Confronting unsuccessful practices: repositioning teacher identities in English education

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Abstract:

Teacher education programs attempt to prepare preservice teachers for the various challenges faced in the classroom. One particular challenge new teachers face is how to handle unsuccessful practices. This paper argues that confronting ineffective practices require that teachers respond to complex and dynamic challenges, making change difficult when solutions are not readily available. Presenting data from case-study research, the paper uses an identity framework and positioning theory to explore how two novice teachers navigate moments of unsuccessful practice. Findings suggest that when teachers confronted ineffective practices they repositioned their teacher identities in ways that depended on the ideologies of their school. The paper concludes with implications about the importance of extending typical reflective practices of teacher education with video analysis that challenges students to examine how they enact teacher identities over time within the figured world of their school.

Keywords: teacher education | teacher identity | positioning theory

Article:

Introduction

> I've been picking out errors in their own papers and using those and I've been working on the sentence combining, really focusing on specific skills of semi-colons and using commas ... But unfortunately … they're making the same mistakes over again.

In this quote Abigail (all names are pseudonyms), an experienced high school English teacher, informally discusses with a teacher educator how she engaged in writing instruction with her tenth-grade students. The "papers" Abigail referred to are from a practice prompt for her state's writing assessment. Students composed the writing test essay via notecards, one paragraph per notecard. To assess student writing, Abigail marked grammatically incorrect sentences with a dot along with comments about content. Students were then responsible for revising the sentences

with a dot on a separate piece of paper and submitting them to Abigail. In order to help students with their corrections, Abigail provided isolated grammar instruction via daily sentence corrections and quizzes. For example, on one quiz, Abigail required that students produce sentences using the grammatical structures she asked for (e.g. "Create a compound sentence with an appositive") in hopes they would transfer that knowledge into their writing. Despite these efforts, her students kept "making the same mistakes over again," which was frustrating to Abigail. Although she recognized this frustration, Abigail continued to teach grammar in the same way over time and received the same results from students.

Recognizing and dealing with consistently ineffective plans and strategies are a familiar experience for teachers. Although we (the authors who are teacher educators) do not focus on Abigail in this paper, we begin with her story to illustrate the frustration that both teachers and students experience when unsuccessful instruction is not modified to meet the needs of students. As teacher educators, we believe we can learn from the stories of experienced educators to help novice teachers confront enduring unsuccessful practices throughout their teaching career. For this paper, we use the phrase *confronting unsuccessful practice* to refer to moments when teachers realize that strategies and practices that they have been using consistently do *not* lead to student learning and teachers revise their practice based on that realization to fit the needs of their students. Because terms like *success* or *effective* are value-laden, we want to be clear that our understanding of successful and effective teaching practices is based on scholarship that illustrates the benefits of student-focused instruction (Cohen, 2011; Scanlon & Anderson, 2010). Such research argues for instruction created for the individual learning needs and interests of students in the classroom rather than scripted programs that do not differentiate for learners (Scanlon & Anderson, 2010).

In this example, Abigail did not confront her unsuccessful practices, which produced repeated results and hindered student learning. Developing solutions that meet the needs of students and curriculum, however, is not an easy task. Changing enduring instructional practices is a difficult process because it requires teachers to not only recognize what is not working and to take on new knowledge and skills, but also "to change the whole way they understand themselves, their world, and the relationship between the two" (Kegan, 1994, p. 275). To create such enduring practices, teachers must first realize that a current practice needs improvement and come to terms with the opportunities and barriers that will occur from changing instructional practices (e.g. differing beliefs from colleagues), making a permanent pedagogical shift (e.g. from teacher-centered to student-centered practices) (Bell & Gilbert, 1996).

Confronting ineffective teaching practices is a complex process that requires not only changing knowledge and instructional strategies, but also changing deeply rooted sociocultural beliefs about what it means to be a teacher within a particular institution. Such confrontations are complicated even more by an institution's definition of success, which may or may not match with the teacher's definition and the needs of the students. Educators would benefit from more research that explores the complexities of those confrontations. This paper attempts to do just that by using an identity framework to explore how high school English teachers dealt with ineffective teaching practices within their classrooms. This research draws from a larger study that explored how four novice teachers constructed their teacher identities during their first year of teaching. One major finding from this study reported that all teachers repositioned their

identities when they confronted unsuccessful practices. For this paper, we explored the following question: In what ways did two novice teachers confront unsuccessful teaching practices?

Literature review

Confronting unsuccessful practices

Educators have done much work on how teachers confront and change unsuccessful practices in their classrooms (Bell & Gilbert, 1996; Duffy & Hoffman, 2002). For example, Duffy and Hoffman's (2002) concept of thoughtfully adaptive teaching suggests that teachers and teacher candidates struggled the most with being responsive to students or situations within moment-to-moment classroom interactions. The K-5 teachers knew their content and used "best practices," but struggled to figure out what to do when confronted with situations that did not match their expectations and required them to improvise. Similar to Principled Eclecticism (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997), Duffy and Hoffman's adaptive approach means knowing students, content, strategies, and creating the right combination of student needs, strategies, and materials to support growth. Such research suggests that teachers may need to abandon instruction that does not work and develop new strategies that orchestrate dynamic combinations of methods and materials in response to students. For preservice or novice teachers, the idea of abandoning well-planned instruction is overwhelming, especially if that planned instruction is mandated by their institution. Novice teachers are juggling multiple complex tasks such as understanding state curriculum standards, learning the depth of content in their grade level and subject area, and developing relevant strategies. How teacher educators prepare future teachers to handle the complexities of this learning influences how well new teachers navigate both successful and unsuccessful practices.

Stemming from Dewey's (1938/1991) work on reflective practices, Schön (1983) developed theories about learning, change, and reflection that highlighted how reflection was central to understanding what practitioners do. His notions of reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action involved an examination of experiences, connection to emotions, and attendance to theories in use and entailed building new understandings to inform actions in an unfolding situation. For Schön, practitioners confronted unsuccessful practice through reflection about personal experiences in the workplace that analyzed, adapted, and challenged assumptions. He believed that practitioners were likely to assess, understand, and learn from experiences and potentially change those practices based on their students. Teacher educators have integrated this kind of analytic reflection into their programs to foster critical thinking about practice.

To extend this research, Fairbanks et al. (2009) discussed possible reasons why some teachers were more responsive than other teachers through four perspectives: teacher beliefs, visions, belonging, and identity. Research on both teacher beliefs and visions about pedagogy suggests that if teachers are expected to clarify beliefs, such reflective practices may open opportunities for teachers to reexamine what they do and why they do it (Olson, 2007). At the same time, teachers' beliefs about their institutions can shape their practices and responsiveness to students. For example, if teachers believe that curriculum is not negotiable, they are more likely to follow scripted programs and less likely to change practices based on student needs. That does not mean, however that teachers' beliefs are not powerful. In a study about teacher beliefs and

technology integration, Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, and Sendurur (2012) found that teachers with student-centered beliefs were more likely to enact student-centered practices regardless of administrative and technological barriers. In addition, teachers reported that existing attitudes and beliefs about technology were the biggest barriers to trying out technological instructional practices. Thus, a change in pedagogical beliefs is likely to shape classroom instruction.

Teacher visions, or descriptions of how teacher candidates see themselves as teachers in the present and future, can provide opportunities for teachers to define themselves within an institution and to recognize tensions between who they want to become and who they are expected to be (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Duffy, 2002). Recently, scholarship in this area illustrates how both video and discourse analysis of classroom interactions can help preservice teachers tease out those tensions and make a constructive plan for action in future instruction (Sherin & van Es, 2009; van Es & Sherin, 2010; Vetter & Schieble, 2016).

Research on teacher belonging suggests that teachers are more likely to change practices and be responsive to students when they are supported by their institutions and connected with their colleagues (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Thus, when the teacher and institution hold similar ideas about successful practices, then teachers are likely to try out new practices. When those ideas do not align, changing instruction can be difficult because teachers fear losing their jobs. Specifically, professional learning communities, such as teacher research groups, offer spaces for teachers to enact modes of belonging (engagement, alignment, and imagination) (Goodnough, 2010). With the support of such groups, educators feel a sense of belonging and, thus, feel more comfortable with new instructional practices.

To help preservice teachers learn to negotiate such dilemmas, practice turn theorists in education (Kemmis & Smith, 2008) suggest that teacher education programs should focus less on knowledge and beliefs, and focus more on the actual tasks and activities of teaching (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Before novice teachers can negotiate conflicting ideas about successful practices within an institution, practice turn theories illustrate how teacher education can provide preservice teachers with more time to practice so that they can study that practice with the benefits of support, scaffolds, clear instruction, feedback, and coaching (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2004). Thus, more settings need to be developed in which practices can be tried out, corrected, refined, and mastered (Ball & Forzani, 2009). With more practical experience, novice teachers are better prepared to deal with the sophisticated nature of negotiating conflicting ideas of effective practices at their school (i.e. less focused on surviving their first year and more focused on contributing to the culture of their school) (Reid, 2011).

Identity, figured worlds, and positioning theory

There is a widespread interest among current educational scholars in using a teacher identity framework to inform scholarship about teacher development and responsiveness (e.g. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Bullough, 2005; Cohen, 2011; Fairbanks et al., 2009). This is because an identity framework attempts to uncover how teachers are shaped by past experiences, teacher education, and their interaction with other people (Cooper & Olson, 1996; Danielewicz, 2001), and how they negotiate previous assumptions related to sociocultural notions of education

(Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Fairbanks et al., 2009). This paper draws from an identity perspective to illustrate how confronting an ineffective practice is about repositioning teacher identities within a figured world. To explain that framework, we draw from three interrelated concepts that we define and explain below: identity, figured worlds, and positioning.

Poststructural concepts of identity are defined as "self-understandings" or a "key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them" and are a base "from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 5). Thus, identities are multiple, shifting, and are shaped by a sociocultural context (Holland et al., 1998). In particular an identity framework recognizes that learning is not only about understanding a set of skills and strategies, but is also a process in which people construct and negotiate identities in order to become members of particular communities, such as a school. For example, teacher educator, Maxine Greene (1981) viewed the specific task of learning to teach, "as a process of identity development … it is about choosing yourself, making deeply personal choices about who you are and who you will become as a teacher" (p. 12). In a study with four Norwegian teachers, Soreide (2006) found that teachers constructed their teacher identities in four ways: the typical teacher, the caring and kind teacher, the creative and innovative teacher, and the professional teacher. Through narratives, the teachers negotiated between multiple identities that were constantly shaped, reshaped, and adapted to the figured world. Such research suggests that "being" a teacher is a constant process of reconstruction and expansion (Danielewicz, 2014). That process is tied to teacher beliefs about pedagogy and learning, which shapes teachers' identities (Bullough, 1997). Teacher educators, then, must be concerned with providing opportunities for the identity work of teachers in order to promote meaning-making and problem-solving within the field (Bullough, 1997).

Teachers construct and enact identities within a figured world (e.g. school). Holland et al. (1998) define a figured world as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). Within a figured world, individuals have expectations for appropriate behavior and structure within an event. For example, Boaler and Greeno (2000) identified two distinct figured worlds of mathematics, one driven by didactic teaching and the other by discussion-based teaching. Findings from interviews of teachers illustrated that these figured worlds shaped how participants constructed their teacher identities, and as a result, instructed students. Thus, the figured world of a school shapes how teachers confront ineffective practices. A teacher might recognize that her typical skill-and-drill method of teaching is not challenging students to think critically about figurative language, but she might refuse to change that practice because the figured world of her school greatly values high scores on standardized exams, believing such a method is the only way to achieve such scores. At the same time, this perspective recognizes that teachers also shape the figured world of their school. For example, teachers might engage in professional development over the summer about implementing a writing workshop and as a result change how writing instruction is typically taught in their school. Thus, how and why a teacher confronts both effective and ineffective strategies is dependent on the figured world of the school. As a result, the definition of successful or effective practices shifts depending on what a school values. When this definition differs from a teacher's understanding of successful practices, the teacher is challenged to find a way to shape the figured world in ways that meet her needs along with the needs of the students. Sometimes,

as our study illustrates, teachers leave the profession rather than risk the consequences of attempting to change school curriculum and policies (Alsup, 2006).

Positioning theory (Harré & Langenhove, 1999) is a useful concept for understanding how teachers construct and enact identities within the figured world of their school. Positionality is defined as "the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 91). Positioning theorists believe that people situate themselves either interactively (i.e. when a person positions another person) or reflexively (i.e. when a person positions himself or herself) within discursive interactions and along storylines or narratives in which they feel comfortable (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 91). Thus, positioning illuminates personal beliefs and assumptions about the world, including behaviors, duties, and responsibilities that make up a particular act of positioning, such as student-led pedagogy. In other words, preservice teachers position themselves in relation to beliefs they have about teaching, past learning experiences, and current teacher education experiences. Those positionings reveal the storylines (i.e. order people impose that is grounded in beliefs and tacit knowledge that underpins a person's world view) they are prepared to enact when teaching. To construct a teacher identity, preservice teachers must position themselves in ways that enable others to view them as a teacher within a figured world (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Haniford, 2010). For example, a teacher positioned as an expert teacher leader may be required to perform what Harré and Slocum (2003) describe as a heroic storyline, characterized with behaviors of heroic feats that "display mastery with a becoming modesty" (p. 107). These positionings are not without difficulty and they take practice over time. In addition, taking on a new position, such as former lecturer to future facilitator, is a long process that involves a shift in behaviors and talk over an extended time (Holland et al., 1998). However, as social psychology work presents, "every instance [storyline] is unique," yet potentially only "surface features" of someone's attitude or cognitive state (Harré & Slocum, 2003, pp. 100–101). This poses potential flexibility in the development of teacher identities within teacher education programs and for teachers as they enter the classroom. For teacher educators, then, understanding how preservice teachers position themselves as they enter teaching could provide insight into better teacher preparation and for helping teachers see ways to shift their identities, and thus their position, within a given classroom situation/practice (Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Harré & Slocum, 2003).

We use the term *reposition identities* to illustrate how changing practices are tied to a shift in rooted sociocultural beliefs about what it means to be a teacher. Such beliefs are deeply resistant to change, which is why it is important for teacher educators to challenge beliefs that might contradict teachers' goals of reaching students (Bullough, 1997). Thus, what teachers do and how teachers react in these moments depend on teacher identity and how they construct and enact that identity within the figured world of school (Holland et al., 1998). This study speaks to the importance of identity work in teacher education programs that prepare preservice teachers to (1) recognize an unsuccessful practice, (2) analyze the complexities involved in why a practice may or may not be successful (e.g. pressures from testing, expectations of school, etc.), and (3) develop strategies for reflecting in new ways on such moments in order to make changes in their practice. Such identity work relates to concepts of practice turn theory that suggests teacher education is about making teaching practices strange for students (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2004; Reid, 2011). This idea poses opportunities for students to confront the work of teaching as

something they do not know everything about and instead as something to be practiced, refined, reflected upon, and tried again (Reid, 2011). Research on both teacher beliefs and visions about pedagogy suggests that if teachers are expected to clarify beliefs, such reflective practices may open opportunities for teachers to reexamine what they do and why they do it and potentially shape their practices and responsiveness to students (Olson, 2007).

Methods

Participants

This research draws from a larger study that explored how four novice teachers constructed their teacher identities during their first year of teaching. We focused on Hailey and Kerri for this paper because they taught in contexts (rural and urban) that were representative of where our preservice teachers would teach after graduation. In addition, Hailey and Kerri were committed to our research group meetings, which provided rich data for analysis.

Hailey

Hailey, a white middle-class female, teaches tenth-grade at a rural school in the southeast Mason High School (MHS). At the time of the study, approximately 575 students attended the school. Of those students, 73% were white, 16% were Latino/a, and 11% were African-American. The school's SAT score average was 1036/1456. The main focus for the school at this time was helping students who spoke English as a second language to succeed, as well as integrating technology (i.e. Smart Boards) into the classroom. Hailey attended the local university in the area and received her license to teach high school English in 2010. Amy and Jeanie taught Hailey during her junior and senior year at the university. Following her graduation, Hailey agreed to participate in a study with us that focused on ways to improve their English Education Program at the university. Hailey's teaching philosophy stated that she wanted "to encourage success and motivate students to achieve their personal goals and to help them overcome their fear of failure and become accomplished despite the obstacles that stand in their way." Her goal at the end of her first year teaching was to continue practicing innovative strategies that pushed her outside her comfort zone of traditional instruction.

Kerri

Kerri, a white middle-class female, taught ninth-grade at an urban school in the southeast, Stuart High School (SHS), at the time of the study. At the time of the study, approximately 1200 students attended SHS. Ninety-five of those students were from culturally diverse backgrounds and 84% qualified for free and reduced lunch. On the End of Course Test, focused on English proficiency, approximately 27% were proficient. One of the major goals of the school was to raise test scores. She attended the local university in the area and received her license to teach high school English in 2010. Like Hailey, Amy and Jeanie taught her during her junior and senior year at the university in English Education courses. On Kerri's teacher blog, she stated that teaching was hard work that required constant personal reassessment. She believed teaching was about more than content-knowledge and required "helping students to feel validated and valuable."

The researchers

Amy and Jeanie, professors in English Education at a southeastern university, collected data on four teachers during their junior and senior year and during their first year of teaching. Amy taught all four teachers during their senior year in courses titled *Teaching Practices and Curriculum* and in *Student Teaching*. Jeanie taught three of the four teachers during their junior year in a course called *The Teaching of Writing*. Shana, an English Education professor at a small, private university in the Southeastern United States, provided Abigail's language at the beginning of this paper (from a separate study on teacher identity) and a third, outsider perspective on the data analysis.

Data collection and analysis

We (Amy and Jeanie) collected data as participant-observers for a period of two years during the participants' student teaching and are first-year teachers. Data sources included: (a) participant observation field notes in academic settings; (b) three audio-taped semi-structured group interviews; (c) two audio-taped semi-structured individual interviews; (d) written assignments, such as reflections in daybooks, lesson plans, timelines, blogs, and portfolios; (e) informal conversations, and (f) five video-taped lessons with transcriptions and reflections. Observations (audio and video-taped) of the five lessons occurred for the entire day so that all three 90-min class periods were noted in thick description.

Since the teacher was the main focus, field notes focused on how the novice teachers did or did not confront ineffective practices. For example, notes focused on types of language used (verbal and nonverbal), such as the use of closed-ended questions or sitting behind a desk to facilitate discussion. We formally interviewed (audio-taped) Hailey and Kerri in a focus group (approximately 3 h) with two other novice teachers three times during their first year of teaching (beginning, middle, and end of the year) and individually during our school visits (approximately 45-min). In all interviews, we asked the teachers about pedagogical strategies and theories, their process of becoming a teacher, and the supports and barriers they faced as new teachers. During the second and third interviews, we discussed interpretations of the data collected up to that point with the teachers, including a few potential patterns found through initial analysis.

Data analysis began by using grounded theory to generate common patterns and themes across data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this point (Phase I), Shana joined the research group and analyzed data from both Hailey and Kerri. First, we individually reviewed all audio and video-tapes and extended field notes that included information about how Kerri and Hailey did or did not confront unsuccessful practices. We came back together and systematically took note of those specific occurrences and compared/contrasted interpretations. From this initial analysis, we concluded that both Kerri and Hailey attempted to reposition their teacher identities (i.e. lecturer to facilitator) after they were confronted with unsuccessful practices in the classroom. The evidence for this theme was rich and potentially provided insight into how teachers change or do not change deeply embedded beliefs and practices to reach the needs of students. Thus, during Phase II, we refined analysis by using positioning theory to uncover how teachers positioned themselves (e.g. lecturer), positioned others (e.g. students as participants), and were positioned

by their students or colleagues (e.g. students position teacher as authority) to determine the identity work involved in confronting ineffective practices within a figured world of school. Thus, for transcribed interviews, observational notes, and artifacts, researchers took note of interaction and reflective positionings in relationship to teaching. For example, we noted that Hailey repositioned herself from lecturer to facilitator and her students from passive to active participants after realizing that direct instruction about writing was not successfully teaching her students how to write.

Through an analysis of positioning, we were better able to understand how teachers' discursive practices constituted them in particular ways and were used as resources to negotiate new positions in their school. Thus, because language is used to construct identities within figured worlds (Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland et al., 1998), discourse analysis helped us better understand why and how the teachers repositioned themselves in new ways, including how those positionings related to the figured worlds in which they taught (Elder-Vass, 2011). In particular, because teacher positions are created in and through talk, discourse analysis helped us to identify how teachers conceived themselves and others through their positionings (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009).

Table 1. Discourse analysis of novice teacher identity work.

Techniques	Questions for analysis
Situated Meaning The understanding that words take on different meanings in different contexts of use	What do words mean in this figured world? What do these words mean in this time and What are the key words in the text?
Social Languages Types of language people use in situations to situate themselves in particular ways	What is the grammar and function of the language? What type of person speaks like this? Is the grammar appropriate for the figured world?
Discourse Models A generalization or assumption from past experiences that people make to explain a current situation	What are the speaker's underlying assumptions? What Discourse models does the speaker believe? What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense? Do ideologies align with the figured world?
Situated Identities How a person positions themselves within a particular situation	Who is the speaker trying to be? What is the speaker trying to do? What Discourses are being produced here? What identities gain membership in this figured world?

Source: Adapted from Gee (2005) and Van Sluys, Lewison, and Flint (2006).

In Phase III, we drew from Van Sluys, Lewison, and Flint's (2006) use of Gee's (2005) techniques (i.e. situated meaning, social languages, and Discourse models) to analyze their talk in interviews, reflections, and video-taped lessons that illustrated moments when they confronted unsuccessful practices (Tables 1 and 2). Specifically, situated meanings helped us better understand the various meanings of words used in the context of their school, which revealed the ways in which the figured world shaped each teacher's positionings. For example, Hailey's use of the words "terrified" to describe her first teaching experience in a rural school uncovers the uncertainty she had of teaching students who were culturally and linguistically different than herself. Examining social languages revealed the kinds of words the teachers used in situations to situate themselves in a particular way. For example, Kerri used "teacher talk" in her interviews, such as Individual Education Plan (IEP), to position herself as a teacher in a struggling school.

From this, we inferred that the high-needs school shaped how she constructed her teacher identity.

Table 2. Discourse analysis.

Utterance	Building task	Analysis	Context
There were gang issues. So if I saw a little attitude … I would say 'we're not fighting.' They would stop because they knew that I knew what was going on. But it took a while. The first week I was terrified. It's hard when you find out that five or more of your kids are in a gang. I just felt like every day was a new thousand-piece puzzle that I had to put together to make it work. Every day had something good and something bad. I had one class that I could just never get.	Situated meaning	In this context we understand that these words are used to describe her first few weeks of teaching to a group of students who came from very different backgrounds than her own.	Interview Rural school
There were gang issues. So if I saw a little attitude … I would say 'we're not fighting.' They would stop because they knew that I knew what was going on. But it took a while. The first week I was terrified. It's hard when you find out that five or more of your kids are in a gang. I just felt like every day was a new thousand- piece puzzle that I had to put together to make it work. Every day had something good and something bad. I had one class that I could just never get.	Social languages	Throughout this description, Hailey used a deficit-laden social language to describe her students and teaching experience (*fighting, hard, terrifying*).	Interview Rural school
There were gang issues. So if I saw a little attitude … I would say 'we're not fighting.' They would stop because they knew that I knew what was going on. But it took a while. The first week I was terrified. It's hard when you find out that five or more of your kids are in a gang. I just felt like every day was a new thousand-piece puzzle that I had to put together to make it work. Every day had something good and something bad. I had one class that I could just never get.	Discourse models	Hailey assumes that her students are scary and difficult to teach.	InterviewRural school
There were gang issues. So if I saw a little attitude … I would say 'we're not fighting.' They would stop because they knew that I knew what was going on. But it took a while. The first week I was terrified. It's hard when you find out that five or more of your kids are in a gang. I just felt like every day was a new thousand-piece puzzle that I had to put together to make it work. Every day had something good and something bad. I had one class that I could just never get.	Situated identities	Hailey positioned herself as a teacher who was afraid of her students and was continuously confronted with unsuccessful practices.	Interview Rural school

Gee states that a Discourse model is a generalization or assumption from a past experience that can be used to explain a current situation. This tool for analysis helped us better understand the storylines these teachers followed in their positionings. For example, Hailey's description of Ebonics (i.e. African-American Vernacular English) as "awful" in an interview illustrates her assumption about the kind of language that counts in her classroom. From this, we understood

that linguistic differences shaped how she repositioned her identities. Finally, a situated identity is how a person positions themselves within a particular moment, such as when Kerri situated herself as empowered after opting to not teach to the pacing guide at her school. Because this analysis expected us to carefully consider the context, it revealed how the figured world influenced the ways in which teachers repositioned themselves. For example, we noted that the figured world of a high-stakes school, which often focuses on the test rather than the student, played a significant role in the way Kerri repositioned her identities and confronted unsuccessful practices. After discussing results from the discourse analysis from both Hailey and Kerri, the researchers constructed a descriptive case study based on the ways in which the teachers confronted practices that were not proving to be successful with their students.

Although a micro analytic approach provides significant insights into classroom interactions, there are limitations to this kind of analysis. First, it is important to note that as discourse analysts, we are never completely sure of the purpose and intention behind the speaker's words (Gee, 2005). In particular, with each level of discourse analysis there is increasing possibility for oversights and misrepresentations based on the assumptions we bring to the analysis. For example, we recognize the power differentials between the researchers and the participants. During the first year of data collection, Hailey and Kerri were our (Amy and Jeanie) students and could have given us the answers and assignments they believed we wanted in order to successfully complete their program. Although during the second year of data collection they were no longer our students, there was still potential for them to teach lessons and make specific comments that they thought we wanted to see and hear. With that said, we believe that our consistent presence in Kerri and Hailey's teaching experiences during both years helped to develop a trust between us that likely produced authentic data. In addition, both teachers wanted to remain as participants in the study because they wanted to continue to reflect and learn about their teaching practice with university support.

Findings

Hailey: Confronting teacher-centered instructional practices in a high-poverty school

During her first year of teaching, Hailey noted in interviews and reflections that using the teacher-centered strategies she learned from her past K-12 schooling, such as assigning heavy loads of reading at home and/or lengthy essays, were not fostering success with her students. In her own schooling, Hailey experienced a majority of direct instruction that used grades as a motivating factor. As a student, this kind of instruction worked for her. Thinking about how to employ innovative strategies "on the fly" pushed Hailey outside her comfort zone and oftentimes left her feeling overwhelmed. Thus, the figured world of the school where she taught was very different from the figured world of school, which she attended. As a result, "successful" teacher identities within these figured worlds were different and Hailey spent the first six months of her teaching coming to this realization. Although we recognize that Hailey's teacher education experience shaped her teaching, data illustrated that her own schooling history had the most impact, which is what we discuss in this section.

Hailey also came from a white middle-class family who was able pay for her to attend college and taught her how to navigate the institutions of education. Hailey's students at MHS, however,

came from low-income backgrounds, many at poverty level (Table 3). Thus, Hailey entered teaching with particular Discourse models or assumptions about what it meant to be a "good" or "successful" student in this figured world as illustrated in the following interview:

> There were gang issues. The first week I was terrified. It's hard when you find out that five or more of your kids are in a gang. I just felt like every day was a new thousand-piece puzzle that I had to put together to make it work. Every day had something good and something bad. I had one class that I could just never get.

Table 3. Demographics at MHS.

Demographics	MHS (%)
White	55
Latino/a	24
Black	18
Asian/Pacific Islander	2
Students eligible for free and reduced lunch	37

In this interview Hailey described her students with words like, "gangs," "attitude," and "fighting." As a result, she portrayed her first few weeks of teaching as terrifying and hard. Her comparison to teaching with putting together a thousand-piece puzzle illustrated the difficulty she had making things "work" for her students. In this context, we understand that these words are used to describe her first few weeks of teaching to a group of students who came from very different backgrounds than her own. Throughout this description, Hailey used a deficit-laden social language to describe her students and teaching experience (e.g. "fighting," "hard," and "terrified"), which illustrates the assumptions she had about her students (i.e. that they are scary and difficult to teach). From this, we gather that Hailey positioned herself as a teacher who was afraid of her students and frequently encountered unsuccessful practices because of these differences (e.g. "I had one class I that just could never get"). At this point, Hailey's disconnection to the lives of her students and her deeply rooted beliefs and storylines about the value of teacher-centered instruction, particularly the teacher-centered practices she found success in as a student, kept her from developing successful practices with her students within this particular figured world.

After the first semester of using teacher-centered strategies (lecture and worksheets) that proved to be ineffective according to student grades and feedback, Hailey revised her entire curriculum over the winter break to create more student-centered learning for a new group of students during the second semester. She learned about these strategies from colleagues in the English Department who had experience teaching student-centered units. In the next example, we discuss one instance during a unit focused on *A House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (2013). In interviews, Hailey stated that she chose this book because she believed that it would speak to many of her Latino/a students, open dialogue about the Latinos/as community with students from other cultures, and provide opportunities for her to learn more about her students. Before reading the book, she engaged students in a project that asked them to create a multimodal autobiography. When projects were complete, they shared segments of their writing with the entire class. This was particularly valuable for one class because Hailey noticed that they segregated themselves based on race when they were allowed to choose their own seats. In

interviews, she stated that she worried about how this seating arrangement shaped the classroom community and realized that she needed to rearrange her seating to foster relationships in the classroom. Below she described some of those conversations after students wrote their autobiographies in a similar format to the book.

> But, with this book, they could write about anything in the world they wanted to. I learned so much about so many kids. When we introduced this book I found a newspaper article about Mexican immigrants in Chicago. So, we talked about it. And, of course you have the one that's going to be like, "Yeah, the Mexicans come here to …" But, then you have the Hispanics who say, "We came here for a better life. We came here for an education. We came here to do this, or that." And, for them to talk about those things in tenth grade is kind of a big deal.

In this segment, Hailey used the value-added sentence, "I learned so much about so many kids" to illustrate her shift in Discourse models about her students. Rather than being fearful or terrified of her students, she learned from them and set up the classroom so that they learned from each other. In doing this, she situated herself as a student-centered teacher and her students as valuable contributors. Her use of the pronoun "we" signified a language of community and sharing, rather than a community that did not talk about experiences outside of school.

Thus, Hailey confronted her structured teaching practices (e.g. rows, quizzes, lecture) that promoted a segregated classroom and took on a new position of facilitator who learned from the stories of her students and used current events to foster controversial dialogue about social, cultural, and political issues. This is significant because Hailey not only took on a new strategy, but she also shifted from a transmission model of teaching to a sociocultural model that provided more student-centered instruction. She reframed what it meant to be a teacher within this figured world and repositioned herself as a teacher who used students' experiences and prior knowledge to shape her teaching practices that promoted community development, such as seating arrangements, book choices, and projects. Hailey taught in a figured world in which this kind of curriculum was shared and supported, which helped her to question her initial beliefs and storylines about what it means to be a teacher. For her, "becoming" a teacher at MHS meant teaching in a more student-centered approach.

Although Hailey repositioned her structured teaching practices in several ways, she still encountered unsuccessful teaching practices that resulted in no refiguring, all of which were related to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of her students. For example, in an interview towards the end of her final year, she discussed her views on non-standard English and its relation to learning and honors classes:

> For the writing test, I went and told the principal, "We have so much Ebonics … it's awful. Awful." Then, the ELLs that are still learning English … Why are they in an honors class? But, you know, I push them and they do it. … if a parent wants their kid in an honors class, that's where they are … I mean, I'd want my kids in honor's class. They're going to get better.

In this example, Hailey used deficit-laden words like "awful" to describe Ebonics, the native language that many of her students spoke. Her statement illustrated Discourse models about the relationship between higher level thinking and the use of academic English. Unfortunately this reflects broader institutional perspectives, even beyond her school, that place students not fluent in academic English in classes with struggling learners because their capabilities are misinterpreted. Interestingly, when she switched from a teacher perspective to a parent perspective, she gained more compassion by saying, "I'd want my kids in honor's class." We viewed this example as a missed opportunity for Hailey to confront concepts of "honors-level" teaching practices within the figured world of this school. These practices did not match with honors-level students in the figured world of her attended school. At this point, Hailey struggled with her idea of how students *should* learn and speak rather than examining her students' needs and modifying instruction based on the assets they bring to class. Although Hailey repositioned her teaching identities as student-centered in the first example, she was unable to reposition identities within the new context of an honors-level classroom. This could be a result of teaching her first honors-level course at this school, and we imagine that Hailey will reposition her teaching identities in ways to reach this new group of students as she did in the past. Regardless, Hailey's identity work within the figured world of the classroom was directly related to her understanding of the cultural and linguistic histories that students brought with them to class. For her, some of those histories were easier to capitalize on than others.

Kerri: Confronting structured teaching practices in a school focused on high-stakes exams

Kerri came from the figured world of a private school background that influenced what she described as her "rainbows and butterflies" view of teaching. After graduating college, she was hired at a local, urban high school that consisted of students from 44 different countries (Table 4). SHS did not meet Annual Yearly Progress for the year. This meant that 50 to 60% of their students were at grade level based on standardized exams. Thus, Kerri taught in a figured world that was very different from the figured world of her own schooling.

Table 4. Demographics at SHS.

Demographics	MHS (%)
White	4
Latino/a	15
Black	67
Asian/Pacific Islander	10
Students eligible for free and reduced lunch	80

After attending curriculum meetings the summer before she began teaching, Kerri frequently discussed her concern that the scripted curriculum of the school would not engage her students. She struggled with how to confront and change these practices even before she taught her first class. During a group interview, Kerri discussed this dilemma:

> I'm in the ninth grade freshman academy and one in four students doesn't speak English as a first language. I'll be teaching a new curriculum and I'm the only one in my school teaching it. I won't find out until the sixteenth [if] any of my students', like, [have] IEPs and things like that. I'm really afraid … it's going to be very different. And, I'm a very

creative person, that's kind of how I function. I really enjoyed my student teaching because of the freedom. And, to be doing something every day that my administration made for me, and having someone coming into my classroom, telling me … The government comes in and checks, and I have other teachers in my classroom that I haven't met or worked with them. The fact that I feel like I'm kind of behind before I start … terrifies me … it's just going to feel really different to be disempowered.

In this context, we understand that Kerri views the figured world of SHS to be disempowering and frightening. For example, she uses personal statements to describe how and why she feels anxious about her upcoming teaching year, including not knowing the learning plans for special needs students, teaching students whose first language is not English, teaching a new curriculum on her own, and working with colleagues in her classroom that she does not know. Such fears illustrate storylines about what she needs to do in order to be a successful teacher and that includes information about students and colleagues, knowledge about and collaboration in developing curriculum, and support in working with students who have special needs and/or language needs. In addition, she used emotional language such as "I am really afraid" and it "terrifies me" to illustrate the Discourse models or assumptions she has about how the figured world of this school will limit her creativity and freedom to teach struggling students and English Language Learners. As a result, she positioned herself as a teacher who was disempowered and already "behind" in developing appropriate curriculum and instruction.

It is clear that Kerri positioned herself as a teacher different from the teacher this figured world expected her to be. She felt stymied by the high-stakes pressure for students to do well on a test. Kerri likewise seemed conflicted by the pacing guide as "something the administration made" that she must adhere to. She understood that someone from the "government" could "come in and check" up on her and potentially fire her if she did not follow these policies. Kerri's words illustrated her struggle between her understanding of what it meant to teach and the policies and practices valued by her institution. In other words, her storylines about what it meant to be a teacher did not align with the storylines that were accepted by her institution. At this point, Kerri worried about how her identity as a teacher might conflict with how her institution positioned her as an educator. As a novice teacher, membership into this figured world was especially important, because she wanted to build a positive reputation and continue teaching in the district, so she opted to follow the scripted curriculum. Her definitions of successful teaching practices, however, differed with the definitions of her administration. Such conflicting beliefs in effective practice ultimately led her to question her teacher identities and overall profession as a teacher.

Despite her desire to be a member of the figured world of SHS, Kerri continuously recognized and stated in interviews that the pacing guide was not meeting the students' needs. During her second semester, she confronted those practices by altering the curriculum as she described in the following interview:

> I opted not to follow the pacing guide. After we read *Seedfolks* (2004), my students were angry – they recognized the stereotypes and it made them mad. I decided that we needed to engage in conversation about real issues that they face everyday. They chose to read about Tookie Williams, the founder of the Crips – and we've been talking about him for a

month. You see, they like to "fully indulge" – they don't want to go too fast and just cover stuff.

In this context, we understand the students' anger about the stereotypes in *Seedfolks* related to stereotypes about their own cultural and linguistic culture. Kerri used phrases like "fully indulge" and "engage in conversation about real issues that they face everyday" to illustrate her Discourse models about what it meant to be a teacher. In other words, Kerri repositioned her teacher identities to be student-centered, creative, and empowered when confronted with the lack of success with the pacing guide. The practices in the pacing guide were not working for her students and thus were unsuccessful in her view. As a result, Kerri confronted the mandated practices by pushing aside the pacing guide and teaching a text that students chose at a pace that met their vocalized needs. For Kerri, this decision was high-stakes given her understanding of the figured world of her school as test-centered. Thus, her beliefs in learning and instruction shaped the storylines that she enacted while student teaching.

This example illustrates how difficult it was for Kerri to negotiate her teacher identities within the figured world of this school. Repositioning practices were high-stakes and any mistake could result in job loss or student failure, as perceived by Kerri. At our last group meeting, Kerri received the results of her End of Grade Exams. Tears streamed down her face as she described how, although all of her students progressed, some did not meet the required standard. Based on ongoing assessments, Kerri knew her students left her class better readers and writers; nonetheless, she believed she had disappointed her administration and her students. At the end of the interview, she described her situation as an "impossible task." Kerri now attends an International Education Program abroad in search of school systems that work, that better fit her idea of successful teaching and learning. She hopes to bring this knowledge back to the US to create school systems that foster new possibilities for teaching and learning.

Discussion

In a special issue about figured worlds in Education in *The Urban Review*, Luis Urrieta (2007) stated:

> Figured worlds are thus formed through social interaction, and in them people ''figure'' out who they are in relation to those around them ... Through participation in figured worlds people can reconceptualize who they are, or shift who they understand themselves to be, as individuals or members of collectives. Through this figuring, individuals also come to understand their ability to craft their future participation, or agency, in and across figured worlds. (p. 120)

The two case studies in this paper illustrated the relationship between changing practices and repositioning identities within two different figured worlds of school. In other words, both teachers came to understand themselves as teachers through the expectations of their school. Specifically, what they defined as successful practices were not only dependent on the needs of students, but also on the values of success defined by the institution. As Urrieta suggested, such refigurations significantly impact future participation and agency within an institution. Alsup (2006) named these narratives of tension in her research on teacher identity and stated that she

was most worried with aspects of "identity development that involve the integration of the personal self with the professional self, and the 'taking on' of the culturally scripted, often narrowly defined, professional role while maintaining individuality" (p. 4). Thus, these cases raise questions about the ease or difficulty of trying on new positions and practices within a particular figured world in ways that fostered or prohibited membership in the community as future teachers.

Specifically, Hailey's professional and personal figured worlds merged to help her become successful at her school. In both her personal (her husband grew up in poverty) and professional world (as a teacher in a high-poverty school), Hailey was with people who had different experiences than her own. In order for Hailey to be a member of these worlds (i.e. wife, teacher), she needed to attempt to understand those experiences and reposition her practices to fit the needs of people in those figured worlds. Unlike Kerri, Hailey's school promoted innovative practices that reached student needs and challenged teachers to reposition their assumptions about students with different backgrounds than their own. She was required to attend professional development on teaching in a school with high poverty, and thanks to a colleague, she was introduced to the *House on Mango Street* curriculum that she implemented during her second semester. Thus, Hailey repositioned her teaching identities to be a member of a figured world that supported more innovative "unstructured" strategies and curriculum that attempted to build community and use students' prior knowledge and backgrounds to learn. As mentioned in her case study, Hailey has more to learn about how to critically examine her position as a white, middle-class teacher and how markers of difference shape her pedagogy and will likely do so with the support provided by her figured world. Hailey continues to teach at MHS.

Kerri's story represents a teacher who initially positioned herself as a pacing-guide teacher in order to become a member of the figured world of her school. As she was continuously confronted with the ineffective strategies of that structured curriculum, she repositioned her teacher identities to align with those of her past teaching and university experiences (i.e. creative and empowered). The tensions between her vision of herself as a teacher and the expectations of her figured world required that Kerri either shift her vision of herself as a teacher or confront her practice of following the pacing guide. Kerri found it difficult to define herself within this particular institution (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Duffy, 2002). As her principal told her at the job interview, "at SHS, you're not just a teacher. You're a parent, a friend, you're a confidant, and it is up to you to find that student, where he is and his capabilities, where they are, and bring them out." When Kerri tried on her department's view of teaching, she discovered that it was limiting and even self-censoring (Luttrell & Parker, 2001). Kerri took her principal's words to heart and rather than conforming to traditional practice, she took a risk inside her classroom. Although Kerri was not able to transform the figured world of SHS, her goal now, based on that experience, is to create or refigure figured worlds of school based on a global perspective. We recognize, however, that Kerri's departure after one year of teaching contributed to the systemic issues of SHS (e.g. high turn-over rate) that did not serve the needs of students. We do not blame Kerri for this decision, but instead acknowledge the need for teacher education programs to help novice teachers negotiate conflicting definitions of successful teaching practices in ways that shape the figured world of schools to reach the needs of students.

In addition, we wonder how Kerri, a recognized and respected teacher outside of school, was considered to be a failure by her school based on results of a high-stakes exam. This experience caused her to question her identity as a teacher and leave the profession after one year. Her experience raises questions about how our society defines successful teachers and constructs figured worlds of school that reproduce social inequalities (e.g. instruction that minimizes high-level thinking skills for high-needs schools). We wonder about the impact these definitions of teachers and success have on novice teachers and teacher retention. Overall, both cases illustrated that confronting and changing practices were not only about gaining a new set of strategies, but also about repositioning deeply rooted beliefs related to storylines about teaching to meet the expectations of a school. As portrayed by the teachers, these repositionings take time and occur in a fluid process during everyday activities and events that inevitably require support. Educators would benefit from more research about the relationship between teacher beliefs and identities, especially as they relate to the ways in which novice teachers position themselves and others in schools and classrooms.

This study also suggests that the figured world of schools varies considerably even within one state. As such, teacher education programs need to consider these various worlds of schools (e.g. high stakes testing, standardized and scripted curriculum) and help future teachers learn to navigate these terrains. Thus, teacher education programs must consider if their goal is to help student teachers adapt to the values of the figured worlds of their school or if their goal is to encourage student teachers to challenge those values and inevitably come into conflict with the figured world of their school (e.g. Kerri's experience). We argue that student teachers would benefit most from learning how to negotiate conflicting definitions of successful teaching practices, rather than conforming to or working against those values, in ways that reshape the figured world so that it benefits learning for students. Thus, successful practice is no longer defined by individual teachers or administrators, but is a negotiation between school professionals that are based on the needs of students at that moment in time.

Implications

For teacher educators, these findings suggest that preservice teachers would benefit from engaging in "identity work" that illuminates unsuccessful practices and provides opportunities to explore new positions. Teacher educators have engaged preservice teachers in reflection through teacher visions and beliefs and have challenged them to think about how they interact with students through thoughtfully adaptive teaching (Duffy & Hoffman, 2002). More work, however, needs to be done to engage preservice teachers in reflective practice about identity construction that pushes them to think about the institutional and student expectations that they will encounter during their jobs. Specifically, explorations of identity must also include "the study of schooling and wider social context and ways in which those contexts both enable and limit meaning, privilege and suppress knowledge" (Bullough, 2005, p. 21). Teacher educators can facilitate these conversations by providing case studies or narratives of teachers who are involved in these dilemmas (Bullough, 2005). Alsup (2006) suggested assisting preservice and/or novice teachers in the creation and expression of borderland discourses that enable them to tie together multiple identities within one figured world. In addition, educators can challenge the beliefs of preservice teacher beliefs by "connecting with, expanding, and developing preservice teachers' metaphor plotlines rather than ignoring or rejecting them" so that they are more open to repositioning

teacher identities to fit the needs of students (Pinnegar, Mangelson, Reed, & Groves, 2011, p. 647). In particular, teacher educators can help preservice teachers figure out how discursive practices constitute them in particular ways and how to use those practices as resources to negotiate new positions in their school.

Reflection and learning from the experiences of other teachers is not enough; however, novice teachers need opportunities to practice, refine, and study teaching practices (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). One way to do that is through bounded or supported segments of practice such as engaging in scenarios in which teachers act out how they may react in a particular situation (Grossman et al., 2009). Other scholars have proposed virtual, designed, or actual settings that allow for close analysis of practice (Ball & Forzani, 2009). We suggest that such practices and borderland discourses could be examined and practiced through video-taped lessons that ask teachers to examine how they position themselves and others in the classroom and how those positionings relate to the figured world of the school (Schieble, Vetter, & Meacham, 2015). Unlike past research about the importance of teacher reflection that asks students to reflect on a past lesson in a narrative, implications from this paper suggest that teachers would benefit from engaging in discourse analysis with video-taped lessons and transcripts. This allows teachers to realistically examine if and how they confront ineffective practices and the social, political, and cultural reasons behind those choices.

These case studies also illustrate how early career teachers need support during their first years of teaching, perhaps through opportunities to co-teach, try innovative strategies, and reflect on such experiences. Professional development, most likely in the form of teacher research, could open opportunities for teachers to engage in identity work that helps teachers not only recognize unsuccessful practices but also figure out how to change those practices. Teacher research has been found to foster teacher change because development begins with practitioners' own burning questions about teaching and learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). Such inquiry projects lead to repositionings related to professional confidence, awareness of classroom events, dispositions towards reflection, broadened view of teaching, teacher beliefs about themselves, their roles as teachers, and attitudes towards students (Goodnough, 2010; Zeichner, 2002). The most successful research groups are those that engage teachers in open communication that critically challenge instruction and practice, increasing awareness of professional issues (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lauer, 2001; Levin & Rock, 2003) and ultimately help teachers to reposition their identities within the figured world of their schools when confronted with unsuccessful practices. These repositionings include reshaping the figured world so that it fits the needs of both teachers and students in order for schools to develop a definition of success that works for everyone. These are not easy negotiations, which means that developing teacher leaders early on in teacher education programs is more important than ever.

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