Quarter-Life Crisis:
Exploring Self-Identity as an Emerging Teacher

How can I explore my teaching identity and put it into practice in the classroom?

Lauren Sheehan
1st/2nd Grade Multiage Intern
Park Forest Elementary School

State College Area School District / Penn State University
Professional Development School

Teacher Inquiry – April 2012

Lesheehan5@gmail.com
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... 3
Context............................................................................................................................ 3
Wonderings .................................................................................................................... 5
Data Collection and Analysis ..................................................................................... 5
Explanations of Findings ............................................................................................ 10
   Claim 1 and Evidence .............................................................................................. 10
   Sub-claim and Evidence .......................................................................................... 11
   Sub-claim and Evidence .......................................................................................... 12
   Claim 2 and Evidence .............................................................................................. 13
Reflection and Implications for Future Practice ....................................................... 14

Appendices

A. Inquiry Brief .......................................................................................................... 16
B. Annotated Bibliography ........................................................................................ 21
C. Teacher’s Worldview Flow Chart ........................................................................ 24
D. PDS Application Question .................................................................................... 25
E. Timeline ................................................................................................................. 26
F. Student Survey and Some Results ...................................................................... 30
G. Mid-term Assessment ............................................................................................ 31
H. Reflection and Inquiry Journal .......................................................................... 31
I. References ............................................................................................................. 34
Abstract

Throughout my PDS experience, I often thought about my personal and professional identity. I also frequently reflected on my actual teaching practice, as well as frustrations, road bumps, and successes I encountered along the way. I felt a tension between what I believed about teaching and what my actual teaching practice looked like. This led me to wonder: how could I explore my teaching identity and put it into practice in the classroom? Through my research, reflection, and data analysis, I found a disconnect between some of my beliefs and practices, yet I also found areas of agreement. I was also able to more deeply establish my teaching platform, as well as explore how it came to be and how it will continue to change.

Context

I am teaching in a first and second grade multiage classroom of 20 students this year, including 10 first graders and 10 second graders, 10 of which are boys, and 10 girls. The make up of this class is quite diverse across all areas, including cultural backgrounds, social relationships, and academic levels. Out of my 20 students, seven come from multi-cultural backgrounds, two with non-English speaking parents, and one was born in another country. In addition to students of different cultural backgrounds, my class also has some students with very bold personalities, as well as some with more timid personalities. There are three students, in particular, who are social leaders in the classroom, having a strong influence on the other students. There are also three students who have the potential to be social leaders, but are still maturing and developing in that way. Conversely, there are also five students in the class who present especially challenging behavior at times.
Along with these strong personalities, I also have four students who are especially quiet, though they demonstrate behaviors that indicate they are engaged during instruction. Similarly, I have two students who have trouble making friends, one in particular who needs strong emotional support. Additionally, there are four students who have many friends and are easy to get along with, yet they have trouble getting their work done. Furthermore, the levels of academic achievement vary greatly in my classroom. Six of my students receive learning enrichment. I also have six students who currently qualify for Title I services/Book Club, and one student who has an IEP and receives learning support. Additionally, I have four students who receive speech services.

Finally, my class has some very distinct behavior patterns that surface daily. First and most regularly, the students have a very difficult time making transitions between activities and subjects. In general, they are easily distracted and, therefore, have a hard time following directions the first time they are given. Another pattern seen in my class is the struggle to appear as a leader rather than a follower, specifically when lining up to leave the classroom, as well as being the “teacher’s helper.” Lastly, it is common for my students to become very frustrated when they do not understand content or worksheets, and their behavior tends to become poor very quickly once this frustration sets in. Although my class has students who differ greatly from one another in the areas of cultural backgrounds, social relationships, academic skills, and behaviors, they have demonstrated the ability to have great independence, and they have also contributed to a community that continues to strengthen daily.
Wonderings

Main Wondering:

How can I explore my teaching identity and put it into practice in the classroom?

Sub-questions:

- What is my espoused platform? What do I say my beliefs are? What do I think those beliefs should look like in practice?
- In what ways will my identity evolve over the course of the inquiry?
- How do I match my personal identity with my class/students’ needs and interests? How do I determine the needs and interests of my class? What are they?
- How does my platform align with what I’m actually doing in the classroom?
- How would my primary students describe my practice?
- How would my mentor describe my practice?
- How does the context I’m in impact my ability to put those beliefs into practice?

Data Collection and Analysis

Weekly reflection journals

One of the requirements of this yearlong internship is to submit a weekly reflection journal to our supervisor, about two pages in length. The purpose of these journals is to provide a means by which we are able to reflect and inquire about what we are observing and experiencing in our classrooms, as well as provide an avenue by which we are able to think through our own teaching and professional development. The weekly journals also provide an open forum through which we receive feedback on or advice from our supervisors about different areas we are discussing. I decided to analyze these reflection journals from the year, asking myself two
questions: What areas of teaching and learning did I most often reflect upon? How did those areas change as the year continued?

To do this, I printed out and read each of my reflection journals, underlining statements that seemed to characterize a belief I held or a main idea I was discussing. At the end of each journal, I wrote the main ideas on a small sticky note and placed it at the top of the journal entry. After reading through each entry, I created a timeline of those main ideas I reflected upon and I color-coded similar ideas or topics so I could take note of connections and developments across the journals.

Inquiry journal

In addition to my weekly reflection journals, I thought it would be valuable to keep a regular journal of thoughts, reflections, and conversations I had that I felt related to my inquiry in some way. During the first couple weeks of my inquiry, I learned quite a bit about myself as well as other teachers, and recorded many reactions in my journal. Similar to my assigned weekly journal, I re-read these entries and also took note of ideas I seemed to dwell on or areas that further depicted my teaching beliefs.

Pre-student teaching papers and reflections

Similar to these reflection journals, I also printed out and read several papers and reflections I wrote in previous education courses, once again underlining statements that seemed to characterize a belief I held or a main idea I was discussing. I wrote these main ideas on a small sticky note at the top of the papers, as well, and added that information to the timeline in order to see when certain beliefs developed or how my beliefs have changed.
Student survey

In addition to examining my own reflections and writing, I was also curious to know how my students viewed me as a teacher. I created a survey of 10 questions, eight of which they responded to by circling a smiley face, straight face, or sad face, and two of which they responded to with writing. I created the first eight questions with some of my teaching beliefs in mind, curious to see if the aspects of teaching and learning I find to be of great value were apparent to the students. The open-ended questions were to allow the students to provide me with both positive and constructive feedback on my teaching.

To analyze these surveys, I first recorded how many students circled each response so I could see if there was a general consensus across the classroom or if the answers widely varied. I also put all of the open-ended answers together so I could note similarities and differences. After I combined all of the survey information together, I took note of what surprised me as well as what stood out to me. These surveys gave me more insight into the teaching beliefs I hold that are apparent in the classroom, as well as those that are not. I did have to be mindful, however, of the reliability of these surveys and the honesty of the students’ responses in order that I did not draw conclusions solely based on their responses.

Lesson feedback

Not only was I curious about my students’ opinions, I was also interested in my mentor teacher and supervisor’s opinions. During several of the lessons I taught, my mentor and/or supervisor took anecdotal records of what I said and how the students responded during my lessons, comments or suggestions about what I could do differently, as well as questions for me to consider for future teaching and lesson preparation. In order to analyze the feedback, I read
through each one and underlined areas that stood out to me, specifically regarding areas that verify or undermine my perceived beliefs.

*Three-way conference feedback*

Similar to lesson feedback, my mentor, supervisor, and I meet up twice a semester to discuss specific areas of my teaching in regards to the areas in which I excel as well as the areas in which I need more improvement. In order to support their responses, they often give examples of what I have or have not done to meet certain requirements. In order to analyze this feedback, I re-read all of my conference evaluations to take note of areas that either affirmed or showed disconnect between my beliefs and practice.

*Mentor Questionnaire*

In the beginning of my inquiry, I thought it would be enlightening to ask my mentor teacher about what she perceives my beliefs about teaching and learning to be, anticipating that it would affirm areas in which there’s an agreement between my platform and actual teaching, illuminate areas where there’s a disconnect, as well as reveal areas that I simply do not reflect upon. This, however, was difficult to obtain because my responsibilities in the classroom had only begun to increase. Therefore, rather than using this data to help drive my inquiry, I changed it. As a result of my inquiry, I was able to make statements about my teaching beliefs, and I sent those statements to her in order that she could either provide evidence to support those areas or express an area that is not visible in the classroom.
**Intended but not collected or used**

Due to limited time and unanticipated findings, there was some data I intended to collect but was not able to. For example, when creating the student survey, I anticipated performing a few child interviews to follow up on the results and find out more information. After analyzing the surveys, however, I did not feel the need to follow up with students, so I did not perform any child interviews.

Another means of data collection I anticipated was video analysis. I thought that I would be able to identify more beliefs I held or areas of disconnect in the classroom by analyzing videos of my teaching, however this was not the case. My mentor and supervisor recorded me teaching across different subject areas, but upon watching the videos, I was not able to analyze my practice in terms of my teaching identity.

Similarly, I intended on using systematic observation for more data collection. I thought I would be able to identify my teaching beliefs within the first few weeks of my inquiry, and I planned to have key points of my platform written down, and during a few lessons across different subject areas, my mentor and/or supervisor could check different areas where my platform is evident in my teaching as well as areas where there’s a disconnect. This information would be helpful in finding areas where my platform is evident, as well as areas where there is a contradiction. However, because the majority of my inquiry was exploring where my beliefs came from and what they are, I was not able to collect this data.

Finally, before starting this inquiry, teacher-parent relationships were an aspect of teaching I greatly valued yet did not feel I was exhibiting. I attribute a lot of that to my position as an intern, but because the second part of my main wondering was discovering how I can put my teaching beliefs into practice, I was still interested in surveying parents to find how I can
more effectively build relationships with my students’ parents in the future. I sent out the survey and received responses, however I did not analyze that data to include in my inquiry because the majority of my inquiry ended up focusing on identifying my teaching beliefs and where they came from rather than how I can put them into practice.

**Explanation of Findings**

*Claim 1: Many of my ideas about teaching and learning stem from my ten years of Montessori education.*

In *Teaching in a Distant Classroom: Crossing Borders for Global Transformation*, Romanowski and McCarthy (2009) explain, “Beneath every classroom practice is a teacher’s worldview that is composed of what he or she believes to be true, to be valuable, what is important, what is right and wrong, and what is real” (p. 33). They also provide a flow chart that outlines how a teacher’s worldview is developed and how that worldview directly affects “methods, curriculum, and teacher-student interactions” (p. 44) [See Appendix C]. As shown on the chart, education and school experiences are one aspect of a teacher’s life that help mold his or her worldview. Reflecting upon that, I thought about my ten years of Montessori education, from kindergarten through eighth grade, and was interested in discovering how that unique method of teaching has affected my beliefs about teaching and learning.

To further research this, I interviewed my kindergarten teacher, Cathy Galat. As I stated in my application to intern with the Professional Development School (PDS), “The biggest influence that has shaped my beliefs about the qualities of an outstanding elementary school teacher is the experience I was fortunate to have with my kindergarten teacher. When I think about the kind of teacher I wish to be, I think of her” [See Appendix D].
Sub-claim: I find great value in directing instruction toward students’ interests, yet this is an area where there is a possible disconnection between my beliefs and practice.

Because of the impact Cathy had on my education and my desire to be a teacher, I asked her about the Montessori approach to education. She explained,

Montessori is a very different philosophy from traditional education. You teach by observation… Sure, you have lessons to present in specific ways, but if you observe that a child has special interests, you try to teach to those interests…CP wanted to start a quilt store. He even had his Dad looking for a storefront in the community. We did lots of patterning, colored paper quilts, and made the quilt for the auction. (2012)

In the education classes I took before student teaching, I often reflected on the importance of directing instruction toward students’ needs and interests [See Appendix E]. Although I still find student interest to be of great value, I did not often reflect on that aspect of teaching thereafter, so I surveyed the students on how they view me in those regards [See Appendix F]. When I asked, “Does Ms. Sheehan know my interests?,” 17 of the 20 students circled the straight face (meaning only sometimes), one circled the smiley face, and two circled the sad face. I asked a similar question farther down in the survey to get more reliability, asking, “Does Ms. Sheehan teach me about things I like?” Again, 14 of the 20 students circled the straight face, only one circled the happy face, and five circled the sad face. Upon analyzing these surveys, I reflected, “…I want to teach them what they’re interested in, but there’s also a prescribed curriculum I must follow. How can I still incorporate student interest into the classroom with a prescribed curriculum?” [See Appendix H].

Conversely, in my March mid-term assessment, my mentor and supervisor commented that I “have a deep understanding of [my] students and their learning and development,” and I agree [See Appendix G]. I do feel as though I have a good idea about the interests my students
hold, but if the students do not feel as though I do, I see that as a possible area of disconnect between my teaching beliefs and practice.

Sub-claim: My views on classroom management revolve around student choice and intrinsic motivation, and this is an area that appears to be implemented in the classroom.

From the beginning of November, 2011, to the beginning of February, 2012, I consistently reflected on different areas of classroom management, expressing a discomfort with my management techniques, and a desire to find what fits me and my students the best. On November 5, 2011, I stated, “I don’t like that many students simply behave as we ask because of the extrinsic motivation” [See Appendix H]. In the middle of February, however, I reflected on a conversation I had with another primary teacher about her classroom management technique. She explained that she stresses trustworthiness and making good choices from the very first day of school, and she generally does not have any big behavior problems. Additionally, she said she does not have a physical reward system. After this conversation, I reflected in my inquiry journal, “That’s my ideal setting! Kids intrinsically motivated to make good decisions” [See Appendix H].

When interviewing Cathy Galat, I also asked her about the style of classroom management Montessori teachers follow. She explained,

Yes, we turned off the lights [to get the students’ attention], but we always talked so quietly that you all talked quietly back to us…If a child was having a difficult time following our rules, we would redirect, or we might have a child work at an assigned table (taking away their choice). If that didn’t work, we relied on communication going home to parents for consequences. Your work was your reward. You all liked choosing your own work and working where you wanted to work, especially if it was something that interested you. (2012)

Once again, this style of management most closely matches my desires of how to run a classroom.
Like before, I was curious to see if my students saw this reflected in my teaching. I had only started purposefully advocating making good choices at the end of January, and the students took the survey in the middle of March, so I was not sure of what the results would be. However, I was pleased to see that, when asking, “Does [Ms. Sheehan] help me make good choices?,” 15 students circled the smiley face, three circled the straight face, and only one circled the sad face [See Appendix F]. Although this was an idea I had only been actively implementing for a little over a month, I was pleased to see that the students saw that, too.

Claim 2: Negative behaviors and attitudes affect the way I view students, which in turn affects the way the students view me.

Since my first teaching preparation course in the Spring of 2010, I have taken a stance that “Teaching is all about relationships.” Over my PDS experience, I have separated that into four categories: teacher-teacher, teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-parent. When analyzing my reflection journals and papers, the majority of my reflections included something about teacher-student relationships [See Appendix H].

On November 12, 2011 of my PDS experience, my weekly reflection journal included my thoughts on a chapter we read for class that week about bridging gaps between the teacher and students and becoming the students’ allies (Strachota 2006). In the entry, I focused primarily on the relationships I had with the students in my classroom and how that seemed to be connected to the students’ behaviors. “…I realized that, for the most part, I have stronger relationships with the students who follow the classroom rules and expectations and/or listen to the teachers” [See Appendix H]. This journal also included several questions I reflected upon, including:
Am I closer to certain students *because* I am more attracted to those who listen and follow rules? Am I closer to certain students simply because of their personalities and the way they cling to me? Am I not as close to some students because they too easily frustrate me? Can they tell I get frustrated so aren’t as interested in forming a relationship with me? How is my attitude toward the students’ behavior affecting my relationship with certain students?

As I wrote this reflection, there were a few students I had in mind whose behavior seemed to negatively affect my relationship with them.

Although this was only a reflection based on an article we read for class, it shed light on my inquiry. As I was analyzing the student surveys I gave, there were five that stood out to me because the majority of the responses were the either the straight or sad face, whereas the rest of the surveys were mainly the happy face and straight face [See Appendix F]. When I realized who these students were, I was impacted. The five students who gave me the most mediocre survey responses are five students whose behaviors are very frustrating for me and who I had in mind when reflecting in November. Although I cannot rely on these surveys to be completely accurate, those students’ responses spoke volumes to me. It seems as though my relationship with students *could* be affected, in part, by the way I view/respond to their behavior, and perhaps the students can pick up on that, whether they would be able to verbalize it or not.

**Reflection and Implications for Future Practice**

Beginning this inquiry, I thought I would be able to identify my teaching beliefs within the first couple of weeks of research and analysis as well as areas in the classroom where those beliefs are not apparent, and then focus the majority of my inquiry on how I can effectively implement my beliefs into the classroom. However, exploring my teaching identity and how it has developed took the entire inquiry process, and I am sure there is more I still have to learn. For this reason, I was not able to explore how I can put my beliefs into practice in the classroom,
leaving a few of my sub-questions unanswered: How do I match my personal identity with my class/students’ needs and interests? How do I determine the needs and interests of my class? What are they? How does the context I’m in impact my ability to put those beliefs into practice?

While I have discovered quite a bit about my self as a teacher and my interactions within the classroom, there is still a lot to learn. As Danielewicz (2001) explains, “Identities themselves are always unfinished and in the making; identities develop through continuous processes” (p. 81). Although I can say I now know myself more deeply as a teacher and professional, I will continue to learn more throughout the rest of my teaching career, and will likely change or further develop some of my beliefs. Not only will my beliefs change and develop as I teach more, they will change and develop based on the context in which I am teaching. In other cultures, especially, it is important to be flexible with beliefs and practices because different cultures respond differently to instruction (Romanowski & McCarthy, 2009).

The inquiry process I engaged in over the last few months will greatly affect me for the rest of my teaching career. As I travel to Thailand next year to teach, it is important that I hold onto the rich knowledge and awareness of myself I have gained through this process, but it is also important that I remain flexible in order that I may respond to my students and most effectively meet their needs. As Nikolic and Cabaj discuss, it’s crucial that teachers always question themselves: What do I teach? How do I teach? Why do I teach what I teach, and why do I teach it the way I do? (2000, p. 14) As I begin my professional career in a few short weeks, these are questions I must continue to ask myself no matter where I am or how long I have been in the classroom.
Appendix A - Inquiry Brief

Context:

I am teaching in a first and second grade multiage classroom of 20 students this year, including 10 first graders and 10 second graders, 10 of which are boys, and 10 girls. The make up of this class is quite diverse across all areas, including cultural backgrounds, social relationships, and academic levels. Out of my 20 students, seven come from multi-cultural backgrounds, two with non-English speaking parents, and one was born in another country. In addition to students of different cultural backgrounds, my class also has some students with very bold personalities, as well as some with more timid personalities. There are three students, in particular, who are social leaders in the classroom, having a strong influence on the other students. There are also three students who have the potential to be social leaders, but are still maturing and developing in that way. Conversely, there are also five students in the class who present especially challenging behavior at times.

Along with these strong personalities, I also have four students who are especially quiet, though they demonstrate behaviors that indicate they are engaged during instruction. Similarly, I have two students who have trouble making friends, one in particular who needs strong emotional support. Additionally, there are four students who have many friends and are easy to get along with, yet they have trouble getting their work done. Furthermore, the levels of academic achievement vary greatly in my classroom. Four of my students receive learning enrichment. I also have seven students who currently qualify for Title I services/Book Club, and one student who has an IEP and receives learning support. Additionally, I have four students who receive speech services.

Finally, my class has some very distinct behavior patterns that surface daily. First and most regularly, the students have a very difficult time making transitions between activities and
subjects. In general, they are easily distracted and, therefore, have a hard time following
directions the first time they are given. Another pattern seen in my class is the struggle to appear
as a leader rather than a follower, specifically when lining up to leave the classroom, as well as
being the “teacher’s helper.” Lastly, it is common for my students to become very frustrated
when they do not understand content or worksheets, and their behavior tends to become poor
very quickly once this frustration sets in. Although my class has students who differ greatly from
one another in the areas of cultural backgrounds, social relationships, academic skills, and
behaviors, they have demonstrated the ability to have great independence, and they have also
contributed to a community that continues to strengthen daily.

Rationale:

Throughout my PDS experience thus far, I have often thought about my personal and
professional identity. I have also reflected quite a bit about my actual teaching practice, as well
as frustrations, road bumps, and successes I have encountered along the way. As I have begun
teaching more frequently this semester, as well as across more subject areas, I have ended some
lessons thinking I did not serve my students in the way I would have liked, yet I did not know
what I could have done differently. I have this notion of who I want to be as a teacher, yet when I
reflect on my actual teaching practice, I think there is a disconnect.

When I first chose my main wondering, I was weary about pursuing it because it seemed
so teacher-centered and selfish, but the more conversations I’ve had with different
SUPERVISORs, as well as the research I have begun, I have come to believe that this wondering
will greatly affect both my teaching career, and the students’ school year. Although I will be
focusing on my professional identity and what that looks like in the classroom, that will have a
direct impact on the students I have this year, as well as the students I will have throughout the
rest of my teaching career. My platform is not something that will remain the same once I further develop it; it will always be changing, and part of this change will be a result of the particular students I have in my classroom. Throughout the next few weeks, I hope to get a better grasp on my professional identity, and see how I can implement that in the classroom. I expect there will be some beliefs I hold that are already nurtured in the classroom, but I also think I will find some beliefs that are contradicted with my practice in the classroom.

**Main Wondering:**

How can I explore my teaching identity and put it into practice in the classroom?

**Sub-questions:**

- What is my espoused platform? What do I say my beliefs are? What do I think those beliefs should look like in practice?
- In what ways will my identity evolve over the course of the inquiry?
- How do I match my personal identity with my class/students’ needs and interests? How do I determine the needs and interests of my class? What are they?
- How does my platform align with what I’m actually doing in the classroom?
- How would my primary students describe my practice?
- How would my mentor describe my practice?
- How does the context I’m in impact my ability to put those beliefs into practice?

**Timeline:**

*Week of February 13*

- (Inquiry Brief and Annotated Bibliography due February 13)
- Continue finding and reading sources
- Deeply explore my espoused platform; what do I think my teaching beliefs are? What do I think those beliefs should look like in practice?
- Survey Florence: How does she see me as a teacher? From my teaching and interactions with the students as well as school personnel, what would she say were my teaching beliefs?

*Week of February 20*

- Continue finding and reading sources -- revise inquiry brief and annotated bibliography
- Print my weekly reflections from last semester and begin looking for connections, differences, and growth areas, and compare them to my current espoused platform
- Finish deciding on specific means of data collection and create data collectors
Week of February 27
- (Revised Inquiry Brief and Annotated Bibliography due February 29)
- Work on platform 3 assignment (due March 12), which directly correlates to my inquiry
- Have Florence or Laura video record some lessons I teach (variety across subject areas)

Week of March 5 (Spring Break)
- Florence will give students a survey about how they would describe my practice (simple questions based off what I think my practice should look like)
- Analyze/code videos
- Send out a survey to our students’ parents about their relationship to their child’s education as well as classroom teacher, what they would want that to look like, as well as how they would like that to happen

Week of March 12
- Have Florence or Laura examine more of my teaching, using my espoused platform, and make notes where my platform is evident in my teaching, or where there’s a disconnect
- Have Florence or Laura video record a few lessons I teach
- Analyze papers I have written in previous education courses, which expose areas of my current platform as well as areas in which I have grown and changed my platform already
- Survey students on their perceived needs, as well as their interests

Week of March 19
- Begin wrapping up data collection
- Continue analyzing data already collected
- Continue working through past journals, as well as the journal I’ve been keeping specifically for this inquiry

Week of March 26
- Finish collecting data
- Continue/begin wrapping up analyzing data
- Reexamine my espoused platform, seeing if/how it has changed over this process, as well as analyze if/how I think I am better implementing it in the classroom; if not, reflect on why (i.e. Is it the context? The students? My role as an intern? Is it unrealistic?)
- Begin working on inquiry paper draft

Week of April 2
- Finish analyzing data and finish paper
- (Inquiry Paper Draft due April 7)

Week of April 9
- Work on final paper
- Prepare presentation

Week of April 16
- Work on final paper
- Prepare presentation
**Week of April 23**
- Practice, practice, practice!
- (Inquiry Conference April 28)

(Final Inquiry due May 1, to Bern by May 20)

**Data Collection Ideas:**

**Systematic Observation**
- I’m not exactly sure what this would look like, but I would like either Florence and/or Laura to have key points of my platform written down, and during a few different lessons across different subject areas, check different areas where my platform is evident in my teaching, and also areas where there’s a disconnect. I will also Studiocode videos I have of myself teaching, noting areas where my platform is evident, as well as areas where I see a contradiction. These methods will be helpful for me to have tangible evidence of how my teaching identity is or is not put into practice.

**Survey/interview**
- I will ask Florence to fill out parts of the questionnaire I will be filling out for my espoused platform, but about what she thinks my response would be. Again, this will be helpful in finding areas where there’s a disconnect between my platform and what’s actually occurring in the classroom.
- I’d like to construct some type of survey that would have the students circle or write short answers about my teaching practice (this would have to be worded very carefully). This would be valuable information for me to have to see how the students perceive my practice, and I can compare that to how I perceive my practice as well as what I desire my practice to look like.
- I’d like to send a survey to the parents, inquiring about teacher-parent relationships. I find that relationship to be very valuable and necessary for a successful school year, but I’d like more ideas as to how that relationship can be made and strengthened. I can ask all the teachers I want, but I thought, who better to ask than the parents themselves?

**Videos and Studiocode/Anecdotal Records**
- I will have someone take videos/notes of my teaching in different subjects, and I will Studiocode a few different aspects of my teaching. I will compare my actual teaching to what I would like my teaching to look like, as well as my classroom manage strategies. I will also take note of the students’ actions and responses during my instruction and reflect on how my teaching affected that.

**Journal Entries**
- I will look back over my weekly reflection journals from last semester to get a better idea of my teaching identity as well as the disconnect I’m feeling.
- I will keep a regular journal of different thoughts I have throughout the week regarding my inquiry, including more questions, realizations, changes, etc. This will be useful for me to jot down anything I’m reflecting, and it will also be something I will be able to look back over throughout the inquiry process to see how my thoughts have developed further or changed.

**Appendix B- Annotated Bibliography**


This journal article focuses specifically on the development of teaching identities as students are preparing to become teachers in Singapore, and the importance of this development. Furthermore, it explains that a teaching identity is shaped by professional identity, the specific classroom context where the teacher is placed, as well as personal identity. In order to explain this, the journal introduces a research project conducted in order to map the development of about 100 students throughout their teacher preparation program. This connects with my inquiry because I am a pre-service teacher right now, trying to discover and develop my current state of professional identity.


This book examines the process of becoming a teacher, specifically following the story of six undergraduate students in a secondary education program. The author discusses what identity is, how a teaching identity is developed, and how it all relates to practice in the classroom. She also discusses the ever-changing nature of identities. This book will be especially helpful in my inquiry process because it helps give me a clearer understanding of how I can explore my teaching identity, as well as the process it will be.


In order to learn more about my educational background and explore different teaching methodologies, I interviewed my old kindergarten teacher. Whenever I am asked to describe the teacher who has had the greatest impact on my educational career, she is the first one I think about, and I aspire to have an impact on students like she has. Additionally, I spent the first ten years of my education in a Montessori school, and I was interested in learning more about the “Montessori Way” and exploring how that has shaped me both as a learner and a teacher. This interview was very helpful for my inquiry because it shed light on my educational upbringing and I was able to see how it shaped my teaching beliefs and practice.

Interviewing my kindergarten teacher led me to further examine the Montessori philosophy of teaching and learning in order that I may better understand my educational background, as well as consider the application of some techniques in my own practice. This article further explored the areas of teaching and learning Cathy discussed and gave more examples of the implementation. This article was helpful for my inquiry because it confirmed practices Cathy mentioned and affirmed that many of my beliefs do come from my Montessori background.


In this book, Nikolic and Cabaj discuss the value of self-assessment throughout one’s teaching career. They also offer many suggestions as well as a wide variety of tools teachers can use to assess themselves over multiple subject areas and facets of teaching. This book will be especially helpful in my inquiry process as I determine what data I will be collecting and how I will go about collecting it. It has opened my eyes to areas of my teaching I had not considered exploring, and it will help provide a wider range of data from which I can analyze my teaching practice.


Nolan and Hoover included a chapter entitled “Uncovering Espoused Platforms and Platforms in Use,” establishing the idea of having a belief system. They also included a set of questions to help people more deeply uncover their espoused platform, as well as others’. In the first few weeks of this inquiry, I will use this survey to identify areas of my teaching identity I have not yet considered, and this will be the basis from which the rest of my inquiry derives.


This website introduces an approach to teaching that will help build an effective classroom community, and set students up for success. It also offers a wide variety of resources for educators, including a blog, regular articles, suggested reading, and more. As I’ve explored the website, it’s introduced me to approaches of teaching I was unaware of, and it has opened my eyes to opportunities and suggestions I might not otherwise have found. I think further exploring this website will help give me a better idea of my teaching platform, as well as tangible ways I can implement that into my classroom, both now and in the future.


This website explores different ideas and strategies for teaching, specifically pertaining to classroom management. It offers multiple tools and techniques for getting students’ attention, reinforcing positive behaviors, and getting students more involved in their
education. It also encourages teachers to consider incorporating the five ways the brain learns into their teaching: seeing, hearing, saying, feeling, and doing. This pertains to my inquiry because it has opened my eyes to techniques and practices outside of my student teaching placement, and it has helped me further examine different solutions for classroom management. I think this website will help me discover which strategies are most effective for me.


This book introduces readers to the idea of worldview. It discusses how a teacher’s worldview is developed and shaped, and how that directly influences educational practice. This has been pivotal in my inquiry because it provides a model that has helped me more deeply explore the roots of my personal and professional identity, as well as how that is communicated in the classroom. Not only did it provide further insight into my professional identity, but it also raised more questions about how my platform will continue to change as my teaching setting changes.


For class last semester, we read a chapter of this book that opened my eyes to an area of teacher-student relationships I had not thought about before. Strachota discusses the idea of becoming students’ allies in hopes of positively affecting their behavior. This book applies to my inquiry because an area of teaching and learning I often reflect upon is teacher-student relationships, and reading this helped make me aware of an area of teaching where my beliefs and practice do not reflect one another.
Appendix C: Teacher’s Worldview Flow Chart

(Adapted from Romanowski & McCarthy, 2001)

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Design  Default

Teacher’s Voice

Design  Default

Teacher’s Dialogue (Philosophy of Education)

Design  Default

Faith and Beliefs

Life Experiences/Social Histories

Teacher’s Worldview

Education and Schooling Experiences

Culture and Ideologies

Institutions of Society

The many lessons and values students learn via pedagogy, curriculum, knowledge, interactions, management strategies, and other educational practices.
Appendix D: PDS Application Question

Tell about an event, experience, activity, or reading that has shaped your beliefs about the qualities of an outstanding elementary teacher.

The biggest influence that has shaped my beliefs about the qualities of an outstanding elementary school teacher is the experience I was fortunate to have with my kindergarten teacher. When I think about the kind of teacher I wish to be, I think of her. First, she was an outstanding teacher. Not only was she outstanding in the classroom, but also outside of the classroom. She lived in my neighborhood, and she was always so welcoming and supportive. When I was selling Girl Scout cookies, or selling wrapping paper for school, or trick-or-treating, I always made sure to stop at her house. I knew that she would support me in whatever I was doing, and she would do so gladly.

When I was in my first teaching preparation class last year, I remember my teacher telling our class that teaching is all about building relationships. Ever since she told us this, my view of teaching has been changed. When I think back to my kindergarten teacher, I see that she really knew what that looked like. To me, she is what an outstanding teacher is. One who not only teaches well and succeeds in the classroom, but also one who cares about each of her students and supports them in all that they do.
Appendix E: Timeline

January 26, 2010: (Paragraph Summary)
- Prepare students for life after school
- Teacher-student relationship as one of cooperation rather than authority
- Meet students’ individual needs and interests
- Work in the best interest of the students

March 1, 2010: (Field Experience Reflection)
- Set up the classroom environment based on the students and their needs and interests
- Be consistent with management and establish a norm in the room
- Teacher-student relationships

April 4, 2010: (CI295 Paper)
- Teacher-student relationships
- Student-student relationships
- Value students’ culture, identity, and uniqueness
- Encourage students to be the best they can be
- Teach according to students’ abilities, needs, and interests
- Help students develop skills and passions to build foundation for life
- Be aware of myself and my impact on students

April 20, 2010: (CI295 Paper)
- Teachers must be passionate about teaching in order to get students passionate about learning
- Teach to the whole-student
- Teachers’ attitudes affect the students’
- Help students see what they’re learning applies to the real world
- Necessity of teacher-student relationships
- Spur on a love for learning

April 20, 2010: (Paragraph Summary)
- Importance of self-reflection and expression
- Being in tune with students’ feelings and encouraging them to be, as well

January 28, 2011: (Definition Paper)
- Appeal to students’ different learning styles and interests
- Develop a cross-cultural curriculum
- Incorporate art and music often
- Work extends outside the classroom
- Help all achieve to the best of their abilities
- Teacher-student relationships
- Student-student relationships
- What happens in the classroom affects generations to come
August 30, 2011: (Platform 1)
- Meet students where they are and push them
- Teacher-student relationships
- Student-student relationships
- Help students see ownership in their education
- Help them see the connection between what they’re doing in the classroom and life outside the classroom and empower them to make a difference

September 3, 2011:
- Help students achieve to the best of their abilities
- Encourage student independence
- Fight learned helplessness
- Understand students and where they’re coming from

September 10, 2011:
- Teacher-student relationships
- What will it be like teaching solo?

September 17, 2011:
- Desire to know the real student personalities
- Teacher-parent relationships
- Get parents involved in education at home

September 24, 2011:
- Students’ home lives affecting their education and my teaching

October 1, 2011:
- Relationship with Florence (Teacher-teacher)
- Classroom management- morning determines rest of the day

October 8, 2011:
- Group projects (with other interns)
- Relationship with Florence (Teacher-teacher)

October 15, 2011:
- Continue to know students more deeply
- Finding my role as intern

October 22, 2011:
- Desire to make students feel valued
- Prepare lessons with students in mind
- The honor and responsibility of teaching; we have such an impact!

October 29, 2011:
- Get to know students and their families’ culture and incorporate it into the classroom
- Help expand students’ worldview beyond themselves and their families

November 4, 2011: (Platform 2)
- Teacher-student relationships
- Stretch students’ thinking beyond the classroom, open eyes to world around
- Incorporate students’ cultures and language
- Help students see ownership in their education
- Instill a love for learning
- Incorporate student interests

November 5, 2011:
- Management strategies and what fits me
- Intrinsic motivation

November 12, 2011:
- Students’ behavior affects my relationship with them

November 19, 2011:
- Use self-discovery to teach students
- Pick my own battles with management

December 3, 2011:
- Teacher face- teacher’s attitude affects student behavior
- Is student achievement connected to student behavior?

December 2011: (Dear Laura)
- Friendships
- Relationship with Florence
- Worried about meeting expectations
- Daunting Process of lesson planning

January 7, 2012:
- I have grown a lot but still have a lot of room for growth
- Gathering tools for my teaching belt

January 14, 2012:
- Discomfort with discipline, worried students won’t like me

January 21, 2012:
- Classroom management, following directions
- Incorporate my personality in teaching
- Finding my voice although in the role of an intern

January 28, 2012:
- Desire to be needed
- Teacher-teacher relationships

February 4, 2012:
- Classroom management affects effective lesson delivery
- See the learning process (lesson didn’t go as planned, try again, reinforce)

February 11, 2012:
- Student communication with one another
- Total participation
- Build foundation and impact students for year to come

February 18, 2012:
- Teaching solo
- Use students as helpers and teachers

February 25, 2012:
- Observed students’ growth!
- Seeking professional development
- Want to challenge the students yet walk alongside them and their needs
- Relationship with Florence

March 3, 2012:
- Effective teacher can teach any grade effectively?

March 12, 2012: (Platform 3)
- Relationships: teacher-student, student-student, teacher-teacher, and teacher-parent
- Self-discovery effective way for students to learn
- School means by which students learn independence and responsibility for their own actions
- Teach about cultures so they can have a greater understanding of the world around them
- Allow students to interact and discuss with one another during the learning process is very beneficial for students and teachers
Appendix F: Student Survey and Some Results

Does Ms. Sheehan know my interests?  
1  17  2

Does Ms. Sheehan encourage me to be independent?  
9  9  2

Does she make me feel important?  
13  6  1

Does Ms. Sheehan help me when I need her?  
8  12  0

Does she help me love school and learning?  
11  8  1

Does she help me make good choices?  
15  3  2

Does Ms. Sheehan teach me about things I like?  
1  14  5

Does she listen to what I have to say?  
13  5  2
Appendix G: Mid-term Assessment

Lauren has excelled in the areas included in Domain A. She plans instruction based upon strong content knowledge and has a deep understanding of her students and their learning and development. Lauren includes clear and measurable goals within the context of her lessons. She is able to adapt material to accommodate diverse learning needs.

Appendix H: Reflection and Inquiry Journals

November 5, 2011

someone, etc., and they then ask for a reward. I don’t like that many students simply behave as we ask because of the extrinsic motivation.

I want to build intrinsic motivation in my students, so they act appropriately simply because they respect the classroom rules and the community we have, and they have a deep understanding of why we ask them to behave a certain way. I do think there is value in sending

February 14, 2012

act simply because it’s the right choice, not because the teachers watching or mom and dad reward because they know it’s the right choice. I love that! That’s similar to what I’ve been trying to tell our kids, but put so much better. She said she really hasn’t had management issues since starting that a few years ago. I also asked if she uses any sort of reward system, but she doesn’t. That’s my ideal setting! Kids intrinsically motivated to make good decisions.
February 13, 2011

walk away. I really want them to take responsibility of themselves and only themselves and that’s definitely something I will instill from the start next year.

April 4, 2010

As a teacher, it is very important to have a set of beliefs or values or dispositions to which I will commit my teaching and myself. One principle I will apply to myself and to my teaching is to constantly committing myself to building and maintaining relationships with the students, in order to build trust in the classroom and a safe learning environment. I think this is an extremely important standard to have as a teacher, and I can easily list off my past teachers

September 10, 2011

It seems like I’ve been in the classroom for months now; it’s crazy it’s only been two weeks! I feel like I’ve known these students for a long time, and I’m very comfortable with them. When I came into class on Wednesday (after being gone since Friday), all the students were exclaiming, “Miss Sheehan is back,” “Miss Sheehan, you’re back,” “Miss Sheehan, you look so beautiful,” and they kept hugging me; my heart just about melted! It was the greatest feeling in the world to know that the students missed me and were happy to see me!
October 15, 2011

All that to say, I am slowly finding ways to help my students see me more relationally than personally, but it’s tricky doing so in someone else’s classroom, as well as finding the balance of still having the students respect me as a teacher. I know there’s a way to do it, I’m just slowly figuring out ways to do so. Seeing my students’ personalities at back-to-school night (in the class but outside school hours), and hearing parents talk about their children at home, I know there is more personality I can get out of these students, it’s just a matter of figuring out how!

November 12, 2011

The teacher walks away. As I thought about other students in our class who follow these same patterns, I realized that, for the most part, I have stronger relationships with the students who follow the classroom rules and expectations and/or listen to the teachers.

Processing that has since surfaced many questions. Am I closer to certain students because I am more attracted to those who listen and follow the rules? Am I closer to certain students simply because of their personalities and the way they cling to me? Am I not as close to some students because they too easily frustrate me? Can they tell I get frustrated so aren’t as interested in forming a relationship with me? How is my attitude toward the students’ behavior affecting my relationship with certain students?

Survey Results Reflection

I wasn’t necessarily surprised my students don’t think I know their interests, because that is one place where I thought I’d find a disconnect in my platform and actual practice, but I was surprised it was so drastic. I know that I am aware of my students and I do know many of their interests and try to engage in conversations about them, but I clearly don’t show it to them or make them feel like I know. It’s hard, because I want to teach them what they’re interested in, but there’s also a prescribed curriculum I must follow. How can I still incorporate student interest into the classroom with a prescribed curriculum? (i.e. Books?) A similar area I’ve
Appendix I: References


