps the term "reflective teaching" performs a hidden or misinterpreted function in practical level. On the surface, it appears to call upon a particular intellectual tradition. Yet it also operates to further confine the freedom allowed to teachers and preservice teachers to think

politically and deliberatively about their own work. Zeichner and Liston (1990) criticize the literature on mere cognitive and individualistic view of reflective teaching and further argue that

we do not think it makes much sense to attempt to promote or assess reflective practice in general (e.g., Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985; Kirby and Teddlie, 1989; Stout, 1989) without establishing some clear priorities for the reflection that emerge out of a reasoned educational and social philosophy. We do not accept the implication that exists throughout much of the literature that teachers' actions are necessarily "better" just because they are more deliberate and intentional. (p.24)

Higgins (2001) and Eisner (2002) also argue that despite their move away from teaching as technical and instrumental practice, these programs and research studies failed to adequately address issues of ethics, politics, deliberation, aesthetics, and rhetoric in teacher education, because their view of self as cognizing agent in teaching practice does not take into account the inescapable role of social, political and aesthetical dimensions of teaching.

Focusing upon the social, moral and political content of preservice teachers' reflections, therefore, is crucial in order to bring substance and meaning to teaching process. In an attempt to highlight the notion that moral and political content matters, several scholars have attempted to provide conceptual clarity by organizing the field in order to point out the different dimensions along which reflective content can be understood.

Van Manen (1977), for example, makes a similar critique of misinterpretation of reflection and further argues that this view of reflection does not always make explicit how power issues intersect with culture and learning. In order to eliminate the limitations of interpretive view of reflective teaching and practice, Van Manen develops a complex model of reflection based on three arbitrary epistemological paradigms as positivist, critical, and interpretive. These paradigms, in turn, define the parameters of three hierarchical "levels of reflectivity" (Van Manen, 1977, p. 226). The first and "lowest" level, *technical reflection*, is concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of means to achieve certain ends, which

themselves are not open to criticism or modification. The second, *practical reflection*, allows for open examination not only of means, but also of goals, the assumptions upon which these are based, and the actual outcomes. This kind of reflecting, in contrast to the technical form, recognizes that meanings are not absolute, but are embedded in, and negotiated through, language. The third and "highest" level, *critical reflection*, as well as including emphases from the previous two, also calls for considerations involving moral and ethical criteria, making judgments about whether professional activity is equitable, just and respectful of persons or not. In addition, critical reflection locates any analysis of personal action within wider socio-historical and politico-cultural contexts. The aim of such "critical reflection" is not the effectiveness of the technical level, nor the understanding of the interpretive level, but:

a distortion-free model of a communication situation that specifies social roles and social structures of a living together in unforced communication; that is, there exists no repressive dominance, no asymmetry or inequality among the participants of the educational processes. Universal consensus, free from delusions or distortion, is the ideal of a deliberative rationality that pursues worthwhile educational ends in self-determination, community, and on the basis of justice, equality, and freedom. (Van Manen, 1977, p. 227)

Following Noffke & Brennan (2005), I do not refute such an important and comprehensive idea, in fact, such a refutation is not the aim in this paper. However there are problems in using this Habermasian framework to the everyday thoughts and practices of classroom teachers. Van Manen's "ways of being practical," even though sound in their logical correspondence to his "ways of knowing," seem to assign the major part of teachers' thoughts to the "lowest" level (Noffke & Brennan; 2005). The actual contents of their reflections remain undifferentiated and obscure. They are also, at least by implication, not as important. Van Manen argues that his purpose was "to demonstrate that it is only through such critical reflection that the questions of greatest significance to the field can be adequately addressed" (p. 205).



Noffke & Brennan (2005) argues that we should not disprove the argument that issues of "greatest significance" can only be achieved through "critical reflection," but that the hierarchical levels define away most teachers thinking without suggesting a clear contrast toward which a teacher might aspire. My aim here is to challenge the idea that there is an implicit elitism that not only names the "practical" of most teachers as lowly and less significant, "but also offers no guidance as to how to increase their level of reflexivity" (Noffke & Brennan; 2005, p.63). In fact, connections and interrelationships between levels of reflection are obscured, making the development of critical and practical reflexivity more difficult. There is also evidence that teachers are not always receptive to a critical perspective on reflection (Johnson, 2001; Zeichner, 1990); the problem is framed as one of resistance. The challenge becomes, therefore, how to create conditions for and support of reflection and learning so teachers become professionals committed to social justice education in schools serving predominantly working-class minority students. Based on the result of their research study, Zeichner and Liston (1987) also make a similar critique and argues that Van Manen's "levels," while corresponding to the goals of their teacher education program, did not adequately capture the existential and practical reality of the teaching discourses. They attributed this to Van Manen's reliance on "categories which were formulated within the realm of the theoretic," while the discourse of teachers and preservice teachers was primarily concerned with "practical problems" - those relating to "past, present, and future pedagogical actions" (p. 161).

### **Summary**

I have identified some of the problems in the present notions of reflective teaching and teacher education. I argued that none of these conceptions deal with reflective practice and teacher education in a reflexive way. My critique challenges the prevalent conceptions of

reflection and proceeds to offer new direction for further reconstruction of the theory and practice of reflective teaching. The final section of this paper offers an alternative conceptualization of “reflective practice” designed to address many of the concerns I raised, while acknowledging that some will always need to be addressed as a continual process.

### **Teaching as Phronesis: Towards a Post-Foundational Teacher Education**

An alternative post-foundational way of thinking about teacher education put ontological, and practical issues of selfhood and human agency at center stage, and describes teaching practice as a political, ideological, gendered, sexual, racial, transformative, social, discursive, engaged, indigenous, lived, or performed *Praxis*, accordingly (Car, 1999; Dressman, 1998; McLaren, 2002). In this approach, the distinction between ontology and epistemology seen in positivism and post-positivism gives way to a view that what can be known is intertwined with the interaction between a particular practitioner and a particular context (Carr, 1999). This transactional and subjective epistemology and ontology that is value mediated and value dependent leads preservice teachers to see a progression towards good judgment as an excellence of their practice at both global (outside of their communities) and local context (in their school communities). This interaction is dialectical, transforming misapprehensions of historically mediated structures into a view of how the structures might be changed (McLaren, 2000).

This proposal neither suggests another teacher education model to define what teaching practice "really" is nor rejects the progressive and interpretive dimensions of reflective practice. Rather, it restructures reflective practice as a multidimensional practical philosophy, and brings our notions of “practice” and “good teaching” closer to the moral and political realities of everyday life activities. This multidimensional view emphasizes and improves the shared nature of reflective teaching through three concepts: situated cultural activity, teaching as a social,

political, moral and practical accomplishment, and teaching as a deliberative and action oriented critical process. Teaching is understood as a social accomplishment that is embedded in everyday activities situated in school cultures that are social, cultural, moral and practical in nature, where interactions with others are an important medium in which reflection occurs. This multidimensional view of teaching and teacher education requires deliberation and dialogue, and the exchange of ideas where reflection itself is not contained wholly in the mind of the individual but is shared through socio-political discourses and artifacts that are embedded in the social activity of the school community. For example, action research, collaborative curriculum planning and policy making, participating and developing teacher unions, organizing boycotts and strikes, etc. require teachers to discuss their beliefs and practices within the routines and outside of their daily work. As teachers participate in the practices of the community and use strategies and techniques to actively take part in political and intellectual decision making processes of their school communities, teaching itself becomes a form of practical, social, political, and intellectual accomplishment, or what Freire (1972) calls “Praxis.” For Freire, Praxis without the regulative ideas of emancipation and social justice is blind; and the critical reflection without a concrete content from our practical interest in communicative practice is empty. It is teacher educators’ task to show how an understanding of educational theory and practice is guided by both a recovery of shared tradition and a projection of an emancipated inquiry to their preservice teachers. But, how do teacher educators accomplish this task? And, how do they teach the ability to accomplish the task to preservice teachers?

For Bernstein (1983), this is a moral and political accomplishment, and this moral and political task requires a type of wisdom what he calls “phronesis,” or “practical wisdom.”

Practical wisdom, or phronesis, according to Aristotle (1976), refers to an inquirer's capacity to discern what is worth doing together with the ability to get it done, a reasoned and

true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods. Practical wisdom differs from theoretical wisdom (*scientia*) by a conclusion in human action. “In the first place, the end of a practice is not to produce an object or artifact but to realize some morally worthwhile ‘good’” (Carr, 1995, p. 68). Practically wise activities (*praxis*) for Carr (1995) have no fixed ends. The ends are constantly revised as “goods” are discerned. *Praxis*, morally worthwhile action, is not about choosing the right knowledge. It is about a way of being (Kessels, 1996). The starting point is what it means to be ethical, practical and political. What is needed for teacher education is a view of teaching practice which is able to acknowledge the non-causal, social, moral and political nature of teaching practice. What is needed, in other words, is an acknowledgement of the fact that teaching is a moral, social, practical and political accomplishment, rather than a mere technical or technological activity. The most important question for teacher educators and preservice teachers is therefore not only about mere technical and individual evaluation of efficacy of their practices but also about the potential social, moral and political value of what they do. In order to accomplish this task, *phronesis*, as a capacity acquired through experience, helps preservice teachers to ask penetrating questions, provide insight into the implications of their actions and events, and to advise appropriate courses of action. *Phronesis* involves the ability to understand how complex and messy situations hang together in teaching and other educational practices, and to discern the affordances whereby appropriate actions might be founded. For example, in the case of my preservice teacher mentioned above, it was evident for her that if she did not relate her lessons and teaching strategies specifically to the diverse students’ needs and backgrounds, and incorporate culturally mediated activities, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in classroom instruction, she would miserably fail in her class. Her experience in the class helped her understand that teaching is more than the simple application of strategies or techniques, there are

questions about the moral, social, cultural and political issues and problems need to be addressed in particular classroom contexts. It is precisely the version of teacher education that I conceptualize in this paper in order to help teachers and preservice teachers understand and deal with the complexities of teaching in diverse classroom settings.

This study is based on an argument that the idea of phronesis, or practical wisdom, offers a valuable framework to capture and represent the wisdom of preservice teachers. In this framework, I connect the features of phronesis and practical philosophy in the hope of developing a view for what needs to be captured and represented about the practical wisdom of preservice teachers.

In the following section, I discuss why it is necessary to move the theory and practice of reflection in teacher education towards a hermeneutic view of practical wisdom, and describe what the characteristics of this hermeneutic view of teacher education are.

### **From Reflective Practice to Practical Wisdom**

The move from reflective practice to practical wisdom points to the possibility of developing a multidimensional approach of theory and practice of reflective teaching and teacher education foregrounded in the features of hermeneutic practical framework mentioned above. Higgins (2001) argued that “the Aristotelian concept of phronesis or practical wisdom (as extended by Hans-Georg Gadamer) offers us a richer vocabulary for talking about the very kind of reflectiveness Schön is after.” (p.93). In order to show the limitations of contemporary literature on reflective practice, Higgins stated that

the move from reflective practice to practical wisdom helps us to capture crucial dimensions of educational reflection, like its inescapably ethical nature, which Schön fails to address. Once we build on Schön's account of reflection in this way, his diagnosis of the sources of unreflectiveness and his prescription of reflective practica no longer seem sufficient. If the unreflective practitioner lacks phronesis, then unreflectiveness is

not merely inflexibility but a kind of moral blindness. Unable to see what the new demands of us, we fall prey to various forms of repetition. (p.93)

Higgins argues that teacher education should focus on practically wise teaching practices and educational exemplars. However, he admits that phronesis cannot be taught by philosophers or anyone else. According to Kerdeman (2001),

The problem is that phronesis is practical understanding in-situ (situated understanding). It therefore cannot be realized in advance or outside of the experiences that require it. Put differently, the kinds of experiences in which phronesis comes into play are understood only insofar as we actually live through them. (p.100)

But the question here is how teacher educators might practically educate such understanding if phronesis cannot be taught. According to Eisner (2002), a part of the answer is through deliberation, artistry, critical, and aesthetic considerations.

This way of looking at the teacher education is an attempt to develop an alternative language in which the terms ethics, deliberative excellence, poetics, critical reflexivity and rhetoric occupy center stage (McLaren, 2000; Eisner, 2002).

In this study, I try to explore how a middle school English method course affects pre-service teachers' understanding and perception of notions of "practice" and "good teaching" from the five theoretical constructs mentioned above: ethics, deliberative excellence, poetics, critical reflexivity. The following discussion will explore these four theoretical constructs which extends our discussion of teaching as phronesis from practical hermeneutics.

### ***Ethics***

A practical philosophy is first an ethics of judgment. It is a theory of good judgment relevant to every instance of reflection and teaching. Practical knowledge is not acquired in making some kind of product, or solving some kind of problem, disconnected from teachers' way of being in the world. Rather it is existential accomplishment involves a social, moral and political understanding that is not required in technical view of teaching and teacher education. Technique

requires clever application of skills; practical wisdom requires understanding. Teaching as practical philosophy is not a cognitive capacity that one can use at one's choosing, but a way of knowing bound up with who we are and what we want to become. It is particularly related to questions of the human goodness.

The notion of caring plays an important role in understanding of ethical dimensions of practical philosophy in teacher education. To care as a teacher is to be ethically bound to understand one's students. The teacher probes gently for clarification, interpretation and contribution from what students' say, whether it is right or wrong. Ethics of caring is practiced through confirmation, which stresses that teachers must take time to listen and help students; dialogue, where teachers and students engage in an honest and open communication as an appropriate and integral tool of learning; and cooperative practice, which stresses that practical personal confirmation and honest dialogue with students can be practiced only by working cooperatively with students, e.g., teachers acting as advisors in their subject field, not just imparters of knowledge.

Practically wise teaching is enhanced by the ethics of care attitude toward education, which involves taking a questioning, pondering, democratic perspective on the personal and public values of teaching and learning. Teachers seek out opportunities to dialogue with students, colleague, and society.

According to Noddings (1988), teaching from the perspective of an ethic of caring involves: (a) teacher models that pattern intellectual activity and desirable ways of interacting with people; (b) a search for problem solution through open and honest communication with students; (c) practice in caring by encouraging quality interaction between students, between teachers and students, and between parents and teachers; (d) confirmation of the cared for by

revealing to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts.

Howe (1986, p.6) indicated that for teachers to be able to cope with their function as moral educators they need to exhibit the following six characteristics of the ethics of teaching: (a) appreciation for moral deliberate or the recognition that individuals' interests might conflict, (b) empathy or the ability to assume the viewpoints and imagine the feelings of others, (c) interpersonal skills, the capacity to sensitively and humanly interact with others, (d) knowledge needed to formulate reasonable strategies and anticipate their consequences, (e) ability to reason through a conclusion and (f) courage to convert conclusion to action.

### *Deliberative Excellence*

Practical wisdom is variously identified as wisdom, wise judgment, or deliberative excellence. It is also characterized as "ethical know-how" (Bernstein, 1983, p. 147). According to Schwandt,

Even so, it does not simply mean knowledge of ethical behavior. It points to a union of ethics and politics. It is a kind of knowledge that is embedded in praxis and distinguishable from technical knowledge guaranteed by method. Deliberation means choosing a course of action and defending one's choice by means of a practical argument that is concrete, temporal, and refers to actual events. (p.50)

Deliberative excellence therefore requires a different approach towards relationship between means and ends than that found in technical view of teacher education. In deliberative excellence, "there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular situation. For the end itself is only concretely specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation" (Bernstein, 1983, p. 147).

Deliberative excellence in teaching and teacher education is not a monological act; it is dialogic in nature. The rule in the deliberative teaching is that the other person might be right, and that one takes the reasoning of the other person seriously. The possibility that one might be



wrong, or might learn something new from a conversation, is not a risk but a gain. But one must be open to the Other in conversation. This is what Gadamer (1975) and Dewey (1958) called "Openness." It is an ethics of rightly understanding a topic or a situation and working to change it if it is wrong.

If teachers and preservice teachers do not question the goals, values, and assumptions that guide their work and do not examine the context in which they teach, then they are not engaged in good deliberative teaching.

### *Poetics*

This artistic ability of making good educational judgments can be identified as the poetics of practical reasoning in teacher education. This poetic ability invokes images of a creative, inventive, imaginative teaching and teacher education. According to Schwandt (2002), "the use of the term poetics is intended to signal a sharp contrast with epistemology. It indicates that practical reasoning is more art than science"(p.53).

Within the traditional tradition that dominated most teacher education programs for a century, the domain of aesthetics is often overshadowed in the bright light of more "scientific" considerations. Dewey (1934), Jackson (1994), Eisner (1990) and others remind us, however, that powerful experiences are inherently aesthetic in nature. Aesthetic qualities such as beauty, rhythm, and the integration of sight and sound have everything to do with the power and meaning of an experience. The teachers' ability to make critical aesthetic distinctions and judgments in the field of teacher education has become more important than ever.

Eisner (1979) believes teaching "is an art in the sense that teaching can be performed with such skill and grace that, for the student as well as for the teacher, the experience can be justifiably characterized as aesthetic" (p. 153). The aesthetic quality of experience can be witnessed in the dialogue taking place between the teacher and his or her students. It is also

present when the act of teaching "provides intrinsic forms of satisfaction" (p. 153). Artistically and practically wise teachers are masterful at conceiving, planning, and executing lessons with unusual imagination and brilliance. Artistic wisdom in the classroom is more than motivation and dramatization. "It is an extraordinary level of performance, bred out of personal commitment which elevates the state of the art" (Rubin, 1985, p. 159).

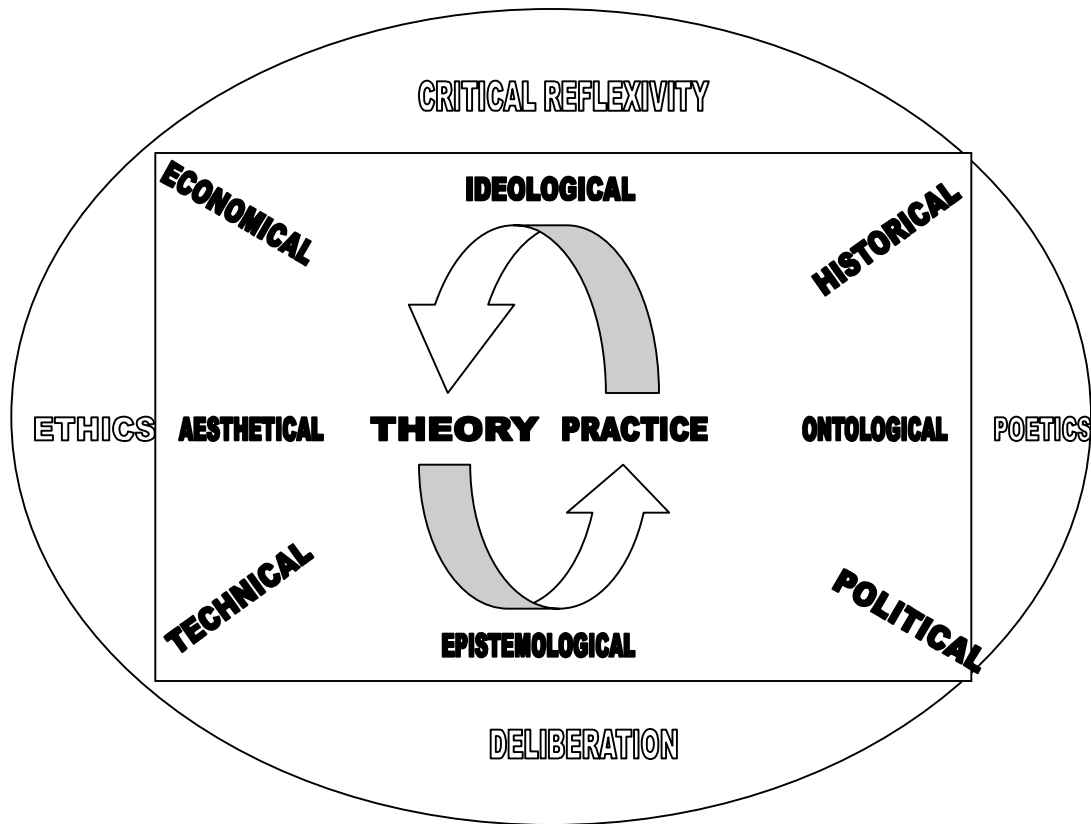
### *Critical Reflexivity*

Traditionally, the relationship between phronesis and critical reflection has been identified in terms of communicative and social democratic practice. From one perspective, theorists articulate critical knowledge as a means for transmitting the deliberations of the practically and critically wise teachers and teacher educators to students and preservice teachers. From this angle, the phronesis/critical knowledge relationship is negotiated by addressing the practical question of how well the teacher educators might share their excellent deliberations and lead the public through transformative, revolutionary consensus. Critical knowledge, in this view, refers to the ability to move an audience to revolutionary practice. From another perspective, critical knowledge promotes, rather than merely transmits, critical deliberation. In this second view, critical knowledge and practical reasoning generate local and practical rather than universal conclusions about teaching and teacher education based on problems of the moment experienced by teachers with the members of the school communities in a particular place and time. And both critical knowledge and practical reasoning aim to persuade students and preservice teachers about the rightness of a decision while considering the issues of social justice, equality, and freedom.

These characteristics of phronesis should not to be seen as hierarchical "layers" or "levels", but rather as forming a multi-dimensional approach depicting the terrain of teacher education and, therefore, its discourse. This multi-dimensional approach first is occupied by the

preservice teachers' social and cultural background, their material reality, and their actions. In this approach, preservice teachers must have a chance to explore their beliefs and pre-understanding about teaching and being a good teacher at both local and global context; through a study of practices or beliefs in the local school communities, and in other foreign; or it could involve comparisons between classrooms in different schools serving children from different social classes; or between educational beliefs held by various teachers.

Teacher education programs in this multi-dimensional approach would provide practical opportunities for preservice teachers to understand and explore the ontological, epistemological, political, economical, ideological, technical and historical issues of teaching and teacher education to develop their sense of practical and critical wisdom (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Multidimensional teacher education.

Investigating the ontological issues would provide preservice teacher to become critical about how classroom discourse shape and construct teachers and students' practices and identities and their ways of being in the world. Thus, preservice teachers can seek to continuously adapt the curriculum to students' backgrounds, interest and needs; seek new ways to get their students involved; and constantly exercise good judgement, imagination and flexibility to produce quality education when they start practicing teaching.

Analysis of the epistemological issues would help preservice teachers analyze what should count as knowledge and as knowing. Thus preservice teachers can consider the

relationship between what they are trying to teach and students' past experiences (backgrounds) and a personal needs and interests.

The exploration of political issues in the multidimensional teacher education would enable preservice teachers to recognize their power to reconstitute social, educational and political and practical life by the way they participate in communication, decision-making and social-political action. According to Giroux and McLaren (1987), if teacher education is to contribute toward a more just, and equitable social order, then it should be seen as a form of cultural politics based on the study of such themes as language, history, culture, and politics:

The project of doing a teacher education program based on cultural politics consists of linking critical social theory to a set of stipulated practices through which student teachers are able to dismantle and critically examine preferred educational and cultural traditions, many of which have fallen prey to instrumental rationality that either limits or ignores democratic ideals and principles. One of our main concerns focuses on developing a language of critique and demystification that is capable of analyzing the latent interests and ideologies that work to socialize students in a manner compatible with the dominant culture. We are equally concerned however, with creating alternative teaching practices capable of empowering students both inside and outside schools. (p. 173)

Investigating the economical issues would provide preservice teacher practical opportunities to analyze how the control of language and discursive practices linked to the existing and unequal distribution of power, goods, and services in school, and how global market economy and capitalist system impact on the policies and practices of educational system.

The exploration of ideological issues of teaching and schooling in the multidimensional teacher education model would enable preservice teachers to critically analyze what knowledge is of most worth to teach, and whose knowledge is it in education. Thus they can reflection on the social and political context of schooling and the assessment of classroom actions for their ability to enhance equality, justice, and more humane conditions in the schools and society. Teacher education for political and ideological consciousness should also provide opportunities for preservice teachers to construct tangible results of the ideological reconfigurations that are

part of critical reflection so that they can assess the quality of their efforts and continue to improve them. Turning critical thoughts into transformative actions helps preservice teachers internalize the process so that it can be replicated in future practices.

The analysis of the technical issues would help preservice teachers to learn how curricular knowledge could be made accessible to their students and by using what types of teaching techniques and strategies in their teaching experiences. Thus, they can become experts in subject matter, time management, classroom discipline, instructional methods, interpersonal communication, and learning theory.

The exploration of ethical issues of teaching and education would help preservice teachers understand how they could treat others responsibly and justly in education, and what the link between moral responsibilities and discursive practices of students and teachers in classrooms is.

Finally, understanding historical dimensions of teaching would provide preservice teacher practical opportunities to explore what ongoing and historical Conversations in the field of teaching and teacher education already exist on issues of teaching and being a good teacher, and what other resources they need to go further.

This multidimensional approach towards understanding teaching and teacher education with its transformative, moral, and practical functions can play a reflexive role, enabling preservice teachers to understand and cope with technical, moral, socio-cultural and socio-political structures and practices that directly or indirectly shape the character and content of classroom discourse, and develop practically wise practices to generate genuine teaching strategies.

## **Conclusion**

A dominant notion of self is that of an individual cognizing agent. Reflection is characterized by self-awareness. A self as agent with self-awareness can reflect on his or her practice in order to generate knowledge. Reflection is systematic and problem-focused. The reflective teacher is one who poses and solves practical problems. *Techne*, or skillful knowledge of the craft, guides teaching practice. Dialogue is a procedural process of making individual knowledge public. Schon offered us a way of speaking about teaching practice that is different from technical rationality. The literature presented here shows that in spite of this, the notion of reflective practice has been instrumentalized.

An alternative view provided by practical and critical hermeneutics offers a way of thinking about reflective practice differently. In this view, agency and self-awareness are part of a larger sense of self. Central to this notion of self is the idea that humans are self-interpreting beings. A self is situated in moral space and a self is embodied in social space. Because our way of speaking about ourselves constitutes who we are, the self is understood dialogically. Ongoing exchanges with others form identity. Self-understanding positions reflection on practice as *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. What if we looked at reflective teaching this alternate way? What if instead of reflecting on our beliefs (metacognition), we reflected on what it means to be an agent in the world (what it means to be a teacher)? What if instead of seeing reflection as problem-solving, we saw it as practical wisdom? What if, instead of monologic selves coordinating work with others, teaching was dialogic?

According to Gallagher (1992), "Interpretation consists of an interchange that involves not only a questioning of subject matter between interpreter and interpreted, but a self questioning" (p. 157). Questions occur to us or arise more than it is the case that we raise questions. This questioning, to be reflective, is dialogical. It is understanding ourselves in relation to practice, but also in respect to our circumstances. Self-understanding involves

dialogical questioning in order to understand others. Self-understanding is to understand oneself in relation to the object of interpretation. “Self-understanding is another aspect of *phronesis* or moral knowledge. . .the subject matter is not something external to an inner process. To the extent that we are involved in it we must find ourselves in it” (p. 187). *Phronesis* is developed through the dialogic encounter as a mode of reflective practice.

Gallagher (1992) drew on Geertz’s cultural hermeneutics, to explain practices by “placing them in local frames of awareness” (p. 335). In this light, reflective teaching might be seen as a situation of local hermeneutics. In a local hermeneutics, teachers analyze the existing interpretational practices in a specific site. Traditions, language use, prejudices, and applications are always local (p. 334). The method of reflection is not pre-determined or instrumentalized. Given a specific local teaching situation, questions arise or occur to the teacher. Reflection does not pertain to selecting from or applying pre-existing rules or canons, but would pertain to developing them in context. Pendlebury (1995) argued that practical wisdom, more than anything else, depends upon “situational appreciation” (p. 55). She referred to “a loving dialogue between principles and particulars, responsibility and perception” (p. 55). This dialogue is what makes *phronesis* possible.



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