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The Deliberate Development of Social Work Educators: Don't Leave it to Chance!

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The Deliberate Development of Social Work Educators:

Don't Leave it to Chance!

By

Mary E. Tinucci

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Social Work

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Abstract

The deliberate formation of teacher-identities, philosophies, and pedagogical approaches, as well as the use of self-reflective practices, are essential to growth and development of social work educators. This banded dissertation focuses on the preparation of social work educators and explores the researcher's development as a postmodern teacher/scholar. The constructivist paradigm is applied to both teaching and research and draws from both narrative theory and narrative inquiry in its theoretical framework. The first product addresses both the lack of attention given to preparing social work doctoral students for teaching in the academy and the infrequent use of self-reflective practices and research methods by social work educators and researchers. The author argues that doctoral students need to take the initiative to prepare themselves for teaching in higher education. By identifying four essential content areas and encouraging the use of reflective practices and research methods, she suggests a focused strategy for preparing to teach in social work education. The second product reports on the findings of a self-study research project in which the researcher examined the extent to which a constructivist philosophy was evident in her teaching. Findings operationalize specific constructivist teaching methods, describe the impact of these, and illuminate the internal process she experienced in her dual roles as researcher and teacher. The third product employs self-reflection, narrative inquiry, and autobiographical writing to consider pivotal life experiences and examine their influence on professional development. Using writing and poetry as methods of inquiry, the researcher explores the place, function, and power of story in shaping her teacher-identity, philosophy, and pedagogical approaches.

Keywords: social work, teaching philosophies, pedagogy, personal narrative, self-study

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Upon learning of a new doctoral program designed, *"to prepare social work faculty specifically for university-level teaching and leadership in higher education,"* I immediately applied. Thank you, Dr. Barbara Shank, Dean of the School of Social Work at SCU/UST, for your vision to create this unique DSW program and for supporting me throughout my education and career. Thank you, Dr. Mari Ann Graham, for your guidance, belief in me, and your unwavering support of my development as a postmodern constructivist social work educator. Thank you, especially, to my wife, Kathleen, for your steadfast emotional support, encouragement, and stellar editing services!

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Introduction

Being a social work educator is a distinct profession and requires specific knowledge and skills. Being a competent social work practitioner is not a predictor of being a skillful and capable teacher. Too little attention, however, is given to the preparation of social workers for teaching in the context of higher education. Social work educators should be able to recognize, differentiate, and articulate their professional roles, responsibilities, and identities as teachers as distinct, and substantively different, from their professional roles, responsibilities, and identities as social work practitioners. They should be cognizant of and able to articulate their teaching philosophies and able to identify their theoretical orientation to teaching so that they are deliberate in choosing teaching methods.

Furthermore, although self-reflection, self-disclosure, professional use of self, and narrative inquiry are commonly emphasized as essential skills for social work students and practitioners, they are less frequently applied to teachers themselves. Like social work practitioners, social work educators should be self-aware, engage in critical reflection of their teaching practice, and examine influences on their teacher-identities and pedagogy.

How are social work doctoral students prepared to teach and to take on the full roles of the professoriate? If not in their doctoral education, then when? Without guidance that supports the shift from practitioner to social work educator, or by employing self-reflective practices, how else can social work faculty develop critical aspects of being a teacher? How can social work educators' use of self-reflection impact teachers, students, and social work education? These questions drive my dissertation scholarship.

Doctoral Education

There is a mismatch between student career aspirations for teaching in higher education

and the preparation and training they receive in doctoral education. Doctoral programs, historically and across disciplines, have focused on preparing students to become researchers and content experts in their fields. Much less attention is given to preparing one to teach or intentionally developing ones' teaching philosophies, pedagogies, and theoretical orientation to teaching in higher education (Gaff, 2002). For those who pursue a doctorate in social work, the primary reason to pursue this degree is the desire to teach (Holland, Austin, Allen-Meares & Garvin, 1991; Patchner, 1982; Holland & Frost, 1987). Although half of all of those who complete a doctorate in social work will seek and find employment in the academic environment where they will have teaching responsibilities, doctoral programs give little attention to training students for the teaching role (Valentine, Gohagan, Huff, Pereira & Wilson, 1998).

Since 1998, several studies have been conducted to examine how doctoral students are prepared for teaching and working in social work education. Through varying research methodologies and targets of data collection, each of these studies found there is less attention and training focused on the development of students as teachers, and more attention to developing students as researchers. Valentine et al., (1998) surveyed 51 doctoral program directors to examine to what extent program course offerings were related to teaching and educational theory. Dinnerman, Feldmand, and Ello (1999) surveyed 45 doctoral programs about their ways of preparing students for the teaching role. Drisko, Hunnicut, and Berenson (2015) examined doctoral program objectives, structures, curricula, and teaching electives and requirements to determine if they were meeting the full range of needs of the workforce in the academy. Lind, Maynard, and Albright (2015) completed a content analysis of social work doctoral program curricula and course syllabi. Each of these studies identifies significant gaps related to teacher-preparedness in social work education. Between 1999-2015, at least three

studies offer recommendations, models, or initiatives for improving the preparation of future teachers in social work education (Knight & Lagana, 1999; Rinfrette, Maccio, Coyle, Jackson, Hartinger-Saunders, Rine, & Shulman, 2015; and Pryce, Ainbinder, Brown, & Smithgall, 2011). Especially pertinent to this dissertation, only a few studies include narrative accounts or employ self-study research to discuss the development of future faculty for teaching (Kayser, 1995; Lay, 2005; McGranahan, 2008; Sussman, Stoddart, & Gorman, 2004; Sy, 2013).

Self-Reflective Practice

There is a rich discussion in social work literature about how educators must teach students and supervise new social workers to be self-reflective in social work practice. The concepts and skills of self-disclosure, professional use of self, critical self-reflection, and narrative inquiry are considered essential and foundational to competent social work practice. Like social work practitioners, social work educators should be well-versed in the concepts and skillful in their use. In writing about teacher-educators, Elbaz-Luwisch (2001) contends, "We need to pay attention to our own stories as teachers [and teacher educators] if we are to be able to attend to the stories of pupils; this is the case at all levels of education" (p. 133). Social work educators, like social work practitioners and teacher-educators, should have a deep understanding of themselves, clarity about their professional use of self and self-disclosure in the classroom, and the ability to empower, listen to, and understand their students.

Unfortunately, there is less discourse about how these self-reflective processes apply to social work educators themselves, or how these skills help social work educators discern and develop their teaching philosophies. Between 1998 and 2012, two social work doctoral students systematically investigated the development of social work educators' teaching perspectives and philosophies (Pearson 1998; Danhoff, 2012). Pearson (1998) surveyed graduate social work

educators about the source of their educational philosophies. Danoff's study (2012) focused on the teaching perspective of graduate social work educators. In both cases, these researchers agree that it is important that social work educators understand their teaching philosophies, how they were developed and implemented, and their subsequent impact on classroom environments.

Further hindering the use of self-reflective practices, social work educators work in the academic context, a culture that often perpetuates an artificial separation of the professional from the personal self of the teacher. Mirroring an epistemological positivist stance that devalues lived experience and negates personal narrative as legitimate ways of knowing or teaching (hooks, 1994, p. 155; Nash, 2011), the culture of academia minimizes emotion, professional use of self, and personal self-disclosure by teachers in the classroom. In the context of social work practice, the stories of our clients and clinician self-awareness hold immense value; In contrast, social work educators teach and work in a context and culture that values something different. As described by Nash and Viray (2013), "... in academia, each of us has experienced the silencing of our voices because they are "small" compared to the "big," authoritative voices of the "experts" (p 33). Paradoxically, it is the "small voice" understood through the reflective processes routinely implemented by social work practitioners that will benefit social work educators.

In their book, "Our Stories Matter: Liberating the Voices of Marginalized Students Through Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing," Nash and Viray (2013) elaborate on the impact and power of the academic culture to silence student, teacher, and researcher voices. They boldly assert how the culture of academia is oppressive and damaging to faculty and students alike:

> Oppression, especially in higher education, is the suppression of personal voice, personal herstory/history, personal resistance, personal belief and critique, and, above all, creative self-expression of all kinds. Subjectivity is ruled out of order; objectivity – in all the

disciplines – is the exclusive rule of the day in academia. Oppression, from our vantage

point in the halls of higher education, occurs whenever and wherever faculty forbids the

full expression of the self in teaching and learning (p. 27).

Conceptual Framework

This dissertation is guided by an overarching constructivist paradigm applied to both

research and teaching and draws from narrative theory and narrative inquiry for its conceptual

framework. This scholarship focuses on how social work educators can apply concepts deemed

essential to their roles and responsibilities as practitioners to their roles and responsibilities as

teachers. I engaged in a reflexive process, integrating literature from social work and teacher-

education. This allowed me to tell, study, and make sense of, my teaching philosophies,

pedagogical approaches. Methods of inquiry in this banded dissertation include autobiographical

writing in the form of personal narrative, narrative inquiry, and self-study research.

Constructivism

Philosophical paradigms of teaching and learning fall on a continuum from

modernist/positivist to critical/constructivist (Graham, 1997; Rigoni, 2002). Whether we are

cognizant of them or not, worldviews and assumptions inherent in one's ontology or

epistemology form the basis for teaching philosophies, pedagogical approaches, and choices

about research methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Constructivism is an educational and learning theory in which meaning making is central,

and narrative and story are the primary processes for personal knowledge creation and meaning

making (Neuman & Blundo, 2000). Constructivists contend that objects and events have no

absolute meaning; rather, individuals interpret objects and events and construct meaning based

on individual, cultural, social, political and historical contexts, experiences, prior knowledge, and

interactions. Theorists who informed constructivism include Piaget, Vygotsky, and Freire. Each of these theorists brought a slightly different focus (individual, social or political respectively) to their theory of knowledge production and learning. (Gordon, 2008; Hein, 1999). Nash (2008) offers a particularly accessible description of constructivism: "Constructivism is predicated on an approach to knowledge that views teaching, leading, and learning as conversational, narrative, conditional, developmental, socially and culturally created, as much heart and hand-based as it is head-based, and always profoundly personal in nature" (p. 19).

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory and many qualitative research methods originated from phenomenological philosophy, and since the 1980's, an interest in narrative theory and analysis has grown steadily across disciplines including psychology, psychotherapy and teacher education Davidsen, 2013; Riessman & Speedy, 2007). Davidsen (2013) states, "Much qualitative analysis based on phenomenological thought has been concerned with understanding people's experiences through the stories they tell" (p. 331). Several key philosophers and practitioners who believed there is much to be learned in the telling and hearing of our stories made significant contributions to the development of narrative theory. These influential philosophers include Paul Polkinghorne, a professor of counseling and practicing psychologist; Jerome Bruner, a constructivist learning theorist and psychologist; and Paul Ricourer, a philosopher whose writing centers around anthropology. (Davidsen, 2013).

Central to narrative theory is this proposition: If the words we use, and the stories we learn to tell about ourselves, directly create our psychological and social realities, then we can recreate or change our realities by changing the words we choose and the stories we tell about our circumstances. Narrative theory gives attention to how the broader culture impacts an

individual's personal narrative and self-concept, particularly when personal narratives are rooted in society's oppressive structures. Re-examining culturally reinforced messages to us/our lives allows us to re-author the meaning of such norms to our self-concept (projectnarrative.osu.edu).

Narrative Inquiry and Self-Study Research

Narrative inquiry and self-study, common research methods employed in teacher-education, allow the teacher-researcher to tell, analyze, and make meaning of their experiences related to teaching and learning. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer this definition:

Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context. It is a means by which we systematically gather, analyze, and represent people's stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood (p. 20).

Asserting narrative inquiry's particular value as applied in teacher-education, Alvine (2001) states, "Teacher-educators have recognized the importance of the individual's lived experience as relevant to the development of what he or she will bring to the classroom. Thus, the life histories of teachers [and teacher-educators] have come to be seen as grounded experience for knowledge of teaching" (p. 5). Rushton (2004) concurs, adding, "Lived experiences can be translated into rich narrative stories useful for both teaching and research" (p. 62). In the profession of social work, narrative inquiry has been most developed and applied in the context of practice, but less developed within research. Mirroring views from teacher-education, Kathleen Wells (2011) advocates for an increased use of narrative inquiry in social work research and encourages social work researchers to bolster their capacity to employ these methods. Because stories are significant to how individuals make meaning and make sense of

themselves and the world, she argues that narratives constitute legitimate data for consideration and analysis, and that, "Narratives can be analyzed systematically and produce meaningful findings" (Wells, 2011, p. 9).

Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

The overall focus of this banded dissertation is presented through three distinct products. In the first product, I provide an overview of research documenting the lack of attention paid to teacher preparation for social work educators and highlight how self-reflective practices essential to effective social work practice are less frequently applied to social work educators. Drawing from my experience as a doctoral student, and from literature within social work and teacher education, I argue that it is incumbent on social work doctoral students to take the initiative to prepare themselves for teaching in social work education. I suggest a focused strategy for preparing to teach in higher education by recommending that students focus their learning on four essential content areas, engage in reflective practices, and employ self-study research and narrative inquiry as ways to improve their preparedness for effective teaching in higher education.

In the second product, I present the results of self-study research in which I explored the extent to which my constructivist teaching philosophy was evident during a one-semester period of teaching. Originating from teacher-education, self-study research is a method that privileges self-reflective practice and narrative inquiry as ways to collect data to study and improve teaching practice. Findings from this self-study suggest that constructivist teaching philosophy was evident in my teaching methods and had a primarily positive impact on students and me. However, for some students and me, these methods also posed challenges and dilemmas. Findings also illuminate the internal process I experienced throughout the research process

associated with my developing postmodern teacher and researcher selves. This study fills a gap in social work research and suggests that self-study is a useful research method for social work educators.

In the third product, using narrative inquiry and writing and poetry as methods of inquiry (Hanauer, 2003; Richardson, 2004; Nash, 2004; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2011), I reflect on pivotal personal, educational, and professional experiences to examine their influence on my professional development as a social work educator. Through the writing of a personal narrative, I employ self-reflection, autobiographical writing, poetry, and narrative inquiry to explore and convey the place, function, and power of story in shaping my developing teacher-identity, teaching philosophy, and ultimately, my pedagogical approaches to teaching. Threaded throughout my story, and central to my personal and professional development, are experiences with silence, race and class privilege, difference, a lesbian identity, marginalization, the coming out process, and family rejection. I describe how my ability to understand, find meaning, and share my story matters in the social work classroom, how story functions as an effective teaching tool, and why I determine story to be a valuable and valid pedagogical approach.

Discussion

Throughout this banded dissertation, I employed narrative inquiry, personal narrative, and self-study research as ways to increase my consciousness and deepen my understanding of my development as a teacher in social work education. Throughout my doctoral education and dissertation-writing experiences, I have been deliberately engaged in a continuous process of meaning-making. I spent three years studying social work education and focusing on my place, and the place of my story, within it. I explored the impact of my life experiences of privilege and marginalization on my development as a teacher. I worked to make sense of the identity shift

from social work practitioner to social work educator, concentrated on my development as a teacher, and investigated how and where social work education intersects with teacher-education, practitioner research, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Essential to this learning process has been critical self-reflection, reflexivity, writing, and a recognition that, as Hanauer (2012) states, "Writing and the act of witnessing one's own life offers the option of exploring the complexities of personal experience and presenting it for observation by another" (p.845-846).

Implications for Social Work Education

This dissertation demonstrates that social work educators can become more intentional in understanding, developing, and articulating their teaching philosophies so that they become more deliberate in choosing their pedagogical approaches. While findings in this inquiry provide a glimpse into one teacher's development (mine), this scholarship provides a model for other social work educators, whether they are new to the academy or seasoned social work educators. It shows them how to invest in their development as teachers, and to do so through research methods used in this study. Not only does this kind of scholarship have potential to increase teaching effectiveness and improve the experience of teaching, thereby increasing confidence and job satisfaction among social work educators; ultimately, it has potential to improve learning and educational outcomes for students.

Social work professors have the responsibility to educate and train the next generation of social workers. Just as high-levels of self-awareness matter to social work clinicians, this banded dissertation shows that teachers also need high levels of self-awareness – to understand our own stories, to be more conscious of our teaching philosophies, to examine our pedagogical approaches, and to know ourselves. This scholarship recognizes the direct impact on students and encourages us to employ practices and research methods that call for, and model, critical self-reflection. It supports

the use of narrative inquiry and self-study research in particular. Far from being a "dead end" in social work education (Caputo et al., 2015), these postmodern methods have the potential to help social work educators increase their conscious understanding of their teaching practice, while simultaneously modeling skills of reflective practice to their students.

Implications for Future Research

This study fills a gap in social work education and research. The body of scholarship in social work education that utilizes personal narrative and self-study research methods to conceptualize the development of social work educators is quite limited. The postmodern research methods employed in this study will resonate with some social work educators, inspiring them to reflect on how their unique stories have impacted their development as teachers. It hopefully encourages social workers to enter into the broader discourse about teaching and learning in social work education.

Those who choose postmodern research methods must be prepared to participate in the ongoing debate about the value of postmodern epistemologies and research methods in social work. By employing such methods of inquiry, I discerned my place in the debate, discovered my voice, and bolstered my confidence on these epistemological matters.

This scholarship examines how my teaching was deeply influenced by my life experiences of privilege, marginalization and lesbian identity. Additional research could expand this focus by calling forth and analyzing the stories of social work educators from diverse backgrounds. Additional studies related to the practices of self-disclosure, professional use of self, and the place, function, and power of social work educators' personal stories in the classroom are warranted. For instance, how do social work faculty determine their level and use of self-disclosure in the classroom? What personal characteristics and identities shape this

determination? How do experiences of marginalization affect teaching philosophies, pedagogical approaches of social work educators? How do experiences of marginalization affect social work educator decisions about their self-disclosure?

By employing methods of narrative inquiry, autobiographical writing, and self-study research, social work educators could bridge their dual roles and responsibilities as scholars and teachers. Many elements related to teaching in higher education still exist behind closed doors. It is a common experience for social work educators to experience what Schulman (1993) calls "pedagogical solitude" (p. 6). The methods of inquiry used in this dissertation make explicit what is often hidden, and public what is often private. In these ways, it provides concrete examples of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), thereby encouraging SoTL among social work educators. Building on Schulman's call to action that, "we must change the status of teaching from private to community property," (Schulman, 1993, 6–7), Huber and Hutchings (2005) encourage educators to join what they call the "teaching commons" where "communities of educators committed to pedagogical inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning, and use them to meet the challenges of educating students" (p. ix-x). This dissertation represents a step in this direction, taking my place as a member of communities of teachers and scholars in social work education.

Throughout this process, I gained clarity and confidence about the value and use of story as pedagogy, and increased my competence as a postmodern constructivist social work educator, teacher, and researcher/scholar. My hope is that this dissertation will spark a conversation about the need for improved and deliberate teacher preparation in social work education and highlight the importance of social work educators to be self-reflective about their role as teachers. I hope,

too, that this scholarship will ignite an interest in and inspire others to consider narrative inquiry,

self-study research, autobiographical writing, and poetry as viable and valid methods of inquiry.

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Taking Initiative: A Focused Strategy for Preparing to Teach in Social Work

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Abstract

In this conceptual paper, I discuss both the long-standing and documented gap in teacher preparation and the limited use of self-reflective practices by social work educators. Because of these gaps, it is incumbent on social work doctoral students to take the initiative and proactively prepare for teaching in higher education. Drawing from my experience as a doctoral student, and from literature within social work and teacher education, I suggest that social work doctoral students engage in focused and deliberate learning about what it means to teach in social work in higher education. I propose that students focus their learning on four specific content areas, engage in self-reflective practices, and employ research methods of self-study and scholarly personal narrative (SPN) to proactively prepare to teach in higher education.

Key words: social work educator, teacher preparation, reflective practice, self-study, scholarly personal narrative

Introduction

Through classroom and field education, social work students are deliberately educated and trained for the profession of social work. New social workers are provided purposeful supervision to support skill development and competence in social work practice. For students and new social workers alike, significant attention is paid to concepts of self, narrative, and reflective practice, generally; and to concepts of self-reflection, self-awareness, professional use of self and self-disclosure, specifically. These concepts and related skills are considered essential to effective social work practice. Additionally, the application of narrative inquiry - understanding one's personal narrative, and hearing and understanding the narratives of our clients - is central to social work practice.

In contrast, social work faculty are not specifically educated and trained to enter an entirely different profession - social work education. Furthermore, the concepts and tools of self, self-awareness, professional use of self, self-disclosure, reflective practice and narrative inquiry seem reserved for students and new practitioners. They are rarely articulated as critical to the development of social work educators or essential to understanding teaching as practice.

Because of the lack of intentional preparation for teaching and the limited use of self-reflection by teachers, it is incumbent on social work educators to be deliberate and proactive in their own development as teachers. Drawing on my doctoral educational experience and social work and teacher education literature, I suggest a focused strategy for preparing to teach in higher education. I propose that students focus their learning on four essential content areas, engage in reflective practices, and employ self-study research and narrative inquiry as ways to improve their preparedness for effective teaching in higher education.

Doctoral Education and Faculty Preparation

It is well documented that doctoral programs within social work education, like many disciplines, provide little attention to the preparation of students for the teaching role in higher education. This is a long-standing problem. As far back as 1942, social worker, Bertha Reynolds recognized social work education as a distinct profession. She believed teaching in social work warranted attention and required specific skill-development. In her book, "Learning and Teaching in the Practice of Social Work" (1942) she pointedly articulated that "there is an art to teaching," and "that there is no royal road to learn to teach" (p. 284). In 1965, social work educator, Eileen Blackey raised her concerns. In her article, "Selection and preparation of faculty for schools of social work," she asserts, "...until very recently, little or no formal preparation for teaching has been required of educators at the undergraduate level and beyond, and development of such preparation seems practically non-existent. The higher one goes in the academic hierarchy, the less the importance attached to formal teacher training" (p. 5).

Seventy-four years after Reynolds wrote about this issue, and 50 years after Blackey suggested improvements, this dilemma still exists. Since 1998, a number of studies have explored the extent to which various aspects of social work doctoral education prepare students for the future responsibilities of teaching. Through varying research methodologies and targets of data collection, each of these studies found there is less attention and training focused on the development of students as teachers, and more attention to developing students as researchers. For instance, surveying 51 doctoral program directors, Valentine, Gohagan, Huff, Pereira, and Wilson (1998) examined to what extent program course offerings were related to teaching and educational theory. Dinnerman, Feldmand, and Ello (1999) surveyed 45 doctoral programs about their ways of preparing students for the teaching role. Drisko, Hunnicut, and Berenson (2015)

examined doctoral program objectives, structures, curricula, and teaching electives and requirements to determine if they were meeting the full range of needs of the workforce in the academy. Lind, Maynard, and Albright (2015) completed a content analysis of social work doctoral program curricula and course syllabi. Each of these studies identifies significant gaps related to teacher-preparedness in social work education. Although each study focuses on differing and distinct aspects of doctoral education, the researchers are in agreement, with each other, and with Eileen Blackey on two key issues. 1. There is a mismatch between student career aspirations for teaching in higher education and the preparation and training students receive. 2. There is less training focused on the development of students to be teachers and more attention to developing students to be researchers.

Improvement: rationale, approaches, initiatives, and recommendations. Social work doctoral programs must improve the preparation of future faculty. Writers offer varying rationales for why such improvement matters, as well as approaches, initiatives, and recommendations for how to do so. Over 50 years ago, Blackey (1965) offered suggestions for improvement in this area. She offered the following 3-stage approach to preparing social work educators for the teaching role:

> If we apply to the problem of preparation for social work education the same
> educational principles which we apply to preparation for practice, we can identify
> three major stages of learning: (1) acquisition of knowledge and experience basic
> to responsible entry into teaching; (2) sound development in the initial stages of
> teaching; and (3) continuing education and development toward higher levels of
> achievement (p. 8).

Very recently, others have offered their rationale for why it is important to prepare doctoral students for the teaching role, and have made recommendations for improvement. Goodman (2015) describes trends in employment opportunities that indicate there are too few social work doctoral graduates available to meet the rising need of faculty in social work education. The Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work [GADE] (2013) recognizes the importance of preparing doctoral students for competence in teaching. In *Quality Guidelines for Ph.D. Programs in Social Work,* GADE provide a list of knowledge and skills in the practice of teaching that doctoral students should attain by graduation. Drisko, Hunnicutt, and Berenson (2015) argue that doctoral program objectives must be bolstered to include preparing students for the full role of the professoriate, including teaching and leadership in the academy. They support increased opportunities for teaching internships and coursework focus on pedagogy. Valuing learning through experience, Knight and Lagan (1999) and Oktay, Jacobson, and Fisher (2013) believe teaching practicums should be required and paired with engaged faculty mentorship. Pryce, Ainbinder, Brown, and Smithgall (2011) contend that discipline-specific social work teacher training is needed and that both methodological and pedagogical instruction must be provided. Rinfrette, Maccio, Coyle, Jackson, Hartinger-Saunders, Rine, and Shulman (2015) describe a self-reflection process group model in which doctoral students and new faculty discuss challenges and experiences in teaching, receive feedback and learn teaching strategies from others. There is noted agreement amongst each of these articles that social work doctoral education should be improved, and will be improved, through the integration of theory and pedagogical instruction, the inclusion of teaching practicum experiences, and structures that provide supportive opportunities for reflection.

Application of Self-Reflection and Narrative Inquiry

      Students and social work practitioners. Social work literature highlights the importance of critical self-reflection, reflexivity, professional use of self, and self-disclosure in social work practice. The primary focus of this discourse is on how to teach students about these concepts and skills. For instance, some authors describe various pedagogical strategies useful for teaching critical self-reflection and reflexivity (Fook & Askeland, 2007; 2012; Lay & McGuire, 2010). Others focus on using reflective writing as a pedagogical approach (McGuire, Lay, & Peters, 2009). Urdang (2010) highlights the importance of teaching students about self-awareness, while Pallisera, Fullana, Palaudarias, & Badosa (2013) address the concept of student understanding of professional use of self. Finally, others focus on how social workers in clinical practice must understand why and how to use these concepts and skills effectively. For instance, Dewan (2006), and Butler, Ford, & Tregaskis (2007) describe professional use of self as an essential component in the service of positive relationship development with clients.

      Social work educators. Although there is a rich discussion in social work literature about how educators must teach students and supervise new social workers to be self-reflective, the focus of this discourse is less often about how these self-reflective processes apply to social work educators themselves, or how these skills help social work educators discern and develop their teaching philosophies. Between 1998 and 2012, two social work doctoral students systematically investigated the development of social work educators' teaching perspectives and philosophies (Pearson, 1998; Danhoff, 2012). Pearson (1998) surveyed graduate social work educators about the source of their educational philosophies. Danoff's study (2012) focused on the teaching perspective of graduate social work educators. In both cases, these researchers agree that it is important that social work educators understand their teaching philosophies, how they

were developed and implemented, and their subsequent impact on classroom environments. Self-reflective practices will support social work educators in understanding their philosophies.

In their article, "Courage to Teach for Social Work Educators," East and Chambers (2007) draw upon the work of Parker Palmer (1998). Through the narratives of one new and one seasoned social work educator, they explore the place of self-reflection in the lives of social work educators. These authors discuss ideas of teacher identity, emotion and spirituality and link them as valuable to the scholarship of teaching and learning in social work education.

In a more recent article, Owens, Miller, and Grise-Owens (2014) provide a strong case for how social work faculty can intentionally develop, articulate, implement, and evaluate their teaching philosophies. Moreover, they suggest that social work educators' understanding about, and development of, their teaching philosophies should go beyond writing a teaching philosophy statement for teaching position applications or faculty promotion. Through three auto-ethnographic stories and a literature review, they provide a rationale for the importance of understanding and implementing one's teaching philosophy. They offer a guide for how social work educators can develop, articulate, implement, and evaluate a teaching philosophy that will improve their competence as social work educators.

Perhaps making the strongest plea for employing such reflective practice, in her article, "Reclaiming our Agency in Academia: Engaging in the Scholarship or Teaching in Social Work," Wehbi (2009) argues for the importance of applying self-reflection to our teaching as practice. In sharing her own story as a new academic, she models how to link a systematic examination of teaching as practice to a developing scholarship. In this way, she implements what Boyer (1990) calls the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Wehbi legitimizes both

the idea of reflective practice for social work educators and provides inspiration and a model for others to do the same.

And finally, although more dated, and fewer in number, some writers offer their personal reflections about becoming social work educators. Through personal narratives, they describe their early experiences in the classroom and how they came to understand, develop, and articulate their teaching perspectives as social work educators (Kayser, 1995; Zapf, 1997; Lay, 2005; & McGranahan, 2008). Based on their clinical practice and doctoral experience, Sussman, Stoddart, and Gorman (2004) argue that to be a skilled clinician does not automatically make one an effective teacher. They suggest that doctoral programs increase their emphasis on the importance of teaching and teacher-preparedness by providing students an opportunity to both teach and reflect on teaching. In all of these personal accounts, it is evident that learning to teach and developing one's teaching philosophy is an evolution that requires the capacity for self-reflection.

Social work research. Social work practice is rooted in the clinician's skills and ability to understand their personal narrative and to inquire, hear, and understand the narratives of clients. In this way, narrative inquiry is better developed and more frequently integrated and applied within social work practice than in social work research (Reissman & Quinney, 2005). For instance, narrative therapy is a method of practice where particular attention is paid to the nature and function of client stories (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative inquiry is less frequently applied in social work research. This might be due to its complex nature as a research method, a lack of researcher training in the methodology, funding sources frequently favor quantitative methods and a more positivist stance, or because of the profession's overall push toward

quantitative methods and scientific evidence-based research (Larsson & Sjoblom, 2009; Wells, 2011).

In their article, "Encouraging Research in Social Work: Narrative as the Thread Integrating Education and Research in Social Work," (2012), Phillips, MacGriollaRi and Callaghan provide a brief literature review and discussion about how narrative, autobiographical writing and storytelling could move beyond use in practice and teaching and increasingly be used within research. Drawing on a multi-disciplinary exploration, they provide examples from nursing, social care, and education in which narrative methods are employed in research. These authors encourage the integration and application of reflective practice and narrative tools commonly found in practice to that of social work research.

The Epistemological Debate: A Challenge and Explanation

There is an additional explanation for this lack of inclusion of self-reflection and narrative for social work educators and researchers; that is, the long-standing epistemological debate about objectivity, subjectivity, and the place of self in social work research. A recent article in The Journal of Social Work Education highlights this debate. In their 2015 article, "Postmodernism: A Dead End in Social Work Education," Caputo, Epstein, Stoesz, & Thyer make bold and negative assertions about social work research methods that value voice and narrative in research. Holding tightly to empirically based research, the need for rationality, objectivity, science, and empirical analysis and quantitative methods, these authors argue that neither the self nor subjective narrative, has a place in social work research. In their view, such a postmodern approach has a detrimental effect on the profession of social work. One the other end of the continuum, those who operate from a postmodern perspective value subjective voice, narrative, and meaning making in social work practice and research. As a new social work

educator and scholar, I have been challenged to find my place within this epistemological debate. Finding less within social work literature attending to the use of self-reflection and methods of narrative inquiry by social work educators and researchers, I turned my attention to the literature of teacher education.

Self-Reflection in Action: Research and Practice - Alive and Well in Teacher Education

Teacher educators — those in higher education charged with teaching the next generation of teachers — regularly research and understand their teaching philosophies and their identities as teacher-practitioners. In contrast to social work, there is substantial discourse and a much larger body of work within teacher education literature about the importance of teacher preparation (Loughran, 2014; Zeichner, 1999; 2004), the application of self-reflection for teacher educators and the value and use of methods of narrative inquiry in research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Dinkelman, 2003; Lyons, Halton & Freidus, 2013; Van Manen, 1995) and self-study research methods for teacher development (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2004; Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009; Samaras, 2011).

Research Methodologies From Teacher Education

Self-Study research. Self-study research originated within teacher education in the early 1990s (Zeichner, 1999). Self-study research supports teacher educators and teachers to be self-reflective about their teaching practices with the intention of improving their teaching and making a contribution to knowledge development in teacher education (Loughran, 2005). In self-study research, the teacher is the researcher, who systematically examines themselves and their teaching practice. The self-study researcher favors qualitative methods and employs collaboration throughout the research process as one way to attend to issues of validity and trustworthiness of data analysis (Loughran, 2007; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015).

Teacher educators have much to say in their own voice about utilizing self-study research as a way to improve their practice and to understand themselves as teachers. The focus of self-study varies, depending on the needs of the teacher-researcher. Some self-studies focus explicitly on the teaching experience and teacher in practice (Alderton, 2008; Berry, 2008). Others concentrate on the shifting identity from that of K-12 teacher to teacher educator in higher education (Dinklemann, Margolis & Sikkenga, 2006; Kitchen, 2005; Murray & Male, 2004; Ritter, 2007; Williams, Ritter & Bullock, 2012; Wood & Borg, 2010). Another set of writers focused on the shift from doctoral student identity to teacher educator identity. In their article, "Exploring Doctoral Student Identity Development Using a Self-Study Approach," (2014), Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, and Allan implement self-study research to investigate this shift from doctoral student to teacher- educator.

Scholarly Personal Narrative. Scholarly personal narrative (SPN) is a relatively new form of narrative inquiry developed by Robert Nash. Nash has been a professor in the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont for 44 years. His focus and interdisciplinary expertise are in areas of higher education, ethics, religion, spirituality and philosophy of education (Nash, 2004). Nash believes wholeheartedly that personal narrative has a valuable place in academic writing and research. He has published widely on SPN for the last 20 years and has devoted his time, attention, and speaking to helping others use SPN as a way to make sense of their personal and professional lives (Nash & Bradley, 2011; Nash & Viray, 2013; 2014).

This research method activates a constructivist approach to teaching, learning, and the research process. Nash believes that each of us as students, teachers, and researchers learn best when subject matter, self, and context are integrated with a continual process of meaning-

making. He states, "Constructivism is predicated on an approach to knowledge that views teaching, leading, and learning as conversational, narrative, conditional, developmental, socially and culturally created, as much heart and hand-based as it is head-based, and always profoundly personal in nature" (Nash, 2008, p. 1).

Like self-study research, SPN puts the writer's practice and narrative at the center of the research (Nash & Viray, 2014). The researcher/writer focuses the writing around specific ideas and then makes connections between the personal story, interpretation and insights, relevant scholarship and theory, and universal themes and larger worldview (Nash & Bradley, 2011). SPN allows the researcher to investigate and analyze their inner life for personal meaning and draw insights that might be universal to others. Effective SPN must have implications beyond the individual and hold meaning as connected to a broader community (Ibid).

This literature review sets the stage and brings attention to how social work educators can apply pragmatic and legitimate research methods that privilege self, reflective practice, and narrative inquiry. Like teacher educators, social workers experience a similar shift in professional practice and identity - from practitioner and/or doctoral student to educator/teacher. The research methods of self-study and SPN, and the associated examples found in teacher education literature, provide useful tools for those who want to understand themselves better as teachers in higher education and improve their teaching as practice.

Content Focus and Reflective Practices

Given the long-standing lack of social work teacher preparation and the limited use of self-reflective practices by social work educators, it is incumbent on social work doctoral students to take the initiative and proactively prepare for teaching in higher education. Drawing from my experience as a doctoral student, and from literature within social work and teacher

education, I suggest that social work doctoral students engage in focused and deliberate learning about what it means to teach in social work in higher education. I propose they focus their learning on four key content areas, engage in self-reflective practices, and employ self-study research and methods of narrative inquiry to increase their preparedness for effective teaching in higher education.

In the following section, I describe key content areas I focused on during my doctoral education and illustrate how they were instrumental in my preparation as a social work faculty in higher education. I recount how my learning processes were grounded in, and supported by, the reflective practice research methods of scholarly personal narrative and self-study research. I suggest that attention to specific content areas and employing reflective practices holds potential for social work doctoral students' to increase their understanding of self as a teacher, and increased clarity about their teaching as practice.

Educational Context and Unique Focus: A Doctorate in Social Work (DSW)

While most Ph.D. programs focus on preparing one for the role of researcher, and most DSW programs concentrate on developing one for advanced clinical direct practice, the doctoral program I attended maintains a central focus on education, pedagogy, and teaching. It names teaching as practice in social work and focuses on preparing students for teaching, and scholarship, service, and leadership in social work education at the college/university level. The St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work's website offers the following program description:

> Our DSW is designed to fill a gap in social work doctoral education. It is the first
> online DSW program to focus on preparing social work faculty specifically for
> university-level teaching and leadership in higher education. Graduates will be

prepared to: Engage in transformative teaching, develop an identity as a scholar-

practitioner, write for publication and pursue social justice through service and

leadership *(https://www.stthomas.edu/socialwork/dsw/about/)*

Personal Context: I Didn't Know What I Didn't Know

By the time I enrolled in the DSW program, I had been teaching as an adjunct faculty in a

school of social work for 12 years. I pursued this program because I wanted the opportunity to

teach more than part-time. However, my doctoral journey forced the realization that although I

have been teaching for more than ten years, I didn't know what I didn't know. I arrived in my

DSW program not understanding the full role and responsibilities of the professoriate or

knowing the context or language of higher education. Before I entered my doctoral program, I

did not know about such words as epistemology or ontology. I had never been asked to articulate

or explain my teaching philosophy or my theoretical orientation to teaching as practice. I had

never engaged in substantive conversations with others about what research methods I employed

or why I made particular pedagogical choices in the classroom. It was not until my doctoral

studies in this DSW program that I began to learn, and engage with others, about such ideas. It

was through my doctoral program that a clearer picture of the profession of social work within

higher education emerged; and my teaching philosophy, theoretical orientation to teaching as

practice and research methods and pedagogical choices became apparent to me. Each of these

areas of learning has bolstered my readiness for teaching effectively in social work education.

This doctoral journey provided an opportunity to develop my social work teacher and

researcher identities. Professors provided guidance and structured assignments for learning. They

introduced me to new ideas, language and tools as they are applied to the practice of teaching.

Through a number of courses in my doctoral education, I discovered a language for my

professional self as a social work educator in higher education, my teaching philosophy and the central place and power of story in my research interests and pedagogical choices. I was directed to specific author resources and provided assignments structured to support my learning in these critical areas. Most importantly, I was directed to my memories and a reflexive process. Where have I come from? What were influential personal experiences on my path thus far? How is my identity shifting from social work practitioner to social work educator? Who were key figures in my educational and professional experiences? How have any of these shaped my teaching practices? What research methods might I employ to investigate these ideas? And why does any of this matter in the roles and responsibilities I have as a social work educator?

Proposed Focus for Learning: Four Content Areas

Throughout the three years of my doctoral education, I completed 15 courses and wrote a banded dissertation in the form of three publication-ready articles. All of the courses and the curriculum were focused on unique aspects deemed essential in the preparation of future faculty in social work education. While each course was significant and useful to me, courses addressing four key content areas were especially advantageous to my development, including:

1. Social work in context: the history of social work, the evolution of social work education and the broader context of higher education

2. Pedagogy in social work education

3. Theoretical perspectives in teaching as practice in social work education

4. Research methods and teaching approaches in social work

Additionally, the opportunity to employ self-reflective practices, scholarly personal narrative (SPN), and self-study was critical toward my development as a teacher in higher education. In this paper, I propose that social work doctoral students who want to be well-

prepared for teaching in higher education will be wise give attention to the four content areas, proactively employ self-reflective practices, and consider adding SPN and self-study research methods into their scholarship of teaching and learning.

Figure 1.1 provides a visual illustration of these content areas as embedded in a reflective process. Immediately following figure 1, I provide a detailed description of each area of focus and how my learning in each area was supported and embedded in reflective practices. I conclude this article with a discussion of implications and recommendations for how social work educators can bolster their readiness/preparedness for teaching in social work education.

Figure 1.1 An Illustration of Four Key Focus Areas as Embedded in Reflective Practice
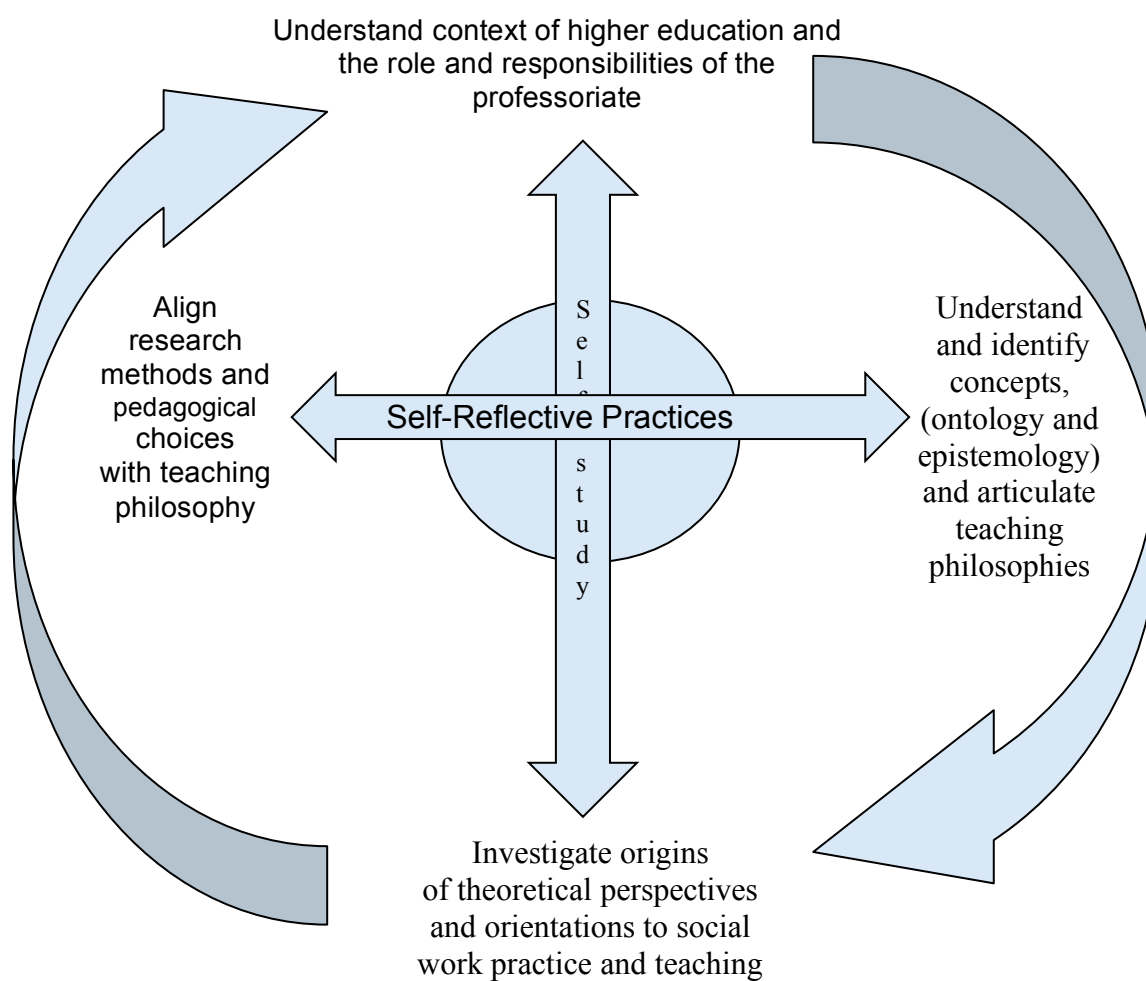
Focus Area 1 - Social Work in Context

Although I taught as many as three courses per year for 12 years, I had little understanding of the context of higher education and the structure in which social work educators function. I did not understand nor speak the language of higher education. As an adjunct faculty, one can operate in an autonomous manner. There is a positive sense of free agency resulting from this autonomy; however, teaching with so much autonomy and free agency can also leave one feeling disconnected and isolated from the greater purpose of the social work department and the broader whole of the university.

Four specific courses in my doctoral program specifically increased my understanding of what it means to be a social work educator and my skills for the role of teaching in social work in the context of higher education. These courses included: History of Social Work, Social Work Education, Curriculum Development and The Role and Responsibilities of the Professoriate. I offer this description of my coursework and suggest that social work doctoral students give attention to these foundational content areas and utilized reflective practices as they prepare to teach.

History of Social Work and Evolution of Social Work Education

In this doctoral program, the first course I took was History of Social Work and Social Work Education. Of course, in both my undergraduate and graduate education, I completed courses in social work history. This time, however, I revisited this content through the lens of 30 years of social work direct practice and with more focused attention to the historical development of the profession and social work education. This course reminded me of the tensions, dichotomies, and debates that thread throughout our profession's history: casework vs. social reform, service vs. social justice, social control vs. social service, individual practice vs.

group work, micro vs. macro, practice vs. research, and social service vs. social change. As a way to make sense again of the tensions within the social work profession, I looked back over my social work career. Upon this reflection, it was evident where, as a practitioner, I have placed myself on this continuum. This long-standing debate within our profession had new meaning. As a social work practitioner, I gravitated toward group work, social reform, macro practice, social change work, social action, and the voices and needs of marginalized communities. In this course, I was able to consider this debate from the position of social work educator. How do these historical tensions make sense to me now? How do these tensions play out for me as a social work educator? How will I apply this understanding to my teaching and my identity as social work educator? How will I present this information to students as I proceed? Will I maintain a dual identity of social work practitioner and social work educator? This course set the stage for a three-year internal dialogue about my shifting identity from social work practitioner to social work scholar and educator.

Through a critical lens, and from the perspective of our social work practice experience, we read about social work history. We read Trattner, W.I. (1999). *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America,* and Wenocur, S. & Reisch, M. (1989), *From Charity to Enterprise: The Development of American Social Work in a Market Economy*. We read works written by and about significant historical figures in the social work profession and social work education including Edith and Grace Abbott, Graham Taylor, Bertha Capen Reynolds and Sophonisba Breckenridge and Charlotte Towle. We engaged in this material with consideration for how we will teach this same material to our students. Revisiting social work history in this course helped me develop a new consciousness and identity as a social work

teacher/educator and scholar who will be called to deeply understand our professional history and open this world to students.

Social Work Education and Curriculum Development

Certainly, as a practitioner holding an undergraduate and graduate degree in social work, I was familiar with the educational paths available to me in social work from the student perspective. As an adjunct, I have taught courses for which I was responsible, most often using an existing syllabus. However, I have not been expected to see the full picture nor design my own syllabus. In courses on social work education and curriculum development, I approached my learning from the perspective of a social work educator. What will my role and responsibilities be when I enter the academy as a full-time social work educator? Where do the courses I teach fall in the full and broader curriculum map of an undergraduate or graduate program? How will I create syllabi that support alignment of course objectives, readings, assignments, and assessment?

Social work education has its own language, structure, key organizations and standardization and regulation processes distinct from that of social work as a profession. In this course, I came to understand the structure and continuum of social work education and associated definitions and nature of the implicit and explicit curriculum. We were introduced to key professional organizations including The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR), International Association for Schools of Social Work (IASSW). We learned about accreditation processes specific to social work education and as completed by CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (COA) and Commission on Educational Policy (COEP). As a social work educator, we gave consideration of how we would be called to participate in such things as curriculum development, accreditation and reaffirmation, curriculum

development and syllabi design. We had a chance to review the evolution of the Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), but this time through the lens of a social work educator instead of from the positions we have held as student or field instructor. In addition to the EPAS, we gave thoughtful consideration to important tasks of social work educators. What constitutes an engaging and significant learning experience? How will we design courses and syllabi to be learning-centered? How will we actively design and effectively utilize rubrics and assessment? For these ideas, we looked to Fink (2005, 2013), Barnett & Coate (2010), O'Brien, Millis & Cohen (2008), Stevens & Levi (2013). As a way to begin connecting our scholarly identity as a social work educator, we were encouraged to explore specific journals including *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, and *Journal of Teaching in Social Work.*

The Roles and Responsibilities of the Professoriate

As I approached my doctoral education, my knowledge about the history and structure of higher education in the United States, and my understanding of social work education within it, was limited. I understood it only to the extent of my experience as a student, social work practitioner, and disconnected adjunct faculty member. In a course entitled, "The Roles and Responsibilities of the Professoriate," I began to see myself in a broader context. My understanding expanded as we focused on the ideas and structures of university administration, faculty governance, academic freedom, factors and trends affecting the landscape in higher education, and university accreditation as separate from accreditation of social work programs. Most importantly, we focused on the three areas for which I will be responsible as a full-time tenure track faculty member: teaching, research, and service. We were directed to useful readings including Boyer, E.L. (1997). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*; The

Chronicle of Higher Education; and CSWE. Exploring the broader context and these resources provided me with a fuller picture of higher education and I could begin to see my place as a social work educator.

Focus Area 2: Pedagogy In Social Work Education

The first courses of this program focused on the history of the profession of social work, the distinct language and evolution of social work education, and the broader context of higher education. These courses provided a springboard for subsequent and focused coursework intended to prepare students to teach in social work education. This content set the stage for discernment and self-reflective practices through which I could make sense of my teaching philosophy, theoretical orientation to teaching, and congruent pedagogical and research methodologies I will employ as a social work educator.

Teaching in social work requires understanding a professional language separate and different from the language of social work practice. Social work educators should be able to explicitly situate and understand themselves and their identities in the role of teacher. They should know and be able to articulate their teaching philosophies and their pedagogical choices once in the classroom. In a course on pedagogy in social work education, I was called to learn this new and foreign language. My primary assignment was to articulate my teaching philosophy and identify my epistemological and ontological stance as a teacher. I was stumped. As a way to begin to understand pedagogy and paradigms of teaching and learning, I was called to write narrative accounts of my experience as a student. I was encouraged to search my memories for professors who I remembered as effective and ineffective. I was invited to consider teachers who had a significant impact on my life as a student. What made them effective, ineffective or influential? What actions did they take in the classroom to support or create barriers to my

learning? We were guided to key readings that modeled this reflexivity and self-reflection, and I would recommend to others, including, Rigoni (2002) *Teaching what can't be taught: The shaman's strategy* and hooks (1994) *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* For social work doctoral students preparing to teach, I highly recommend an article entitled, "Empowering social work faculty: Alternative Paradigms for Teaching and Learning" (Graham, 1997). This article will expose the social work student to educational philosophy and provide a language from which to begin developing their teaching philosophy. I also recommend Owens, Miller, and Grise-Owens' (2014) article, "Activating a Teaching Philosophy in Social Work: Articulation, Implementation, and Evaluation." These readings will challenge and support social work doctoral students to not only operationalize what they do in the classroom, but to be able to articulate why they teach in the ways they do.

Using readings from each course, I linked this new language with my personal, educational and professional experiences as a way to make sense of the material and to further understand myself in the role of teacher/social work educator. I recommend these because of their emphasis on the language of pedagogy and their ability to help doctoral students begin to articulate how and why they are drawn to a particular philosophical paradigm of teaching and learning. It was in this course where I found names for how and why I teach the way I teach. I could understand and see the value of teaching grounded in a more positivist paradigm, but I quickly found myself drawn to constructivism as my paradigm of teaching and learning. It became apparent to me that my process of meaning-making through personal narrative, self-study and self-reflection were an essential means to an end for how I would come to identify my teaching philosophy.

Focus Area 3: Origins of Theoretical Orientation to Social Work Practice and Teaching

In Human Behavior in the Social Environment, we teach undergraduate and graduate social work students about key theories that ground social work practice, including behaviorism, systems theory, developmental theory, attachment theory, cognitive theory, critical theories, feminist theories, etc. We teach practice methods rooted in these theories including cognitive behavioral theory, attachment theory, structural family therapy, etc. Social work practitioners go on to function in their direct practice as informed by theoretical orientations, albeit frequently stated as integrative or eclectic.

In a course on theoretical perspectives in social work, we were asked to identify our theoretical orientation to teaching and to create a practice model for teaching in social work education. Again, I couldn't articulate answers to these questions. As a way to begin to understand and name my theoretical orientation to teaching and implement a practice model for teaching supported by this theoretical orientation, we were guided to key readings including: *Skills for Using Theory in Social Work*: *An Introduction to Using Theory in Social Work Practice (*Forte, 2014), and *Educational Communities of Inquiry: Theoretical Framework, Research and Practice* (Akyol & Garrison, 2013). A primary assignment in this course was to complete a personal, educational and professional timeline identifying key experiences, pivotal moments, and influential people impacting our lives. Using the timeline, we were to indicate how these events exposed us to specific theoretical perspectives. Which theoretical perspectives became evident in this process? Using the support reading we linked these experiences with the theoretical concepts and language. We were able to see which theoretical perspectives supported our teaching philosophy/pedagogical approaches. From the timeline and linking activity, we were creating a practice model for our teaching. This exercise provided clarity and an

explanation for the theoretical underpinnings to my social work practice. I was able to see my interest in and connect to narrative theory, feminist theory and critical theory. I could immediately see the links between my significant life events, narrative theory, and constructivism and recognize the power and impact of story on me, and why I use story as a pedagogical approach in the classroom.

Focus Area 4: Aligning Pedagogical Approaches and Research Methods

In a course on teaching in social work, I could see my how my postmodern leanings play out in the classroom through my pedagogical choices. We read Bain, K. (2004), *What the Best College Teachers Do*, and began to understand and link pedagogical approaches and choices to our philosophies and theoretical orientations to teaching. I began to understand the approaches I have employed in the classroom and why I use these approaches. In turn, understanding this opened up more choices in my teaching. Similarly, in a course on mixed methods research, I drafted a mixed methods research proposal grounded in research methods congruent with my teaching philosophy and theoretical orientation to teaching. As a social work practitioner, my continuing education most often meant attending conferences to learn about new practice techniques. Less often, it meant drawing from the literature or reading social work research. One of the gifts of my doctoral education was my renewed link to social work scholarship and literature. In a mixed methods research course, I discovered my affinity for narrative inquiry. I also found myself navigating a debate in the literature about whether such a postmodern research method held any validity in social work. Ultimately, as a result of learning in each of these content area and by employing reflective practices and research methods, I gained clarity and confidence about my identity and practice as a social work educator, teacher, and scholar.

Conclusion

If not in social work doctoral education, how do social work faculty come to understand, develop and articulate essential aspects of being a social work educator? How can they commit to the intentional development, understanding and articulation of their theoretical orientation to teaching? How can social work faculty make clear and congruent pedagogical and research methodological choices? Throughout my doctoral education, exposure to, and focus on foundational content areas and work on assignments requiring self-reflective practices supported and increased my ability to answer these important questions. Course content and reflective practices were first steps and building blocks for my use of scholarly personal narrative and self-study research as the container and structure for my banded dissertation. Each of these elements provided me with a strong foundation on which to stand as I enter the academy as a social work educator. As a result of this work, I am prepared to take on the roles of teacher and scholar.

Doctoral students must have a strong content understanding of the history of social work as a profession, the distinct evolution and elements of social work education and the broader context of higher education. From this foundation, self-reflective practices and a scholarship of teaching and learning and employing SPN and self-study research will support their overt development of their teaching philosophies, theoretical orientations and pedagogical and research methodological choices. Such intentional development of social work faculty will increase the preparedness of social work educators for the teaching role, reduce stress for new social work faculty, hold potential to increase retention of new social work faculty and improve the quality of teaching. Because it is a long-standing reality that this focused learning is not typically embedded in doctoral education, I am suggesting that it is incumbent on doctoral students to take personal initiative to prepare themselves in these ways. However, I also believe

we should still push for doctoral programs, in general, to integrate such focus and learning opportunities in their programs. Additionally, more doctoral programs holding a focus on teaching in social work could be developed. Schools of social work and CSWE could be pressing for doctoral programs to actually make these long-called-for changes and improvements.

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Self-Study Research: The Impact of Postmodern Pedagogy in Social Work Education

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Abstract

This study fills a gap in social work education literature by suggesting that self-study is a useful research method for social work educators. This method privileges self-reflective practices and narrative inquiry as ways to collect data, study, and thereby improve teaching practice. This research systematically examined how a constructivist teaching philosophy informed the researcher's pedagogical approaches. A constructivist teaching philosophy was evident in the researcher's teaching methods and resulted in primarily favorable outcomes. Relevant challenges for both students and the social work educator/researcher also surfaced. Also described are internal experiences associated with the development of the teacher and researcher selves throughout the research process.

Keywords: Self-study research, social work education, critical self-reflection, self-awareness, teaching philosophy, pedagogy

As a direct result of my undergraduate and graduate social work education, through both classroom instruction and supervised field experience, I became a competent social worker. As a long-time social work practitioner, I gained substantial experience applying the knowledge and skills of critical self-reflection, self-awareness and professional use of self to understand myself as a social worker. I regularly engaged in narrative inquiry as a way to understand and work with my clients. However, as an adjunct social work faculty member, my competence as a teacher seemed left to chance, with no preemptive requirement for classroom instruction or supervised teaching experience to prepare me for this role. I had few opportunities to conceptualize how critical self-reflection, self-awareness, professional use of self, or narrative inquiry applied to my role as a teacher or researcher.

My desire to be more intentional about my development as a teacher prompted me to enroll in a unique DSW program intended to prepare social work educators for teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership in higher education. I wanted to articulate my teaching philosophy, increase my conscious understanding of how my teaching philosophy informs my pedagogical choices and be deliberate in choosing pedagogical approaches congruent with my teaching philosophy. In this paper, I provide a description of the research process, articulate my findings and offer a discussion of the implications of this research for social work education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Substantial evidence suggests that too little attention is given to preparing social work doctoral students for the full role of the professoriate, especially for the teaching role (Dinerman, Feldman & Ello, 1999; Gaff, 2002; Knight & Lagana, 1999; Lind, Maynard, & Albright, 2015; Valentine, Edwards, Gohagan, Huff, Pereira, & Wilson, 1998). Often, those teaching as adjunct faculty are given little guidance, direction, or support. As a result, social work educators are neither adequately taught to understand and develop their teaching philosophies, nor how to deliberately choose and employ

effective teaching methods, once in the classroom. A limited body of research focuses specifically on the development of social work educators' teaching philosophies (Pearson, 1998; Danhoff, 2012; Owens, Miller & Grise-Owens, 2014). Even fewer research studies include personal narratives that focus on how social work educators understand, develop and articulate their teaching perspectives (Kayser 1995; Zapf, 1997; Lay, 2005; McGranahan, 2008; Sy, 2013).

If social work educators were more clear about the origins of their teaching philosophies and can explicitly understand, develop and articulate them, then they could be more deliberate in their teaching practice, have more pedagogical choices, be more confident and better prepared for the teaching role, and ultimately, improve the quality of their teaching. Rigioni (2002) states, "To theorize without considering practical implications is arrogant and elitist; to practice without considering theoretical foundations is negligent and shortsighted" (p. 11-12). Further, "When we practice without understanding the theory that supports it, we are essentially saying, 'I'm just going to do it this way; I really don't know (or care) why'" (p. 14-15). Therefore, increased attention is needed to the intentional development, understanding, and articulation of social work faculty teaching philosophies so that social work educators can be cognizant of our worldviews and the educational theories that underpin and inform our teaching.

There is a rich discussion in social work literature about the importance of teaching students and new social workers to have a high level of self-awareness, understand the application of professional use of self, and be critically self-reflective in practice (Schon, 1987; Ruch, 2002; Mishna & Bogo, 2007; Lay & McGuire, 2010; CSWE, 2012:). However, there is much less focus on how social work educators (themselves) must apply these concepts to their teacher-identities, teaching philosophies, or practices. Because of the stark absence of research on the application of these concepts to the teaching role and work of social work educators, I turned my attention to teacher

education literature, where I discovered these principles applied in the research methodology of self-study.

Teacher educators -- those in higher education charged with teaching the next generation of teachers -- regularly conduct research to systematically examine their teaching philosophies, identities, and practices as teacher-practitioners (Brookfield, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Bollough & Pinnegar, 2001; Loughran, 2004). Self-study research bridges the critical practices of self-reflection, research, teaching, and research about teaching and learning (Loughran, 2005; LaBoskey in Loughran, 2004). Conducting this self-study allowed me to enact my commitments to the application of critical self-reflection/awareness, professional use of self, and the intentional development of my competence as a teacher and self-study researcher in social work education.

METHOD

My research question was, "How does my constructivist teaching philosophy inform my teaching practices and to what extent is my teaching philosophy evident in my pedagogical choices?" Because self-study research is grounded in social constructivist learning theory (LaBoskey, p. 22-23) and my research interest is situated at the intersection between who I am and my teaching practice, the qualitative research methodology of self-study was a particularly appropriate and useful research methodology for this study.

Self-Study Research

Self-study research methodology originated from within the field of teacher education in the 1990's (Zeichner, 1999). This research is conducted by teachers in practice, rather than by researchers far removed from the classroom (Loughran, 2004). Teacher educators and teachers conduct self-study research to be self-reflective in the context of their teaching with the intention of improving their teaching and making a contribution to knowledge development in teacher education (Loughran et al.,

2004; LaBoskey, 2004; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Samaras, 2011). Self-study research grew out of and was influenced by both action research and reflective practice. Self-study is a systematic research methodology focused on both self and practice improvement. While reflective inquiry is personal and an "inside job," self-study research makes reflective inquiry and reflective practices systematic and public (Loughran & Northfield, 1998).

Self-study has five grounding characteristics. It is self-initiated and self-focused, improvement-aimed, interactive, includes multiple (mainly qualitative) methods, and defines validity as a process based on trustworthiness (LaBoskey, in Loughran, 2004. p. 817). Building on LaBoskey, Samaras (2011) identifies key features through what she calls "The Five Foci Framework" (p. 9). According to Samaras, "self-study inquiry is personally situated, critically collaborative, aimed at improved learning, includes a transparent and systematic research process, and is intended for knowledge generation and presentation" (p. 10).

Teacher educators often conduct self-study research to examine the shift from teaching students in the k-12 classroom setting to teaching future teachers in higher education, a shift similar to the ones made by clinicians who move from clinical social work practice to teaching in higher education. Self-study research, implemented with fidelity to grounding characteristics identified by LaBoskey and Samaras, proved a useful methodology for me as I moved from social work clinician to social work educator.

Research Context and Participants

During the fall semester of 2016, and as a social work adjunct faculty member, I taught two graduate-level courses in social work (MSW) at a Midwestern Catholic university. Both courses were offered in a weekend cohort model and had four, eight-hour class sessions during the semester. A white female social work educator, I was the primary participant, subject, and researcher of this study.

Additional participants included one critical friend, 11 graduate students in a theory course, and eight graduate students in a practice course. All 19 students were female, 17 were white, and two were students of color. My critical friend is a social work educator and a woman of color.

Data Collection and Organization

Having received the University Institutional Review Board's approval and appropriate participant consent, I collected six types of data including field notes, post-teaching journal entries, student surveys, email correspondences, written transcripts of critical friend conversations, and post-course student evaluations. Three data sets provided a vehicle for student-voice (surveys, email correspondence, post-course student evaluations), and three data sets provided a vehicle for my voice and that of my critical friend's (field notes, journals, critical friend conversations).

During each class session, I wrote field notes focused on my thoughts and experiences of the teaching/learning process. After each weekend of teaching, and using prompts from Brookfield's Critical Incident Questionnaire (see Appendix A), I wrote post-teaching reflective journal entries. After the September and November weekends of teaching, I distributed anonymous electronic student surveys focused on student experiences of engagement during class and the impact of class structure and teaching methods on their learning (see Appendix B). Throughout the semester, I collected and compiled email correspondence between my students and me. After each weekend of teaching and using Google-Hangout video technology, I had a conversation with my critical friend about teaching and the research process. I audio-recorded three of the four conversations and had these transcribed verbatim. At the end of the semester, I collected course evaluations.

Collecting multiple data sets yielded a significant volume of written text to compile, organize, and analyze, requiring that I organize the data systematically and carefully. Using a Microsoft Word

document, I created a table for each data set putting raw data in one column leaving the other column for coding.

Data Analysis Procedures

Employing thematic analysis as a method to identify themes within and across each data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I approached the data in two ways. In the first round of open coding, I employed an inductive process without a prescriptive concept, theory or question in mind. I let the data speak for itself. During this first process, I created initial descriptive codes for each data set using single words, brief phrases, and color as a useful visual coding strategy. In the second round of coding, I approached each data set using a deductive process with my research question in mind. I consciously looked for evidence of related constructivist teaching and coded based on that. This two-step coding process resulted in 25 primary codes and subcategories.

Data analysis in self-study is a cyclical rather than linear process. Samaras (2011) calls self-study research "a hermeneutic process: a dance of data collection and data analysis" (p. 197). This process required me to engage in a reflexive, recursive and iterative process throughout data analysis, reading and rereading each data set, moving back and forth between and amongst the data to identify codes and categories.

Once each data set was coded independently, I merged all coded sets into a combined coding chart. I used the constant comparison method (Glauser & Strauss, 1967) to compare and contrast the codes and categories across data sets, collapsing connected codes, and distilling them into five themes.

To ensure trustworthiness in this research process, I engaged in a number of actions. First, collecting data in multiple ways from multiple sources, triangulating data, and looking across data sets, strengthened the credibility of my findings by minimizing threats to validity inherent in any one

data set. Using both inductive and deductive coding processes, and then looking across both sets of codes, provided an important discipline, a way of cross-checking my assumptions, and ensured a deeper analysis of data. Subsequent use of the constant comparison method allowed me to identify similarities and differences between codes and categories, and within and between each data set. Throughout the research process, I employed reflexivity, by writing analytical memos and by having dialogue with a critical friend. Use of the latter is a critical component of self-study research, as LaBoskey (2004) states:

Because we view teaching, learning and researching as interactive processes, we realise that we need the perspectives of significant others such as students, colleagues, and other self-study researchers or 'critical friends' to "challenge our assumptions and biases, reveal our inconsistencies and expand our potential interpretations (p. 849).

FINDINGS

Three primary themes emerged directly related to my research question including identification of constructivist teaching methods, positive impact of constructivist teaching methods, and challenges and dilemmas associated with constructivist teaching methods. An additional theme emerged indirectly related to my research question and is related to the internal process I experienced as an educator and researcher.

Identification of Constructivist Teaching Methods

Evidence of constructivist teaching methods surfaced frequently and consistently in all six data sets. Students identified constructivist teaching methods identified through student surveys, email correspondences, and course evaluations, and I identified them by field notes, post-teaching journals, and transcripts of conversations with my critical friend. The following list provides an

aggregate summary of specific teaching methods, which were explicitly noted and described as embedded elements of the next two themes:

- Session agendas, use of flexibility
- Group rituals and poetry to begin/end each class session
- Check-in questions and activities used to facilitate full-class discussions
- In-class role-play activities
- Paired review of assigned readings and verbal reporting back to class
- Guided pairs and small-group discussions
- Small-group activities using case examples
- Student introspection, e.g., check-in/story-sharing, timeline and Eco-map activity
- Professor story-sharing of professional and personal experiences relevant to social work
- Valuing prior student experience and knowledge
- Use of videos conveying fictionalized/real-life stories with guided post-video discussions
- Use of current events/public issues
- Accessibility of professor via email, phone, in-class questions, written assignment feedback

Positive Impact of Constructivist Teaching

The constructivist teaching methods and structures identified and listed above had a primarily positive impact on both my students and me. Indications of this positive impact on students were evident through student surveys, email correspondences, and course evaluations, and on me, through my field notes, post-teaching journals, and transcripts of conversations with my critical friend. Described via three sub-themes, constructivist methods and associated positive impacts include real-world application and skill development, connections and support in the learning process, and positive and engaging learning environment.

Real-world application and skill development. In-class role-plays provided students opportunities to apply concepts and practice social work skills and were described as challenging and a helpful way to learning:

> *The role-plays were helpful and challenging because I understand concepts better when I am given a real-world example. It was good practice (student survey response).*

Students role-played terminating with Sophie from In Treatment, and it worked well. Students took risks. Occasionally, I entered the role-play to model and discuss skills. Students commented enthusiastically how they valued my participation and modeling (post-teaching journal entry).

Students identified the use of video, real-life examples, and guided discussion as helpful ways to apply concepts and experienced as motivating and helpful:

TED talks were eye-opening — they motivated me to want to make changes in the world, and I liked seeing real examples, like in the Big Mama documentary and the HBO episode of the therapist/client (Paul/Sophie). Guided reflection and coaching afterward was excellent. It helped to hear multiple perspectives and gain new insights from the cohort and professor about what we saw in the videos (student survey response).

The instructor provided many examples (real-life) of how particular theoretical perspectives apply to social work (post-course student evaluation).

I was inclined to use teaching methods that linked real-life and current events to social work, applied course concepts and fostered and guided discussion:

MT: I like using the TED Talks that showcase the work of Bill Strickland, Aaron Huey, and Matika Wilbur. They are great ways to spark dialogue regarding macro practice, race, and use of arts as activism in social work practice. They are always well received (critical friend conversation/October transcript).

MT: I am so aware of my inclination and desire to integrate the larger societal issues especially pertinent to social workers into the classes for HBSE and Methods/501. I continually seem to bring my own interaction with the world and these issues into class, hoping to help students make sense of the issues in their developing social work practice (critical friend conversation/November transcript).

Connection and support in learning process. Students identified teamwork, time for students to share stories and experiences about life and internships, and hearing about my experiences and social work practice stories as methods that fostered engagement and a sense of connectedness:

Doing the theory presentation with a partner let us bounce ideas off of each other, and watching everyone present their theory reduced my anxiety. I felt like we were all connected and "in this together" (student survey response).

> *I felt the most engaged during the first hour of class when members had time to express how they were feeling about school and internships. Mary beautifully created a safe space for the discussion by opening with a poem and sharing some personal details about her experience. It gave us permission to be vulnerable and engage with the class. It made me more receptivity to learning for the rest of the day (student survey response).*

Positive and engaging learning environment. The variation of activities, meaningful assignments and kind feedback, a passionate tone, and flexible structure and pacing of class sessions felt respectful of students' time, inspired students, increased students' investment in learning, fostered a positive learning environment, and made an 8-hour class go quickly:

> *Having a written outline at the beginning of class helped me mentally prepare for the day, but it was nice the Mary was not rigid about the schedule. We deviated from the outline when conversation was flowing; she never made it come to a halt in in order to stick to the agenda (student survey response).*

> *The variation of assignments and readings and activities supported my investment in learning the material and created an ideal learning environment (student survey response).*

> *Mary is knowledgeable and delivers thorough and effective feedback in a kind way (Post-course student evaluation).*

> *The combination of teaching methods, use of technology, opening of class and passion she brought to every class was inspiring (post-course student evaluation).*

> *Mary is passionate about social work and teaching. She greatly cares about her students and the world around us (post-course student evaluation).*

I place a high value on setting a positive tone, creating a safe classroom climate and holding the experience together by using the basic structures of group work:

> *When I open class with a John Fox poem called Deeply Listening, I just love the way the room's energy changes. I can actually feel people show up and enter the learning space. I like how poems provide a strong foundation for the session's learning, keeping students focused in this way on essential elements of the course (post-teaching journal entry).*

The use of social work-relevant poetry as an opening and closing ritual set a positive tone for learning and was described as engaging, inspiring, and calming:

I was most engaged in this class when we listened to the instructor read poetry. I really love that she starts and finishes the class that way. It inspired me when she read it in the beginning and helped me wind down at the end (student survey response).

Mary opened with a poem, "We Were Made For These Times." It was exactly what I needed to hear, and it set a good tone for the day in light of the approaching election. It was good to be able to talk about what was on our mind and see that many of us were dealing with similar issues (student survey response).

Challenges and Dilemmas Associated with Constructivist Teaching Methods

Although findings suggest that the impact associated with the use of constructivist-based methods was primarily positive, challenges and dilemmas also surfaced. Challenges and dilemmas for students resulting from the use of constructivist methods were evident through student surveys, email correspondences, and course evaluations, and for me, in my field notes, post-teaching journals, and transcripts of conversations with my critical friend. Four sub-themes that further highlight and describe the challenges and dilemmas associated with constructivist teaching methods include: introspection and sharing, current events and free-flowing discussion, unclear assignment instructions, and lack of lecture and use of PowerPoint.

Introspection and sharing. Some students were surprised, unprepared for, and uncomfortable with the high level of introspection and personal sharing required in paired discussion, small-group discussion, and assignments. These students articulated a need for privacy and an earlier indication from me that the course would require such personal introspection:

I was not prepared for as much introspective work as we did. It was hard to be introspective with so many people so close around me. Maybe knowing ahead of time that we would be expected to be introspective and share in class would help. I might not have been as honest on the timeline activity had I understood (Student survey response).

Current events and free-flowing discussion. My comfort with and ability to let classroom discussion unfold naturally also posed a dilemma for me, as did my desire to integrate examples from

current events. Both make the planning process somewhat stressful and challenging for me to create

and choose a predictable class plan:

> *MT: It just goes back to the fact that I can only plan so much for what I'm going to bring to the classroom. I have a broad focus in mind, but then so much of it sort of is organic. I live in that organic space a lot. I am more comfortable letting it unfold and discussing what emerges as pertinent than I am with making a rigid and clear plan for what will happen in class (Critical friend conversation transcript).*

My comfort to be in conversation and my willingness to stay in free-flowing classroom

discussions can be problematic for some students:

> *I am an introvert and I thrive in paired discussion and small-group discussions. It is a challenge to get my voice heard at times in large-group discussions because the loudest or quickest voices get heard most. I need more time to reflect before I respond. I would feel more comfortable if we were given more time to think and jot down a few notes before speaking (Student survey response).*

> *I was the most disengaged and sometimes bored during some of the class discussions that got off topic and too lengthy, or when one student told a long-winded story, seemingly unaware of time. Mary could have reeled her in sooner (Student survey response).*

Unclear assignment instructions. Some students experienced dilemmas when assignment

instructions were unclear, too loosely structured, or did not include a grading rubric. They felt

disengaged in class and uncertain about how to best complete assignments. They needed additional

structure, information, reassurance, support, feedback, or more assistance:

> *The time-line activity was overwhelming, and I needed more of a reference point/example to do the eco-map activity. I couldn't remember the symbols that I needed to use, and I didn't understand the purpose (Student survey response).*

In field notes, post-teaching journals, and critical friend conversations, I frequently articulated

my struggle and inefficiency preparing the course management system and clearly describing and

reviewing assignment instructions to students:

> *The in-class student teach-back presentations were not well done this weekend, and this is definitely my fault. I did not adequately design or describe the*

assignment to students. I wanted this assignment to result in more student interaction, but instead, they just reported information, with very little critical thinking or discussion. I felt a bit anxious trying to modulate how much I interject into student teach-backs/presentations, not wanting to take over or interrupt; but also, not wanting to abdicate my responsibility to direct discussion (Post teaching journal entry).

Desire for more conventional methods. For some students and me, my infrequent and low-level use of lecture and PowerPoint posed dilemmas. Some students indicated a desire for me to use lecture, PowerPoint, and structured references to text and readings during class:

Even at the graduate level, I still need the instructor to refer back to readings from the texts, or whatever might be posted on Blackboard as an introduction to where the discussion is going next. For me, it is the springboard that reorients my mind, grounds it (Student survey response).

I have a low-level of comfort using PowerPoint and lecture in my teaching, and this poses a dilemma for me. Even though PowerPoint seems to be a barrier for my teaching rather than a helpful tool or guide for students and me, I experience some self-imposed pressure and feel motivated to become more adept at using these methods:

I still have a hard time choosing to use PowerPoint or to create a lecture experience, but I think in this class, some of my students want this from me. I am just more comfortable being in a discussion about the topic at hand. I think some students want and need more didactic instruction and structure to learning. I wish I felt more comfortable with lecturing (Post-teaching journal entry).

My Internal Process as Educator and Researcher

Indirectly related to my research question, one theme emerged which brings to light the internal process my social work educator and researcher selves experienced while, and as a result of, conducting self-study research. Evidence of this internal process surfaced frequently and consistently within each data set. I characterize this internal process in two sub-themes including risking exposure and experiencing vulnerability.

Risking Exposure

Teaching is an isolating experience where, beyond students, few others observe. Conducting self-study research demands that educators come out of the shadows, shine a light on themselves and their teaching, and risk exposure to a critical friend. Engaging in conversations with a critical friend throughout the research process required me to risk exposing my thinking process and my teaching practice to another. Upon implementing this study, I immediately felt exposed, uncertain, hesitant and nervous. Just as quickly, I also realized the positive impact of taking this risk:

> *Teaching as an adjunct is such a solitary experience and isolated task. Even so, when I feel uncertain about what I am doing, I'm glad to be "hiding." This requirement to have a critical friend as part of my self-study is a bit nerve-wracking because I have to talk to another social work educator, whom I respect, about what I actually do in my teaching - and I feel a bit exposed. But I can already tell that choosing to do this self-study has already improved the intentionality of my teaching. I have come out from the shadows and uncertainty to ask for help and feedback about my teaching (Journal entry following critical friend conversation).*

Throughout the study, I shared stories from my teaching, asked questions of my critical friend, and frequently sought reassurance from her about my choices and beliefs about teaching. In October, we discussed what it means to be a teacher and what effective teaching looks like in action. I described to her what I told my partner one day after trying, but failing, to feel comfortable delivering a lecture and adequately using PowerPoint in class. My struggles to trust myself and value my constructivist-based teaching methods were evident, as was my desire to be adept at teaching methods more congruent with a positivist paradigm of teaching:

> *MT: I still come home after teaching and say to my partner, like, "Oh my God, when am I going to feel comfortable to stand up there like some content expert and do a 10 minute mini-lecture?" She's like, "When are you going to get it out of your head that lecturing isn't necessarily the best or only way that makes you a good teacher?" But I'm struggling with that because I really want to be capable of that way of teaching too (Critical friend conversation transcript).*

My critical friend affirmed some of my beliefs about certain aspects of teaching in higher education. She reported similar experiences regarding the lack of preparation for teaching in her Ph.D. program, the lack of direction and support provided to adjunct faculty, and a common negative view of faculty self-disclosure in the classroom in higher education. In a conversation in October, I talked with her about my frequent use of self-disclosure in the classroom and my belief that it is acceptable, valuable, and essential to how I teach. I also acknowledged that I struggle with messages that, in the academy, faculty self-disclosure is somehow frowned upon and has no place in the classroom. In the transcripts of a conversation with my critical friend, I can see my search for reassurance about my choices about self-disclosure in teaching:

> CF: You have to talk about those sorts of things, your life. I think that if you don't bring in personal experiences, not in a self-serving way, but in a way that's used to teach and to connect, it's the same thing that you would hope that students would use in practice. It's all about parallel process, all of it, 100%. I want my students to use professional use of self in a healthy way. You have to model it, so they know what it looks like.

> MT: Do you think there is an idea that academics should not disclose much about themselves in the classroom - like they should be removed from their personal selves?

> CF: Absolutely.

> MT: I didn't know that until I got in this DSW program. So imagine me, being a social worker who always employs the professional use of self in my practice for all those clinical reasons you mentioned. And then, very regularly using it in the classroom for those same reasons - but finding out that generally speaking, in the academy, there is this weird separation and that self-disclosure from faculty is not necessarily seen as positive.

> CF: Yes, it's like a very foreign concept in the academy; that we would try and get rid of this hierarchy and these artificial boundaries between students and teacher (Critical friend conversation transcript).

> Coming out of the shadows, risking exposure, and engaging in conversations with a critical

friend was highly beneficial. From my critical friend I gained inspiration, and specific, practical ideas

for teaching, including effective uses of PowerPoint, visual art, and making class-session objectives

explicit for students:

> *CF: Try to think of PowerPoint as a tool to hold the basic outline of the story you want to tell. I do use the PowerPoint for every class, although sometimes it might be only three slides. I always show a Ricardo Levins Morales' poster that visually depicts a social justice issue that relates to what we're talking about in class. As a framework, you know? When students walk in, the visual that they see on the PowerPoint is this piece of art. It sets the tone for the class, and then I have an agenda. I'm also thinking about adding learning objectives for the day on the PowerPoint to provide a structure for students who need it (Critical friend conversation transcript).*

I received reassurance, support, and affirmation of a constructivist teaching method I

frequently employ, which is using real world/current events as a framework for teaching:

> *MT: I was so aware last weekend of teaching that I always want to, and I always seem to, bring pertinent broader cultural realities and current events from the world into the classroom. It always helps bridge ideas and students.*

> *CF: If you are more of a Freirean teacher, then that is exactly what you would do because your job is to facilitate learning. Sometimes you do that using the textbook and designing assignments. Sometimes it's bringing what's going on in the real world and having a discussion about it. I bring in what's going on in the outside world all the time, especially in diversity/social justice class, but in other ones too (Critical friend conversation transcript).*

As a result of coming out of the shadows and conducting this self-study, I began to find my

place with other constructivist educators. I enthusiastically shared with my critical friend the various

ways I was finding my place with others who hold a constructivist philosophy:

> *MT: Since we spoke last, I have made so many great connections! I went to that conference in Vermont where I met other constructivist social work educators from all over the world; and recently, I met somebody at the University who conducts self-study research. She is excited that I'm doing this because no one else in her department does self-study research and she feels quite alone. It's really encouraging and helpful to meet someone who understands this! She walked through my IRB proposal and gave me a lot of feedback already. She is helping me clarify this whole research process (Critical friend conversation transcript).*

CF: It's like somebody who gets what you are trying to do. So great to get feedback!

MT: Exactly. And then, with the connections I made at the Vermont conference and the scholarship of teaching and learning meetings - it's like I'm finding my people, other constructivist educators who see and think about teaching like I do. It's very affirming and makes me feel legitimate, like I'm on the right track (Critical friend conversation transcript).

Experiencing Vulnerability

Throughout the self-study, I experienced my confidence as a constructivist social work

educator. Simultaneously, however, I felt vulnerable and lacked confidence in my skills in this

postmodern qualitative research paradigm. I grappled with the language of qualitative research in

general, and in self-study, specifically:

MT: What I feel most is uncertain about just owning language related to research, reflective practice, self-study, autoethnography, and ideas of narrative inquiry. I think one of the biggest differences amongst all of those pieces is the discipline from which they come. Because I have my head a lot in teacher education, I find myself in those labels or those words, but I need to find the social work language. But I think they are talking about the same thing. It's just confusing (Critical friend conversation transcript).

MT: This research is such a process. It definitely has me learning about my teaching but also about research. I think I'm trying to find a comfortable place with the research process - to gain confidence about these various postmodern research methods - sorting out the difference between self-study, narrative inquiry, and autoethnography and all the while, wanting to feel as clear and confident as I do in the classroom. It's like learning a new language that I can't speak fluently yet (Critical friend conversation transcript).
I had to muster the courage to ask questions and ask for help about the research process from

my critical friend and others in my developing network. I was determined to find my confidence in

choosing and conducting postmodern research:

MT: I feel so grateful I have been able to talk with you throughout this research process. It has been embarrassing at times, because it is such a learning curve for me, but I couldn't have done this without being able to ask you what feel like dumb questions. I have miles to go to be even close to done with this self-study research, but it's starting to be evident to me how it's going to all fold together, and I can't wait to feel more confident. I want this kind of self-focused qualitative

research to one area of focus for my future scholarship (Critical friend conversation transcript).

LIMITATIONS

Self-study research is rooted in a constructivist epistemology, self-initiated, self-focused, and places the researcher at the center of the inquiry (Samaras, 2011). Some will identify these foundational principles, and this postmodern research paradigm, as limitations to this study in, and of, themselves. To mitigate these concerns, I adhered to the methodological requirements of self-study and engaged with a critical friend throughout the research to ensure that the examination and deconstruction of my teaching practice were not done in isolation. However, engaging in dialogue with an additional critical friend, specifically during the data analysis phase of the research, would have strengthened data analysis by providing an additional lens through which I could have interpreted the data.

DISCUSSION

Although focused on a social work educator, this study mirrors research typically conducted in teacher-education focused on the use of self-study for improved teacher preparation (Loughran, 2014; Zeichner, 1999; 2005), teacher development (Bullough & Pinnegar 2001; LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2004; Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009; Samaras, 2011), and increased application of self-reflection for teacher educators (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Dinkelman, 2003; Lyons, Halton & Freidus, 2013; Van Manen, 1995).

Through this systematic inquiry into my teaching practice, I became more conscious of my constructivist teaching philosophy and how it informs my pedagogical choices. Findings in this study illuminated the particular constructivist teaching methods I employed in the classroom and affirmed their congruence with my constructivist teaching philosophy. Teaching methods indicative of a constructivist teaching philosophy include those through which the interpersonal and social process of

meaning-making is central. Robert Nash states, "Constructivism is predicated on an approach to knowledge that views teaching, leading, and learning as conversational, narrative, conditional, developmental, socially and culturally created, as much heart and hand-based as it is head-based, and always profoundly personal in nature" (Nash, 2008, p. 19).

Data in this study operationalized the constructivist teaching methods I employed in the classroom. These included the use of flexible class-session agendas, group work and poetry as rituals, check-in questions and time for personal and professional sharing by students and me, role-plays and guided paired discussions, small-group activities, large-group facilitated discussions, videos conveying real-life and fictionalized stories, and current events fostering concept application and skill-development.

Beyond the scope of my primary research question, this study offers insights about the impact of constructivist teaching methods on students, the learning process, classroom environment, and me. Findings suggest these methods had a primarily positive impact and that I am more comfortable with, and more inclined to employ, constructivist methods than positivist methods. Methods that supported and deepened student learning included those that conveyed real-world examples, provided opportunities to practice social work skills, and fostered paired, small-group and large-group discussions. Opportunities for teamwork and time for student and professor storytelling and sharing resulted in an increased sense of connectedness and support in the learning process. Attention to tone, structure and pacing, and the use of poetry as ritual created a positive and engaging learning environment.

Although constructivist teaching methods had a primarily positive impact, data also suggests these methods presented certain challenges and dilemmas. For some students, the high level of introspection and sharing required in class posed dilemmas for students and me. Some students

needed more privacy and an earlier indication from me that such sharing would be expected and part of the course. For others, my reliance on current events, willingness to stay in a free-flowing discussion, and my infrequent use of lecture and PowerPoint was challenging and anxiety producing. These students indicated a desire for more lecture and in-class reference to assigned readings and a need for clearer instructions, structure, and grading rubrics for assignments. For me, my reliance on current events, willingness to stay in a free-flowing discussion, and infrequent use of lecture and PowerPoint made creating a predictable class plan challenging and somewhat stressful. I also experienced self-imposed pressure and internal motivation to become more adept at using these conventional methods.

One theme emerged related to my internal process, both as educator and researcher. It brings to light the internal process I experienced while, and as a result of, conducting self-study research. Self-study makes visible and conscious what is often invisible, hidden, or unconscious. This is why an essential aspect of the methodology is to engage in conversations with a critical friend throughout the research process. As a result, this study demanded I risk exposure of my teaching practice, thoughts about teaching, and myself with my critical friend. Data indicated that, although initially worried about risking exposure, feeling vulnerable, and lacking confidence in the research process, conversations with a critical friend resulted in reassurance, encouragement, professional camaraderie, additional ideas about teaching methods, and information and support regarding the research process. As a result of conducting this self-study, I experienced increased clarity about my identity as a social work educator, increased confidence in my constructivist teaching philosophy and methods, and increased my competence for conducting self-study research in social work education.

Implications for Social Work Education

While this self-study was self-focused, personally situated, and helpful to me, quality self-study must extend beyond the researcher and my specific context. It must also generate knowledge about teaching and learning and be made public (Samaras, 2011) and have application and implications for the broader field of education (Loughran, 2004). Beyond benefitting me, this study offers insights and provides a model for how social work educators, like teacher-educators, can conduct self-study research to improve their teaching.

For social work practitioners and students, there is a heavy emphasis on self-awareness, critical self-reflection, self-disclosure and professional use of self. Oddly, there is little focus on and few opportunities guiding social work faculty to apply these same essential social work concepts to themselves as teachers. Through self-study, they can enact for themselves, and model for students, the commitment to and congruence with these foundational social work concepts.

Unfortunately, too little attention is given to the development of social work educators' teaching philosophies and preparation for teaching. Teaching competence appears to be left to chance, and social work educators are left to find their own way. Self-study research is a proactive response to this lack of attention. It can be both a roadmap and vehicle toward self-understanding and improved practice of social work educators. By conducting self-study research, social work educators can become more intentional in understanding, developing, and articulating their teaching philosophies, while also becoming more deliberate in choosing their pedagogical approaches. Self-study research has potential to not only improve teaching but also increase confidence and job satisfaction among social work educators, not to mention, improved outcomes for students.

Implications for Future Research

Self-study research provides an opportunity for social work educators to bridge their dual roles and responsibilities to both teaching and scholarship. In this way, social work educators can participate in the scholarship of teaching and learning to further discern their teaching philosophies, determine effectiveness of specific teaching methods, or examine the identity shift from social work practitioner to social work educator. Future research questions sparked by this study include: How do social work educators understand, develop, and articulate their teaching philosophies? How do social work educators practice critical self-reflection as a social work faculty? How do social work faculty determine their level and use of self-disclosure in the classroom? What factors shape this determination? What influences and factors determine this self-disclosure of social work faculty?

CONCLUSION

Conducting self-study research allowed me to proactively and deliberately direct my professional development as a social work educator, teacher, and researcher. It supported the deliberate inquiry into my teaching philosophy, the pedagogical choices I make in the classroom, and their impact. As importantly, this study suggests that self-study research - a methodology typically employed in teacher education - has significant value and broader application to social work education. Functioning as both a roadmap and a vehicle toward self-understanding and improved practice of social work educators, self-study deliberately employs self-reflective practices and is a proactive response to the lack of attention given to the preparation of social work educators for teaching.

Appendix A: Student Survey Questions

(Distributed in September and November)

1. At what point in this class session were you most engaged? Please identify/describe what was happening in the classroom that made you especially engaged?

2. Was the structure of the class session helpful to your learning? If so, how? (e.g., pacing, timing, flow, activity sequence, time spent on each activity, etc...)

3. What specific teaching methods/activities did you find especially helpful to your learning during this class session? (e.g., lecturing, storytelling, video, small group, PowerPoint slides, Eco Mapping and Timeline Activities).

4. At what point during this class session did you feel most disengaged? Please identify/describe what was happening in the classroom that made you especially disengaged.

5. How could the structure of the class session have been improved to support your learning?

6. How could the teaching methods/activities have been improved to support your learning?

Appendix B: Post-Teaching Journal Log Questions

(Brookfield, 1995, p. 73-74)

1. What was the moment(s) this week when I felt most connected, engage, or affirmed as a teacher - the moment(s) I said to myself, "This is what being a teacher is really all about?"

2. What were the moment(s) this week when I felt most disconnected, disengaged, or bored as a teacher - the moment(s) I said to myself, "I'm just going through the motions here?"

3. What was the situation that caused me the greatest anxiety or distress - the kind of situation that I kept replaying in my mind as I was dropping off to sleep, or that caused me to say to myself, "I don't want to go through this again for a while."

4. What was the event that took me most by surprise - an event where I saw or did something that shook me up, caught me off guard, knocked me off my stride, gave me a jolt, or made me unexpectedly happy?"

5. Of everything I did this week in my teaching, what would I do differently if I had the chance to do it again?"

6. What do I feel proudest of in my teaching activities this week? Why?

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The Place, Function, and Power of Story in an Evolving Pedagogy

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Abstract

Through this personal narrative, I reflect on pivotal personal, educational and professional experiences to understand their influence on who I am, and who I am becoming, as a social work educator. Throughout this narrative, I describe my growing up, educational and professional experiences, path to teaching and my motivations and outcomes of pursuing a doctorate in social work (DSW). Ultimately, I investigate the place of story, storytelling and witness in my development and describe how my resulting ability to understand and articulate these ideas matters in the classroom.

Keywords: personal narrative, story, teaching, social work educator, teaching philosophy, pedagogy

Making Sense of Mysteries

I wanted to be grown
up late with them
but the youngest are sent
up and away, banished.

Disjointed stories of adult lives bubble up stairway banisters
and conversations are muffled under ice clinking drinks
while truths and children
drift further and further away.

Desperation fills my lungs
I grasp at air to catch my breath,
to catch up, but I choke
on the thick smoke of their silence.

As an adult I rise up
heavy with the soot of their secrets
still wanting the mysteries of them
to dissolve.

My growing up was a smooth ride in a homogenous world and marked by imperceptible difference. In a small Midwestern town, although only 15 miles from a larger city, I couldn't have been further away from the diversity of people living so nearby. Steeped in a childhood of privilege — white, middle/upper middle class, able-bodied — I had everything I needed and more. I am the youngest of seven children — five boys, two girls — and raised by parents who owned their own business. By the time I came along, I was a clear beneficiary of their success and enjoyed the sense of pride and experience of belonging that came with this large Italian/Irish Catholic family. We enjoyed annual family winter vacations to Florida, summers at the lake, and always had something or someone to celebrate with dinner parties and presents. My parents paid for my college education, my first car and everything in between and all along the way. All that the world held for me unfolded easily; nothing stood in the way of my dreams.

In addition to growing up in privilege, I also grew up in a family of silence and in a religious and cultural context in which my own differences would soon become secret and problematic.

> *It is 1976 and I'm ten years old. My brother has taken me to a local community festival and I am excited to use a ticket to meet with a real fortuneteller. The fortune teller takes my hand to read my palm. I'm listening to her forecast my future, "You will grow up to fall in love and marry a beautiful woman." She is saying more, but I am too upset to hear it. So embarrassed and trying diligently not to cry, I slink out of the fortuneteller's tent in tears for being mistaken (again), I assumed, for a boy.*

As a child, I spent summer days riding my bike around town, playing football with the neighborhood boys, going fishing with my brothers, climbing oak trees to the top, driving go-carts and playing in tree-houses built by my brothers, catching frogs — and being regularly mistaken for a boy. I was a tomboy. I didn't fit the gender expression and role expectations of the world, and especially, of my mother. I heard constant messages about what was lady-like, what clothes were acceptable for a girl, and how to fix my hair appropriately. There was an undercurrent to the messages about gender expression, of course. But I knew not to ask. This was the one way in which I experienced "difference" and the world's response to it. Years later, I would wonder if I had met a real fortuneteller.

In a sea of silence, generational cutoffs ran through my family tree. In two generations before me, a man who was my grandfather, and a woman who was my aunt disappeared into their own lives far away. No explanation. No story. Don't ask. And later, don't tell. My grandfather left his family when his oldest child, my mother, was 7. My aunt, my mother's sister, left her small town in 1959 in her mid-20's and never looked back, never returned. Throughout my childhood, their disappearances were mysteries to me. The reasons for their departures, their stories, were clearly off-limits. I remember finding a photo and asking my dad, "Who is this?" He responded quietly, "That's your Grandpa," or "That's your mom's sister, but don't ask mom about them." I didn't ask, "Why did they

leave? Where did they go?" It was clear from his response that I was not to know about these ghosts. I was profoundly affected by this silencing of their stories, especially as I began to understand, more clearly, my own.

In elementary school, being a tomboy was relatively innocuous, and almost functional, but by middle school the rules changed. At age 13 and in the seventh grade, I was not like the other girls. I did not belong to the new club that seemed to be forming, where an interest in boys, make-up, and looking a particular feminine way were all parts of the secret password, the ticket for admission to this new club. I felt my place and sense of belonging in the world shifting, but beyond feeling different from others, I could not find words to name it. By high school, this feeling of being different, somehow, only grew more intense. I had no words yet to understand the underlying heterosexism and homophobia saturating the culture. I just knew that, "One of these things is not like the other, and it is me."

The cultural conversation simultaneously evolving as I entered high school was about something called AIDS.

> *It is 1981 and I am in 10th grade. As I walk into my second hour Spanish class, I over hear two classmates talking, "Did you see the new choir teacher? What a fag! He better stay away from me!" I freeze. They are still talking and laughing, but I am too nervous to hear much more. What if others find out that my difference is like the new choir teacher? Students are ruthless. Suddenly, difference is dangerous.*

Simmering gossip, conversations, and words like "gay", "fag" and "AIDS" became part of my school day. It was an isolating time, and again, I found myself further swallowed in silence for the secret that was mine. At home, I remember reading something in the Catholic newspaper to which my parents subscribed. In reference to gay people and concerns at the time about AIDS, it referred to the nature of gay people as "intrinsically disordered." Again, I knew not to ask. All the while, the other silent

partner in my life was privilege. I was blind to it. It was invisible to me. With no words to name my difference rooted in gender and sexuality and living in such a homogeneous white small town, I didn't have much exposure or reason to think about ideas of class, privilege, marginalization, and oppression. In my Catholic upbringing, my parents conveyed one of their deeply held values, "You must always care about those who are less fortunate than you." This didn't seem an unreasonable or challenging idea. To do my part, each Sunday morning at 8 o'clock mass, I proudly put my envelope into the collection plate.

As a senior in high school, I initiated a food drive to benefit a local social service agency for a National Honor Society project requirement. I organized a week of events focused on educating others about hunger in our community. My high school was located in a newly developing suburb of relative wealth, and I thought we could generate a substantial amount of donations. I welcomed a speaker from my church, who gave a lecture on the issue of hunger in the United States, and the director of a local food drive to bring to life the needs in and near our own community and to educate students about how we might make a difference on this issue. I was horrified by the statistics and upset by the reality that people living so near our school might be hungry. I was equally horrified and upset that an overwhelming number of my peers seemed indifferent. Try as I might, I couldn't seem to engage them in my food shelf idea. Although it was not a complete failure, only a small amount of food was collected for the drive, and I was left disappointed and angry. This experience marks an important moment in my life. I was beginning to wake up to the ideas and experiences of privilege and class.

Waking Up and Coming Out: Story as Survival

The public discourse about gays and lesbians in the early and mid-1980's increased and was most frequently and directly linked to the health crisis of AIDS. All negative. Whispers. Secrets. In 1984 the silence in the broader culture regarding gays and lesbians was deafening, and it troubled me.

> *It is 1984 and I am 18 years old. I have arrived at a Catholic women's college for my freshman year of college. I am studying music on a voice scholarship, singing a lot, and enjoying our renowned choral director. But oddly, by the start of second semester, and without fanfare or a word, he was gone. A new choir director has taken his place, but no one offered an explanation. Quickly rumored, and much later confirmed, his departure was due to illness. AIDS.*

Here was the pattern again — secrets and silence — exemplified in the disappearance of this choral director from the college. New place but the same rules. By the time I arrived at college, I arrived with my own secret, fear, and a word to name my earlier feelings of difference. Lesbian. I was terrified someone would find out. I did not have the courage to enter into the conversation with anyone about understanding my lesbian identity. The primary context I had to understand myself was limited. Privilege. Catholicism. Secrets. I don't remember how, but somehow I found my way to the counseling center on campus. I spent two years grappling in the privacy of my own head about being a lesbian. My desperate internal mantra was, "This cannot be who I am." It would take me until my junior year before I utter the words to my therapist, when I finally find the courage to tell her about my new relationship with a woman. During my junior year in college, I met my first partner and began to take steps toward wholeness. I found a safe place in therapy for my stories. I was finding my way. For my entire college career, I kept my secrets from my family and most everyone else, but her office became a haven and place for me to learn about the necessity and power of shining a light on all that had been hidden. I was finding my voice, and a place of safety and belonging as it related to my differences.

In my senior social work field placement, while I worried about where I belonged, where I would or would not be welcomed if people knew who I was, I learned about the power of group work in social work practice. My internship supervisor's skills and comfort with group work was evident, his belief in the value of group process contagious, and his effective modeling of group work encouraging. He used the group as a vehicle to hold a space in which everyone could belong. Girls groups. Boys groups. He created friendship/social skills groups for students who had trouble making friends. He created groups for children who had an incarcerated parent. He created grief groups for kids who had suffered loss. He created groups for students who were relegated to the social margins, picked on, or struggling for one reason or another. Some children told stories of the secrets in their homes, of alcohol, of neglect, of loss, of poverty, and sometimes of violence. I witnessed the power of groups in action. Groups became a safe place where stories could be told and the burden of secrets set down. Groups became a place where we could foster connections and a sense of belonging for children and where healthy relationships thrived. It wasn't long before I found my way to such a place, both as a facilitator and as a client.

This same field placement provided another opportunity to wake up. My field placement was in an elementary school in the city, many students receiving free or reduced lunch and growing up in families living in poverty. It took no time at all for one child, without apology, to mirror back to me what I was projecting to her. "She's rich!" she proclaimed to her third grade classmates. Responding to the gold necklaces and rings I was wearing, this child announced my socioeconomic status, different from hers, and as she saw it. I was startled as I realized what my jewelry symbolized here and what messages I was sending. I felt dumb for being so oblivious to how these children might perceive me. I wondered about my place in the world, in social work. My previously limited context for understanding ideas of privilege and class began to crack open, to shift.

It is 1988. I am 22 years old and have graduated from college. I have my first job as a community social worker, a car, a partner, an apartment, and a community of friends to whom I am out. I am a part of the GLBT community. In all of these ways, I belong. At my first appointment, I tell all of this to my new lesbian therapist. Inquiring about my coming out process, she asks, "Are you planning to come out to your family?" I gasp, "No, and never! I can never, and will never, come out to my family. There's no way. Not now, not ever."

She listened politely and supportively as I stated the anticipated costs of coming out to my family. She encouraged me to join the lesbian support group she facilitated. With immense trepidation, I did. I listened to how others were navigating the coming-out process with their families. I expressed my fears about doing the same. I experienced the much-needed sense of belonging, emotional safety, and new friendships – the same experiences I had just witnessed for the children in my internship. Within this group, and with my therapist, I found spaces and built a community in which I could set down the secret and be open and honest about my lesbian identity. I experienced the positive power of telling my story and hopeful experience of being the recipient of compassionate witness. From this position of being a client in therapy and in the group, I began to fully understand the centrality and power of story for myself. Later, I would understand the power of story from the position of a practitioner.

Therapy — Marking One Year

For the 52nd time I climb the 48 steps
to hoped-for epiphanies and her office
in the noisy city, always arriving early
so as to not miss a minute of her listening.

What is the sound of understanding and
how many tears have fallen here?
What happens to those with no one,
no place to hold their stories?

Out these 3rd story windows, blue gray
clouds hang on every word, heavy with rain
and anticipation, hope. The sky holds all of this
and more, while both bare witness, and listen in.

It is 1989 and I'm 23 years old. Just one year after proclaiming I could never come out to my family, I gather my courage and let the proverbial cat out of the bag. "Dear family member…" I write, composing coming-out letters to my parents and each of my sibling and in-laws.

The responses of my family members ranged from silence and a refusal to speak to me ever again (four siblings), to rage and telling me I was not welcome at their home or to be near their children (two siblings), to more silence and refusing to speak to me and hanging up on me mid-way through a phone conversation (my dad), to expressing anger and regret, "Had I known sooner, I would have taken you to a psychologist" (my mom). Grasping at straws, hoping for compassion, I said, "Mom, if someone finds out, I might lose my job or my apartment." And with no hesitation she said, "You will have to accept those consequences as they come." This very short phone call launched a stalemate, resulting in no further discussion between us for a year. But after several invitations along the way, my parents finally agreed to come to one therapy appointment with me. When the therapist ask my mother if I could come home for Christmas (without my partner) my mother stated quickly and plainly, "If she comes home for Christmas, none of my other kids will come. So no. She cannot come home." That fast, what I feared most, happened. Rejection. No discussion. I lost my place. A few months later, a letter arrived from my parish priest. "Your sister and brother in-law have requested that you be removed as the Godmother of your niece." My place was eliminated, a sacrament erased.

Used to Be

I used to be among them, afraid and silent walking
daily with weighty secrets, heavy in my pockets.

I used to wonder how long they'd hold,
those pockets, the fabric of silence and lies.

One day they broke free
spilling hard truths
but now I'm free.

I was left with the grief of immense loss and a choice. I could jump from the nearest bridge for my grief or be a rage-filled lesbian for the rest of my life for this injustice. The struggle was to find my way to a third choice. The telling of my story became synonymous with this choice, survival. I replayed the experience of being turned away over and over again in my mind. I told and retold the story - to my therapist, my partner, my friends – and each provided essential witness to my grief. Telling my story resulted in self-understanding, self-acceptance, connection, support, and a sense of belonging.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out: Making a Difference Through Story

It is 1991, and after three years working at the community agency, I have landed a school social work job in the public schools. It is the first day of my new job and I am reporting to work at a junior high school in the city, I am greeted by a 7th grade African American girl who is clearly expecting the new staff member. "Hey, bulldagger!" she shouts. I freeze and my heart races. "You ain't the new social worker, are you?" Bulldagger. I have never heard this word, but I know immediately what she means.

The first day on the job in the school system, I was immediately terrified. What were the rules here? At my previous and first job at the community agency, significant weight loss due to the stress of coming out to my family during that time made flying under the radar challenging. My supervisor and colleagues could tell something was wrong and cautiously and graciously inquired. I felt safe enough with them to be honest. I came out and they were very supportive. But here in the schools, could I lose my job if they found out I was a lesbian? Gratefully, my external calm (heart racing on the inside) and authentic response turned the tide quickly with this student. "Yeah, I know. I look like a boy, right? A lot of people mistake me for a boy. That's alright. My name is Mary. What's yours?" The student quickly softened and returned to the kinder vibe of a 7th grade teenager. She seemed ready for fight but then, surprised by my response, likely expecting some sort of authoritative blow

back as a result of her name-calling. Instead, she simply pointed me in the direction of my new office in the special education program.

On my second day as a school social worker, I found myself in another part of the school where I crossed paths with an 8th grade boy. "What are you doing here?" he exclaimed. Again, I freeze and my heart races. For the preceding few months, I had been volunteering at a community center in the city facilitating a support group for GLBT youth. He was a member of the support group, and the last place we expected to see each other was school. "I work here now, and I'm as surprised as you are!" His next words said it all. "Please don't tell anyone!" Of course, I reassured him I would keep his business confidential, but the truth is, we were both afraid of being found out. Within six months, I came out to a few colleagues and learned there was a newly instituted non-discrimination policy in the school district that included sexual orientation as a protected class. This offered some relief, and set my professional life in a new direction.

My negative coming-out experience in my family occurred simultaneously to my early and developing professional life. While I was working diligently to make sense of my experience of privilege, my identity as a lesbian woman, and the rejection and exclusion from my family, I was building an identity as a young social work professional. I was grappling with how my personal and professional experiences and identities intersected. Gratefully, after my family's rejection, I turned my grief and anger toward activism and consequently, my story of coming out became central to my professional, as well as my personal path. My lesbian identity and painful coming out experience fueled my activism and sharpened the focus of my social work practice. In the telling and re-telling of my story, professional opportunities emerged. I wanted to support those GLBT youth who were facing the same fears I had about coming out. I had been volunteering at a community agency co-facilitating a support group for GLBT youth and I was glad to be able to hold space for youth in the

same way space had been held for me. I was happy to be a professional creating a place for youth to tell their stories.

With a developing sense of self-confidence, it was becoming clear to me that I wanted to do more than volunteer on behalf of GLBT youth. I wanted to create a school-based program that would attend to the needs of GLBT youth and adults. Friends said, "Just keep volunteering, you'll never be able to get paid to work with GLBT youth in the schools. You'll never be able to be out as a school social worker." Here is where my privilege runs deep. It seemed to me that I shouldn't have to give up my newly increased salary in the school system because I wanted to work with gay kids. Gay and lesbian youth were here. And so were gay and lesbian staff members. All of us unduly afraid. Having to give up my better public school salary because I wanted to work with gay kids seemed unfair, so I began to create what I would consider my dream job. I began investigating how I could design a school-based program in my school district to serve the needs of GLBT youth and adults.

I researched if any school districts across the country were serving the needs of GLBT youth. The answer was "yes," but the list was short: San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Each program had emotional support and dropout prevention missions at their core. To create a program proposal for our own district, I drew from their basic structure and program design. With the help of several friends and colleagues, we created a model that held safe staff training, safe school climates, and support groups as primary components of the program. My supervisor was supportive of me and of my idea and guided me to key stakeholders in the district to whom I could pitch my ideas.

By the spring of 1994, telling my personal story was central to my professional life. I found myself telling my story to the district superintendent, directors of nursing and guidance and counseling and social work as a way to educate key power brokers about GLBT issues. It was the

telling of my story that opened hearts and doors and was integral to my success in creating a new school-based program serving the needs of GLBT youth and adults in our school district. Telling my story ultimately made space for the stories of GLBT youth and provided witness, a sense of belonging, connection, and support for their self-understanding and self-acceptance. With the intention to make the world a better place for GLBT youth and their families, I successfully initiated and developed a school-based program serving GLBT youth in a large urban school district. For the next five years, when asked what I did for work, I would tease, "I am a professional lesbian, getting paid to tell my story, and create safe space and support for GLBT youth and adults."

Standing up in Front: The Place of Story in the Classroom

As a result of my work in the public schools, I was invited to a college campus to share my personal and professional stories to undergraduate students in social work. As a guest speaker, I was invited to share my experiences of activism, program development and my role as a social worker engaged in a social change effort. I was also asked to share my personal stories of growing up, coming out, and how I made sense of my dichotomous experiences of marginalization and privilege and how they were juxtaposed in my life. I had something to offer by way of walking in two worlds, and for me, these personal and professional stories are inextricably linked.

As a guest speaker, I had confidence and great clarity about the power and value of sharing my personal and professional stories in this context, and I enjoyed the chance to be in this conversation with undergraduate social work students. I shared with students how my professional life was shaped both by my growing up in privilege and by being rejected by my family. I shared with them how as a result of watching my parents build their own business during my childhood, I created a professional life as an adult that mirrored the confidence of possibilities and steeped in their entrepreneurial spirit. For most of my 24 years in a public school system, I stood left of center and a

bit outside of the traditional boundaries of what is typically seen as school social work. I designed and implemented new programs, thus creating unique roles and employment positions for myself. I shared with the students how, operating from this place, my privilege demanded a place in the schools. I explained too, how juxtaposed with growing up in a family of privilege, my painful experience with family rejection and exclusion fed my commitment to create safe spaces for GLBT youth in schools.

> *It is 2003 and I see on my caller ID that the Dean of Social Work, from the same college where I have been a guest speaker, is calling. "Hi Mary. I am calling to ask you if you would like to come teach in our department as an adjunct faculty?"*

I held both an undergraduate and master's degree in social work and 15 years of social work practice, but I was baffled at this invitation. I didn't see myself as a scholar, an academic, or a teacher. I am certain the phrase, "social work educator" was not a part of my awareness, lexicon, or identity. I was a social worker. I was a field supervisor. I was a guest speaker. I understood how and why I would tell my personal and professional stories as a guest, but didn't teaching require something else, something more than stories? Didn't it require more education and more training as a teacher? Although I was nervous and uncertain, I said, "Yes!"

Much like my professional role in the schools was non-traditional and held a lot of autonomy, teaching as an adjunct was quite the same. As an adjunct faculty member, I found myself functioning in my classroom, and in relationship to the academic environment, with autonomy and free, although somewhat disconnected, agency. As a beginning adjunct faculty member, I received no instruction or preparation for teaching. I was welcomed, provided an existing syllabus from which to work and broadly supported. The door to the department was always open for my questions, and social work faculty members were accessible when needed. But I was not overtly taught to teach in the same deliberate way I was taught to be a social worker.

For months prior to teaching my first course, I poured over the two textbooks trying to soak up the facts, trying to become a content expert. I held an underlying belief that good teachers were content experts who could disseminate information through lecture, review the course readings directly for students, use PowerPoint slides, and present the objective truths related to the subject matter. I did not have language then for what I understand now as paradigms of teaching and learning. I believed that a more positivist pedagogical stance made one an effective teacher. While I always understood the place, value and power of story, storytelling and witness in my personal development, social work practice, and guest speaking opportunities; once I became an adjunct faculty member teaching classes of my own, I devalued their place in the classroom.

The first course I taught was an undergraduate macro practice course, General Methods for Social Action. Once I found myself at the front of the class, I did what was intuitive. I relied on stories to teach important concepts. Although it seemed my approach was working, I didn't know why, and I lacked confidence in the value of my approach to use stories as a teaching tool. I continued telling stories, but without language to name it, I kept this teaching strategy to myself. I minimized what I would later recognize as my constructivist leanings, and devalued my intuition and understanding of story and conversation as legitimate and central to my teaching methods. It was not until my recent pursuit of a doctorate in social work that I gave any consideration to my identity as a teacher, or social work educator, or to why I teach the way I teach. I had no idea how to articulate any of what I simply knew intuitively. I didn't know there were words for such things.

Social Work Doctoral Student: Coming Out as a Constructivist Educator

"No, and never!" This has been my emphatic and consistent response when asked if, or when, I will pursue my Ph.D. in social work. Pursuing a Ph.D. was absolutely not my plan. Since graduating with my BSW in 1988, and completing my MSW in 1997, I was engaged and enjoying my career as a

social worker in the public schools and grateful to be done with my graduate education. By 2003, I felt content and lucky to add teaching as an adjunct social work faculty into my professional life. But plans change. In the spring of 2014, I learned about a newly developing DSW program, a degree about which I knew nothing. The university representative described the focus of the curriculum as "education as practice," with a focus on teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership in social work education. Something clicked. I was surprised by the clarity that rose within me; I immediately knew I would apply. I often wondered who I could be as a teacher if teaching in higher education was my full-time career. This was my chance to pursue an education that would support the growth and development of my teaching practice and my identity as a social work educator.

My doctoral journey forced the realization that although I have been teaching for more than 10 years, I didn't even know what I didn't know. In a course on pedagogy in social work education, my primary assignment was to articulate my teaching philosophy and my epistemology, my worldview as a teacher. I was stumped. In a course on theoretical perspectives in social work, my primary assignment was to identify my theoretical orientation to teaching and to create a practice model for teaching in social work education. Again, I couldn't answer. In a mixed-methods research course, I discovered my affinity for narrative inquiry, and subsequently, navigating a debate about whether such a postmodern research method held any validity in social work. Through each of these courses in my doctoral education, I discovered language for my teaching philosophy and realized the central place, function and power story holds in my research interests and teaching practices.

My doctoral journey provided an opportunity to further develop my identity as a social work educator and as a social work researcher. In the three specific courses noted above, I was provided guidance, structured assignments, and key tools from my professors. I was introduced to ideas and language: epistemology, ontology, paradigms of teaching and learning, theory deconstruction, and

theoretical perspectives. I was directed to author resources including hooks, Rigoni, Schon, Brookfield, and Forte and encouraged to launch my own investigation into the literature. Most importantly, I was directed to my memories and a reflexive process. Where have I come from? What were influential personal experiences on my path thus far? Who were key figures in my educational and professional experiences? How have any of these shaped my teaching practices? What research methods might I employ to investigate these ideas? And why does any of this matter in the roles and responsibilities I have as a social work educator?

Now, as a doctoral student, I find myself in the margins again; or at least, I am left grappling with two perspectives of a polarized debate I didn't realize existed. In the face of a strong push for more science-based, evidence-based practice and positivist research methods in social work, I unwittingly find myself navigating a debate about the value of postmodern research methods like narrative inquiry, autoethnography, scholarly personal narrative, and self-study.

Recently, I received my first hard copy of the *Journal of Social Work Education* and opened it, serendipitously, to the article entitled, "Postmodernism: A Dead End in Social Work Epistemology" (Caputo, Epstein, Stoesz & Thyer, 2016). The title states these authors' thesis succinctly. They would likely take issue with my belief in story as legitimate pedagogy and my interest in narrative inquiry as a legitimate research method. Instead, they would contend I am contributing to the demise and "demotion of the profession's adherence to logic of science as the optimal method for determining the efficacy of practice" (Caputo et al p. 643). Gratefully, and coincidently, in the same week that I read this article, I also read the foreward to Brene Brown's recent book, "Rising Strong" (2015), where she makes the opposite argument about the value of story in social work practice and research. Brown states, "And today I proudly call myself a researcher-

storyteller because I believe the most useful knowledge about human behavior is based on people's lived experiences" (p. xiii). I am left to think about my own place in the debate.

Does my interest in, and use of, narrative methods in teaching and research make a positive contribution and have any value in social work or social work education? Through my DSW journey, I found explanations and language that helped me articulate my teaching philosophy and pedagogy that has been, until now, only intuitive. As I looked back on my life experiences, the origins of my ontological view and social constructivist epistemological stance became clear. Writing this narrative made my constructivist philosophy of teaching and learning, and my pedagogical choices more conscious and explicit. The process bolstered my understanding about how and why I teach as I do. Stories have always been and will remain central to my teaching philosophy and pedagogy. As a doctoral student, and as a social work educator, it has been extremely helpful to find language for my intuitive use of story as pedagogy. It's time to stop minimizing my capacity as a teacher and the place of story in the classroom. It's time to own my identity as a constructivist social work educator.

Conclusion

"If you ask me what I came into this life to do, I will tell you: I came to live out loud." ~ Emile Zola

Through the writing of this personal narrative, I remembered significant life experiences that shaped, and continue to shape who I am. It allowed me to bear witness to my life and make meaning, again, of the stories themselves. Most importantly, I was also able to discern how the telling of these stories matters -- to me, my work as a social work educator, my students, and others who might be giving consideration to similar questions about teaching, constructivism, or the use of narrative inquiry in social work education. I agree with Elbaz-Luwisch (2001) when she says, "Telling our stories is indeed a matter of survival: only by telling and listening, storying, and restorying can we begin the process of constructing a common world" (p. 145). In the classroom, I use stories to

construct such a world – one that can hold space for the many and diverse stories of students and me, to support us to discover all of the things we have in common, to embrace all of the ways in which we are different, and to build a bridge between theoretical concepts and real-world social work practice.

As I look back, the place, power, and function of story became evident. Story has been a way for me to make sense of my class and race privilege, and my marginalization and lesbian identity; to break silences, survive rejection and to heal; and to create place and belonging for myself and for others. It is also evident to me how and why story became essential to my pedagogy. It is where I begin. For so many reasons, I tell my story. My personal story opens the door for students to share their stories and to foster honest conversation and authentic relationships in the classroom. Telling my story breaks taboos, sets a tone and creates an environment for learning that is profound and personal. I share my story because, as Elbaz-Luwisch (2001) suggests, "storytelling can be a way of admitting the other into one's world and thus of neutralizing the otherness and strangeness" (p. 134). For GLBT students in the classroom, they benefit from seeing an out lesbian faculty member. For other students, it sparks an open conversation about difference. Through openness and conversation, we all gain from the collected stories and collective and shared wisdom in the classroom.

To me, the classroom is like a group and teaching is like group work, where I attend to the beginning, middle and end stages of development, and where I foster connections and a sense of belonging. Telling my story in the classroom sets the stage for a level of authenticity, genuineness, and safety that provides an expression of hope for the journey in which we are all about to embark. By making space for stories of the authentic lived experiences of both students and teacher, key social work concepts come to life. Through conversation, we make connections between the textbook readings and our real-life and practice experiences. My coming-out story offers one way to enter into a conversation about working with GLBT clients, identity, the coming-out process, and grief and loss.

My professional story opens the conversation about systems change work, activism, macro practice, justice, and group work. My stories make space for students to begin to understand their own social location, their understanding of difference, bias, and their experiences of privilege and marginalization. My personal stories open a conversation about what it means for social workers to do their emotional work, and foster critical self-awareness, and self-reflection in practice. We talk about what it means to wake up to the disparities we hope to change in our world. Telling my story offers a chance to talk about the place of self-disclosure in social work. Hearing stories allow students to think about how they will, one day, be the one to listen, hear, and bear witness to the stories of their clients – and know how and why this matters.

What Matters?

And does it matter, really,

This?

just one story?

or that it occurred at all?

Or is it that I've unfolded it

in just this one way

to reveal

what matters

most?

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