Decentering Normative Practice Through In Situ Teacher Education
Division K, AERA Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas – May 1, 2017

Leyton Schnellert, PhD, University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus
Shelley Moore, University of British Columbia, Vancouver Campus

INTRODUCTION
This project addresses calls to prepare teacher candidates for realities of schools to enable them to critically challenge status quo practices and perspectives, and work with others to re-imagine schooling (Niets, 2000; Royle, 2013).

In this study, we investigate if/how a teacher education methods course based on core principles rooted in social justice, decentered normative practice.

Instructors invited middle school teacher candidates to de/re/construct their teaching identities through in situ coursework in local and urban classrooms and schools consciously reWriting the script of middle years education.

Here we report findings from a self study investigating how immersion and co-teaching in these middle years programs positioned teacher candidates as requiers de/re/constructing their understandings of teaching and learning.

Themes that emerged related to cultivating generative spaces for teacher candidates to critique, disrupt and co-create responsive student-centered curricular innovations.

CONTEXTS/DESIGN
• Weekly Middle School Integrated Methods courses – September – early December
• 12 month program, after degree
• Middle school models include grades 6-9 BC
• Teacher candidates may be generalists, have two specialties, or one major with single courses in other related content areas.

METHODOLOGY & METHODS
Self-Study Methodology
• To better understand and enhance course design and teaching practices – both their impact and potential - through engaging in cycles of action and reflection (Hamilton & Pinneke, 2000; Labroen, 2004; Loughran & Russell, 2006; Samaras & Freese, 2009).
• Recognize socially-situated, evolving and co-constructing nature of learning and practice.

METHODS
• All 25 TCs invited to participate after end of semester (ethics approval)
• All participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted 20-30 minutes.
• Field notes
• Artifacts such as class assignments and written reflections were also collected as part of the study (not used at this stage of analysis).
• Instructor research journal

FINDINGS
1. How did we create the conditions for teacher candidates to be creative in ways that shape their pedagogy and utilize resources in generative ways?

2. What did teacher candidates realize/possibilize/critique about existing educational processes of systems?

3. What did teacher candidates describe as crucial pedagogical shifts that decenter normative practice?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
• What happens when teacher educators invite middle school teacher candidates to develop their authentic teacher identities through working in rural and urban schools that are consciously reWriting the script of middle years education?

• What emerged as important when we sought and cultivated dynamic spaces for teacher candidate learning, self-acceptance, and responsive student-centered curricular innovation?

Teacher Candidate Voices
• “It’s learning to balance when can I push and when I can’t”
• “Always be willing to learn and grow and try things.”
• “Don’t be afraid to try something new, even if it fails, because having people support and be behind you while work is a powerful thing.”
• “Kids are going to direct you and they’re going to tell you what they want, and what they don’t like, and you have to be responsive to that.”
• “Collaboration, I learned for myself, is something that I actually really need...it’s okay to seek help, and it’s okay if it’s sometimes hard.”
• “You can’t pass judgment on the capability or the attentiveness or the willingness of a student to learn.”
• “Students come first, and we should be designing an education that lets them excel, because they are our future.”
• “I am learning more by talking about it because that way I am getting different perspectives.”

DISCUSSION
Middle School Integrated Methods
Important Aspects of the Design
Learning in situ was more powerful, especially co-teaching, than other observation experiences, lower stakes than practicum

Increased comfort with and understanding of student diversity
Supported educators to think creatively and critically
Instructor as facilitator and co-constructor of practice, plans and understandings
Mentor teachers as resources in cycles of action and reflection

EXPERIENCING DIVERSITY
• Through this inquiry, as co-learners, we have been able to disrupt the normative scripts of university-based methods courses and re-imagined what professional learning for teacher candidates might look like.

Based on the traditional academic experiences of most university students (passive recipients of knowledge), we found that engaging teacher candidates as active co-constructors of knowledge within classrooms (supported by reflection) inspired and spurred learning for teacher candidates, teachers, and myself as a teacher educator.

CONCLUSION
Trends that teacher candidates reported included:
• co-planning with students as informants;
• feeling ownership of their learning and practice;
• engaging with complexities, ambiguities and re-examining consideration of problems of practice from multiple lenses;
• collaborating within a community of inquiry was key to ongoing learning;
• critically challenging status quo practices and perspectives through working with others to deconstruct normative schooling.

In situ methods courses offered in settings with educators that challenge the status quo held potential for teacher candidates to combine explorations of theory and practice while concurrently developing their teaching philosophy and identity.

Drawing from diverse experiences required TCs to reconsider their beliefs about teaching and learning and explore and develop innovative diversity positive practices.