

Deep Practices

Advancing Equity by Creating a Space and Language for the Inner Core of Teaching

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ABSTRACT: “Best practices” are well known in the field of education. Best-selling books such as *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that put Students on the Path to College*, by Doug Lemov, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, state teacher evaluation systems, and Department of Education national standards focus overwhelmingly on what the authors term the outer core of teaching, which includes the technical aspects of teaching that can be easily seen and defined. This article proposes a comprehensive framework for defining and observing “deep practices.” These originate from the inner core of teaching, which is comprehensively defined by the five ineffable qualities of calling, presence, authenticity, wholeheartedness, and imagination.

Two Kinds of Intelligence

*as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts
from books and from what the teacher says,
collecting information from the traditional sciences
as well as from the new sciences.*

With such intelligence you rise in the world.

*You get ranked ahead or behind others
in regard to your competence in retaining
information. You stroll with this intelligence
in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more
marks on your preserving tablets.*

*There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,
already completed and preserved inside you.*

*There is another kind of tablet, one
A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness
in the center of the chest. This other intelligence
does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid,
and it doesn't move from outside to inside
through conduits of plumbing-learning.*

*This second knowing is a fountainhead
from within you, moving out.*

-Rumi



We include Rumi's poem in its entirety because it speaks to the tension between the two worlds straddled by every teacher. One world, the first one Rumi describes, is most often the center of teacher education and performance assessments. This is the realm of "best practices" referring to a teacher's technical skills. Best practices by their nature lend themselves to rational and linear description and discussion (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lemov, 2010).

The second world Rumi describes is much more difficult to capture, evaluate, and see. And because of its qualitative and less objective nature, it rarely appears as part of the formal curriculum in teacher education. We call these elements of teaching "deep practices" because they emerge from the passion and calling of the teacher. We define "deep practices" as any action or choice that originates first from the heart of the teacher instead of a technical response. Examples of deep practice be as simple as asking a student how he is doing because the teacher senses something has changed in the student's persona or as complex as designing an inclusive lesson based on the teacher's self-reflection around the ways that her personal experience with racism provides insight into her student's experiences with power and privilege.

While both the inner and outer realms are necessary, we argue in this article for increased awareness of the deep practices of teaching so as to legitimize the second realm of teacher "intelligence" in the Rumi poem. We believe this shift will help elevate the social-emotional needs of teachers, put a human face on the profession, and ultimately serve to reduce teacher attrition and increase equity in K–12 public schools by giving language and legitimacy to this largely unexplored aspect of effective instruction.

In an attempt to frame the distinction between best and deep practices, we will begin by drawing on the arts and describing a scene from the 2014 movie *Interstellar* by director Christopher Nolan (2014). The scene features several astronauts discussing whether or not they know enough about a black hole to accurately plot a trajectory around the collapsing star. Key to understanding the conversation and the choices they face is the "event horizon," that place where the known science ends and the unknown knowns continue. In other words, even though it can't be described using physics and logic the astronauts know that, out beyond the event horizon, there is more to the black hole, qualities they can't "see." The challenge they face is making a right decision based on incomplete data. Their task is to stay alive by developing new ways of seeing the fullness of a black hole: both the known knowns and the unknown knowns.

We find the metaphor of an event horizon to be a helpful way to frame some of the challenging issues faced by educators concerned with increasing equity in K–12 schools by paying fuller attention to Rumi's second way of knowing. For instance, teacher educators know much about the science of teaching in the form of "best practices" that can be found in highly influential, best-selling books such as *Best Practice: Bringing Standards to Life*

in *America's Classrooms* (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2012) and *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that put Students on the Path to College* (Lemov, 2010), which has sold over one million copies worldwide.

Beyond the event horizon of the known elements of *best practices* resides the known but less studied area of *deep practices* that inhabits the spaces out beyond standards and performance rubrics. We believe that these less visible ineffable elements of teaching need further study especially in the ways that they take an active role in supporting a teacher's freedom and well-being. We call these internally focused factors of teaching *deep practices* because they emanate from the identity, calling, and unique passion of the educator. Our hope, like the puzzle faced by the astronauts in *Interstellar*, is that with a more robust understanding of how the known knows (best practices) and unknown knows (deep practices) of education work together that teachers will be better prepared to make life giving democratic choices for themselves and their students.

In this article, we will offer a conceptual model (supported by data from a pilot study) for coaching toward greater effectiveness around deep practices. We want to be clear that this is not an either/or choice between best and deep practices; both are necessary. However, it is our assertion that by attending to the ineffable qualities of teaching there will be an increase in the social-emotional well-being of teachers and a space and language to begin discussing, defining, and legitimizing the inner life of teachers.

Deep Practices in Extant Literature

Deep practices that draw from the social-emotional dimensions of teaching as an explicit educational outcome or goal are difficult to find in the literature on teacher preparation and evaluation. Our literature review on this topic returned many examples of mindfulness and reflective practice but little in the areas of effective forms of social-emotional support that emerge from deeper sources of teaching. To confirm this gap we emailed the directors of six teacher education programs that we had reason to believe would be attentive to social-emotional dimensions of teaching. In all cases the programs acknowledged the value of addressing this topic in the preparation of teachers and they requested a summary of our findings so as to better attend to the social-emotional needs of their pre-service teachers.

In looking at publications by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), we saw very few explicit indicators that developing teachers beyond their technical skillset was a priority. CAEP, which is co-chaired by Camilla Benbow and Terry Holliday, acknowledges that "there is strong support from the professional community that qualities outside of academic ability are associated with teacher effectiveness" (Benbow & Holliday, 2013, p. 19) but beyond that acknowledgment CAEP provides few concrete

next steps. According to Benbow and Holliday, who are the co-chairs on the CAEP commission on Standards and Performance Reporting (2013), “these ‘other’ attributes, dispositions, and abilities lend themselves to provider innovation ” (p. 19) and should be systematically researched. Yet, as noted by Benbow and Holliday as well, there are few if any assessment rubrics or guidelines that include indicators and matrices for these “other” attributes. They stated: “research has not empirically established a particular set of non-academic qualities that teachers should possess. There are numerous studies that list different characteristics by different labels. Furthermore, there does not seem to be a clear measure for these non-academic qualities” (Benbow & Holliday, 2013, p. 19).

The nonacademic or “other” attributes of teaching are notoriously difficult to define and are therefore largely overlooked by both teacher education programs and the larger educational industry. As an example of the difficulty of accounting for the nonacademic qualities, Dr. Paul Michalec has worked closely with a teacher education program to pilot an observation framework to guide teacher candidates toward increased teacher effectiveness. He finds this framework immensely helpful in coaching around best practices, especially in the area of cultural competencies and asset-based instruction. Yet of the 17 “competencies” and 66 “indicators” used to assess teacher candidates in the University of Denver Teacher Education Program, only one competency points toward the deep practices of teaching by encouraging candidates to “engage students in joyful learning” (Salazar & Lerner, 2017). Creating engaging and joyful learning is essential to learning but so also is the deep inner joy a teacher holds around subject matter and the ways this passion becomes transparent and evident to students. Our argument is that teacher performance indicators lean toward the external and onstage best practices of teaching rather than the inner drivers that enliven the best practices.

This “joyful learning” is echoed in the 2016–2017 Leading Effective Academic Practice Handbook (DPS, 2017), which is a comprehensive framework that outlines the objectives and evaluation methods of Denver Public School teachers. “Joy” in this document refers to engaging students in exploration, celebrating student diversity, and igniting a passion for learning (p. 4). These are all critical aspects of education and help create strong learning environments. However, the word “joy,” which appears on page four in the overview, is not revisited again in this 158-page document. This fact has two implications. The first is that, while the school system has indicated a desire to create joyful classroom experiences, they do not specify the tools to observe, measure, and monitor progress toward that goal. This points to a further need to create comprehensive frameworks to better understand and validate these ineffable aspects of teaching. The other point is that this notion of joy is directed exclusively toward the student experience. Our contention in this article is that teachers should not merely be conduits for student outcomes,

but that investigation into—and support for—the lived experience of teachers is a worthy and valid goal in and of itself.

This lack of attention to deep practices is evident as well at the national level. Recently the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality in conjunction with the Department of Education published “A Practical Guide to Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness.” The guide rightly insists that “learning is more than achievement gains” (A Practical Guide to Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness, 2011, p. 2) and that teacher evaluation should include more than just a comparison of students’ test scores. This is a promising avenue of thought, but the guide itself reiterates that “valid and appropriate instruments are crucial” for such endeavors as classroom observations, analysis of classroom artifacts, and value-added models. The term “instrument” occurs 45 times in the 30-page document. The term “valid” occurs 82 times. So, while student test scores alone may be too narrow an indicator of teacher effectiveness, the ubiquity of quantitative terms in this guide indicates national concern with establishing objective and empirical approaches to teacher evaluation. The terms “passion,” “love,” and “joy” were absent from the guide, and the term “care” occurred five times, each in reference to the necessity of maintaining care when implementing an instrument in order to preserve its validity and reliability.

Deep Practices and the Inner Core of Teaching

We believe that the primary reason deep practices are neglected in the literature is that creating a framework to address and legitimize the inner core of teaching is a delicate, nebulous, and highly intuitive process that necessitates comfort with ambiguity and non-quantitative measures. It does not fit easily into state or national frameworks that rely on validity and reliability measures grounded in scientific models of research. We are attempting in this article to create a framework, consistent with the source of deep practices, which relies less on quantitative scientific approaches to knowledge generation. We begin with a look at the current conceptual frameworks supporting the social-emotional elements of teaching.

Parker Palmer (2007) calls for elevating the professional conversation around teaching to address the concept of the self. He argues that when “[f]ace to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this ‘I’ who teaches” (p. 10). For Palmer, the essential questions of teaching are less about technique and more about the deep practices that flow from knowing “who is the self that teaches?” (p. 7). Korthagen, Kim, and Greene (2012) argued that because of the dominance of the standards movement in education “rarely do we see any recognition of the importance for a teacher to understand herself, to engage and expand her awareness and sense of being in the world, and to teach from her soul” (p. 4). Michalec (2013) describes the necessity of paying heed to what he calls

the inner core of a teacher, which he describes as “a constellation of teaching qualities that characterize the inner life of teachers” (p. 29). The inner life of teachers is a broad category of attributes that include calling (Alston, 2008; Hansen, 1995), love (Liston, 2000), heart (Ayers, 2010), complementary curriculum (Moroye, 2009), self-reflection (Korthagen, Kim, & Greene, 2012; Steiner, 1995), presence (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006), and trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2005; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011).

In the next section of the article we will build on the work and insights of these researchers to extend our understanding of the deep practices in teaching beyond the event horizon of best practices that currently define the standards movement in teacher preparation and teacher professional development (Benbow & Holliday, 2013). Our work, at this point, is exploratory and draws on the literature of the inner life of teaching, our experiences as teacher educators working with aspiring educators, and our personal experiences of learning to teach. Therefore the model we propose for comprehensively outlining the inner core of teaching is primarily conceptual, although we will provide data from a pilot study to bolster our framework.

Defining “Ineffable”

We would like to return to the “non-academic” attributes that CAEP acknowledges as important if not widely understood. Through understanding the inner core of teaching, we will further be able to see and define its manifestations, which we refer to as “deep practices.” We believe that the inner core of teaching is comprised broadly of five ineffable qualities (IQs) that comprehensively define the deep practices of teaching. We will define these shortly, but first we want to discuss the modifier. By “ineffable” we mean qualities that are known to exist beyond the known, visible event horizon of standards but resist easy description through technical and external forms of assessment and language; Rumi’s second way of knowing. Abraham Heschel (1955) defined the ineffable as: “that aspect of reality which by its very nature lies beyond our comprehension, and is acknowledged by our mind to be beyond the scope of the mind . . .” (p. 104). Yet while the ineffable is beyond the mind to fully comprehend, it still exists within the realm of human understanding: “The ineffable, then, is a synonym for *hidden meaning* rather than for the absence of meaning” (p. 105, italics added). What we take from Heschel is the understanding of the ways that the tangible (best practices) and ineffable (deep practices) are different ways of comprehending and describing the lived world of a teacher.

Defining the 5 IQs

In the next section of this article, we will develop a framework for talking about the deep practices of teaching in ways that makes the less visible

unknown knows out beyond the event horizon of best practices a little more tangible. We will develop a working definition of each IQ by drawing from the literature on education, positive psychology, theology, teacher formation, effective instruction, and leadership. Our goal is to define, in the sense of giving a feeling for the distinctions between one IQ and the next, while retaining the mystery and less tangible elements of the ineffable. We hope to provide form while resisting efforts at overly defining and quantifying the ineffable. Thus we accept the limitations and approximations of language, which often draw from the rational mind, to convey the essence of the ineffable which resides in deeper sources of knowing (Greene, 2004)

Calling

Calling is the first ineffable quality of teaching and we will begin our review of the relevant literature on the inner dimensions of teaching with the classic work of David Hansen (1995), *The Call to Teach*. In his examination of the central elements of a profession, Hansen points out that the “Latin root of vocation, *vocare*, means ‘to call.’ It denotes summons or bidding to service” (p. 1). Few people would disagree with the claim that the best teachers fit this definition of a call to serve learners and the larger community surrounding their school.

Calling is motivation, enthusiasm, and an intrinsic need to apply one’s singular talents to engage in sustained work that benefits the world. It is the inner-fire that illuminates and pulls a teacher through the challenges that are common in the teaching profession. Calling is the final place of meaning when her instructional world collapses to the core of what it means to teach. For Linda Alston (2008), a career teacher in urban schools, the essence of calling is contained in the question: “Would you say you chose the teaching profession or do you think it chose you?” (p. 97). How a teacher answers this question will likely become a key factor in whether or not she stays in the profession for three years or thirty years. As Alston argues throughout her book, her answer is clear: teaching chose her. In validation of this claim she tells the story of losing hope and becoming exhausted with teaching so she left the profession, only to come back to the life of the classroom, “there is no escaping my divine calling. Teaching had me . . .” (p. 90). As Alston ponders the reason why she continues to return to the classroom day-after-day and year-after-year despite the personal and professional challenges, she acknowledges a pull to the classroom life that goes beyond professional fulfillment. She acknowledges a relationship with something that is greater than her isolated self: “We must return because the call resonates in a place deep within us, and we must answer, ‘Yes’” (p. 96).

Calling is not a dogmatic and implacable adherence to an ideology; it is core to the individual drive to teach, a sense of personal and instructional true north (Hansen, 1995). It is the quality of inner energy that can often reorient

a person from a nonteaching career into teaching where the heart thrives. Macy and Johnstone (2012) described calling as the “inner compass” powered by enthusiasm and passion and points toward a professional identity that is both fulfilling and sustainable. *Calling* as a passion is deep and enduring, derived from values, personality, and identity that “yield[s] social value to others” and also provides “enduring personal fulfillment” (Hansen, 1995, p. xiii).

Presence

The next IQ is *presence*, which is the aura of belonging and fit that a teacher exudes in the setting of his classroom. In our analysis of the literature, *presence* was often combined with the more commonly referenced skill of “being present” to the wants and needs of students (Farber, 2008; Kornelsen, 2006; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). We believe that “being present” is an important aspect of the inner core, but is housed within the ineffable quality *wholeheartedness*, which we will discuss later in this article. *Presence* is an altogether different concept that embodies the confidence a teacher exudes when she feels at home in her classroom.

This concept is often misconstrued even in literature specifically referring to “presence.” Showalter (2003) sees “presence” as an outward embodiment of the teacher and suggests that a strong presence “uses the dynamics of physical movement to lend conviction to inner strengths of mind and imagination . . .” (p. 17). She advocates incorporating aspects of theater—without hamming it up—into the development of a strong speaking voice; a type of stage presence. Dominic Belmonte (2003) refers to presence as a teaching “persona,” which he argues is “how you present yourself in the classroom . . .” (p. 22). His main advice to teachers working on an effective classroom presence is to cultivate a balance between showing too much and showing too little of yourself.

Our understanding of *presence*, however, pushes past the concept of stage presence or persona, and it goes beyond a characteristic that a teacher can choose to don, or shed, or change, or discard depending on circumstances. We agree with Jane Tompkins (1996) when she warns of the dangers of relying too heavily on an exterior manifestation of persona, instead of a sense of projected-self that is real and three-dimensional. According to Tompkins: “To perform in order to survive is back breaking work; to give up the burden of performance, an expressible relief . . .” (p. 65). The challenge of blunting the impact of a manufactured persona can be difficult because as Tompkins notes most classrooms, especially in higher education, have a “theatrical” quality, where “people who take the classroom seriously have invested themselves in perfecting a certain kind of performance . . .” (p. 210). Her observation is primarily directed at the role of student because students have the most to gain or lose depending on the level of match between their persona and the teacher’s expectations. Yet she also notes that teachers, who were once

students, should strive for a more honest projection of self. *Presence* for us is a natural emanation of a teacher's personality, a type of charisma or instructional glow, drawn from authenticity and experience.

Authenticity

The third IQ of the deep practices of teaching is *authenticity*, which we define as the recognition and enactment of the true self, the “character of the teacher” (Dirkx, 2006, p. 29) in a teaching environment where the teacher’s “actions and words are consistent” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 30). Christy Moroye (2009) names the pairing of self and classroom as the “complementary curriculum,” which describes the ways in which a teacher’s values become manifest in the fabric of his curriculum and instruction. In her research, Moroye shows how “ecologically minded” educators teach in a way that reflects the principles of ecology even though their academic discipline maybe English or Math. In this way, authentic and deep commitments become externally evident in the curriculum of teachers.

Parker Palmer (2007) writes in *Courage to Teach* that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher . . .” (p. 10). Many teachers find the current climate of teaching favors an external institutional identity formed around pre-established priorities, such as test scores, classroom rubrics, or data-driven instruction. However, there are limits to technical solutions, as Palmer notes, and when “[f]ace to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this ‘I’ who teaches—without which I have no sense of the ‘Thou’ who learns . . .” (p. 10). For Palmer, the authenticity of the teacher is deeply bound up in the learning relationship with students. As an example he tells the story of the time he asked a group of students what makes for a good teacher. Somewhat to his surprise Palmer discovered that for many students, good teachers were impossible to describe as they varied wildly in their personalities, values, lesson delivery, and philosophies as they strove to connect personal inner-passion with the content and tasks of teaching. But bad teachers shared one outstanding quality; they resembled cartoon characters that were one-dimensional and emotionally distant from their curriculum, content, and their students. In short, good teachers rate high on authenticity and less effective teachers are in need of coaching around the deep practice of exploring and establishing their identity and selfhood.

Wholeheartedness

The fourth ineffable quality is *wholeheartedness* or the ability to engage teaching from a place of “vulnerability and worthiness: facing uncertainty, exposure, and emotional risks, and knowing that I am enough . . .” (Brown, 2012,

p. 393). Wholeheartedness, then, is about a willingness to be devastatingly honest with yourself and the curriculum unfolding in your classroom while simultaneously treating your teacher-self with love and forgiveness. Wholeheartedness is the inner dialogue an educator has when making tough instructional decisions, then having the courage to examine those decisions by picking them apart matching inner emotional commitments to the instructional aftermath. Wholeheartedness is cultivated through relationships with others, and, perhaps more importantly, with the self. It is through the eye of the heart that a teacher can look within herself and let that knowledge shine outward.

Tompkins (1996) claimed that one way to cultivate a more wide-awake teaching personality is to practice sitting still and listening—a form of instructional mindfulness. The payoff is that “keeping the attention open rather than occupied gives a new shape to one’s experience. Little by little, the foreground and background start to even out” (p. 206). And in classrooms this means that the space between teacher and learner is narrowed, and the potential for educators to connect students to the live pulse of content is increased. Rick Snoeynik (2010) referred to this process as a form “withitness” which he defines as “in a split second they noticed what was happening, they interpreted what they noticed, they reflected on the implications . . .” (p. 106).

For Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006), a sense of *wholeheartedness* is cultivated during the process of “seeing and being seen” (p. 266) in relationships. Openness and humility are partners with vulnerability and allow a teacher to be open to critical feedback from students and colleagues, inviting the teacher into a “learner’s stance” targeting more effective forms of instruction. The key to success is an “alert mind” combined with “a passionate heart . . .” which allows the teacher “. . . to be present to . . . apprehend, make sense of and respond skillfully to our needs, strengths, and experiences as learners . . .” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 267). In the process the teacher strives for the goal of, “. . . I become larger than myself . . .” (p. 270). This doesn’t mean that she looms as a force, an instructional authoritarian, but that she disperses her ego and elevates her attention in order to hear more fully and honestly the needs of her students, and the energy and the pulse of her classroom. It is the capacity to resist the closing in of instructional walls when the curriculum is going south, and instead to actively push the walls open so as to consider a wider array of instructional choices.

Practicing wholeheartedness is risky and does not always facilitate learning. Taking emotional risks can lead to hurt and misunderstandings, but allowing the fear of emotional stress to rule actions is like spending your life in a small windowless room. You may be safe, but you will cut yourself off from meaningful connections, and prevent yourself from growth facilitated by new experiences. The teacher who allows himself to be ruled by the fear of being wounded will shut himself off from his students and never stray from the narrow path of the lesson plan or teaching standards. The payoff for risking broken-heartedness is that to be fully oneself as a teacher requires a healthy

capacity to be broken open by students into a new understanding of the teaching-self. As Palmer (2011) articulated: “But a heart that has been consistently exercised through conscious engagement with suffering is more likely to break open instead of apart. Such a heart has learned how to flex to hold tension in a way that expands its capacity for both suffering and joy” (p. 60).

When the heart of the teacher is broken open rather than broken apart, the outcome is likely a less cynical or bitter teacher and instead a teacher who tends to be more open and instructionally inclusive, an educator who understands that not every act of student resistance requires confrontation and decisive use of power.

Imagination

The fifth and final ineffable quality is *imagination* which as a deep practice launches the teacher beyond analysis and ambiguity to an action stance characterized by the pedagogical question, “now what?” *Imagination* is the most concrete and rests closest to the external instructional elements of the outer core of teaching. *Imagination* is the quality of instructional transcendence that holds together the openness and sometimes broken-heartedness of teaching that rests in the layers between “what is” and “what ought to be.” Mulligan (1993) referred to this process as the opportunity to “transcend existing reality, to create images which reflect new perspectives, which may draw us forward into the future . . .” (p. 55).

In their analysis of scarcity thinking, Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) argue that scarcity is a “mind-set” that causes the afflicted to focus myopically on the element that is missing. In the midst of an instructional crisis, scarcity can run rampant in the mind and heart of a teacher; instructional choices seem to close down, pressuring the teacher to act and act now. Although scarcity can have a positive effect in focusing a person’s attention, it also has a destructive element, especially for teachers. Mullainathan and Shafir pointed out that “by staying top of the mind, [scarcity] affects what we notice, how we weigh our choices, how we deliberate, and ultimately what we decide and how we behave . . .” (p. 12). Imagination can help hold a scarcity mentality in teaching in proper perspective by fostering insightful action around well-structured curriculum. As Eliot Eisner (1993) stated, “humans do not simply have experience; they have a hand in its creation, and the quality of the creation depends on the ways they employ their minds . . .” (p. 5). In other words teachers with *imagination* are authors of their own instructional narratives, which, in our model of the ineffable, derives its decision-making energy from the previous IQs, particularly *wholeheartedness* and *authenticity*.

Imagination has another important quality, it can reduce the chance of teacher burnout and attrition. Teaching is fraught with ambiguity and frustrations and this daily struggle with uncertainty can be wearing. Kyriacou

(2001) reports that “most teachers seem to encounter a period of self-doubt, disenchantment and reassessment, in which their concerns are either resolved with them continuing their career as a teacher or their deciding to leave . . .” (p. 29). The teachers who weather through the professional dark times that Kyriacou describes exemplify the characteristic of grit, “. . . perseverance and passion for long-term goals . . .” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelley, 2007, p. 1087). Teachers with *imagination* can see instructional outcomes that are small and far away and they have the grit to hold on to this vision with hope and passion as they work toward the completion of their instructional journey (Mulligan, 1993). *Imagination*, then, is the conception of actions inspired by a teacher’s inner core that leads to both short- and long-term changes.

Instructional acts of *imagination* are common in the classrooms of teachers who never give up on students, even though students may disappoint, frustrate, or doubt the teacher’s capacity to teach them. These teachers exhibit the deep practice of understanding the current learning condition of a student and envisioning a distant identity for the student that is closer to the student’s true potential. Maxine Greene (1988) makes a similar point when she argued for a definition of freedom in schools that includes teachers creating and sustaining “in-between” spaces where students can “. . . engage and resist the compelling and conditioning forces . . .” (p. 115) that constrain their choices of identity.

Data From a Pilot Study

In the winter and spring of 2015 we conducted a case study called “Deep Practices: An Exploration of the Inner Core of Teaching” consisting of nine classroom observations and six interviews of teachers in a school known for encouraging teachers to teach from the heart. We received IRB approval for the study in winter 2014 and began conducting interviews and classroom observations in the winter of 2015. We used a semi-structured interview protocol to foster participant elaboration on meaningful questions while simultaneously directing participant attention to the inner core and how it was supported in their school environment. For observations we recorded detailed notes on classroom practices, actions, and our perceptions then compared notes and used an open-coding method to lift themes from the dataset.

The purpose of the study was to look for concrete examples of the 5 inef-fable qualities that we identified in the literature as deep practices in teaching. Our assumption was that given the implicit attentiveness to deep practices in this school if we were going to see the IQs in any school it would likely be here. Our early data analysis suggested that the 5 IQs are important concepts for articulating the deep practices of teachers but they are perhaps too broad and overly conceptual for practical field use. We did however observe

concrete proxy indicators that point toward the more theoretical IQs of deep practices.

It was in the “rituals, practices and traditions” (Armstrong, 2010) evident in the classrooms of teachers that we began to see emergent categories of deep practices that could form coachable elements in line with the CAEP call for clarity on the “non-academic” aspects of teaching. Although our analysis is still in progress and our findings emergent, at this point the following teacher actions pointed toward some element of deep practice: wait time, listening to students, nonverbal body language, instructional metaphors, recurring instructional phrases, reassuring physical contact, and arrangement of the class environment. All of these elements are also found in the literature on best practices (Lemov, 2010). This is not surprising to us given the paradoxical and mutualistic relationship outlined in our theoretical model between best and deep practices. To illustrate our point we will provide two concrete examples of *imagination* and *wholeheartedness* that appeared in the data.

One teacher in our study had the habit of pulling back from the instructional center of the classroom. She would lean against the wall or circle the perimeter while watching her students engage a learning activity. In the language of best practices, she was demonstrating a form of “wait time.” In his book of 49 techniques to improve teaching, Doug Lemov (2010) claimed that wait time has four instructional benefits for students: increased accuracy, increased student response rates, decreased number of “I don’t know” answers, and increased use of evidence in answering questions (p. 135). Yet as we observed her, there appeared to be something deeper at work. By physically removing herself from the center of the classroom during a class discussion, she seemed to be relinquishing ownership of the floor. She was listening attentively and she was careful to not enter too directly into the learning spaces of her students. Her body language of leaning into her students seemed to express a sense of *imagination* in that she expressed an intentional posture of being open to the diverse ways her students were learning the content of the lesson. She remained “in-control” (a best practice) of the instructional space as she actively redirected students away from distractive behavior to more active forms of learning.

In response, her students were open to each other as fellow learners and they showed a willingness to express their knowledge; both of these elements are important qualities defining equity in schools. For instance, Gay (2000) states that diversity of perspectives in a classroom is “a useful resource for improving educational effectiveness for all learners” (p. 14). Joan Wink (2011) made the connection between critical pedagogy, which we see as a form of *imagination* that opens up the possibilities for diverse learning identities, and enhanced levels of equity. She compared good teaching to a prism that “has the tendency to focus on shades of social, cultural, political and even economic conditions . . .” (p. 50). For Wink, instructional openness and imagination is an important element of critical pedagogy.

Evidence of the deep practice of *wholeheartedness* occurred in a middle school classroom late in the morning between passing periods. A student came into the class and sat down, silently removing books and writing utensils from his backpack and generally getting ready for the lesson to start. Outwardly, he exhibited no signs of distress and was, in fact, following all of the classroom norms. The teacher, however, immediately moved over to him, put a caring hand on his back, and leaned down to speak to him. She stood by him for a long moment, listening to him. When she walked away to attend to other instruction matters, the student was grinning broadly and was visibly more relaxed and present. When we later asked about this interaction, the teacher said that this particular student was always happy and outgoing and when she saw that he was quiet she knew something was wrong. The issue, it turned out, was relatively minor, and the student simply needed to know someone cared enough to ask him how he was doing.

In the language of best practices she was practicing “individual feedback” which refers to the number of 1–1 interactions a teacher has with a student in a given session (Gladwell, 2008). According to Gladwell, a teacher implementing “individual feedback” should have at least one “check for understanding” of content knowledge with every student in every session taught. The teacher in our pilot study went beyond the best practice of “individualized feedback” and engaged in the deep practice of *wholeheartedness*, a willingness to remain open and vulnerable to the lived experience of her student, to genuinely express care and concern for what was bothering her student. It demonstrated a deep level of knowing her students, a real interest with his well-being. Thus, deep practices and best practices can often look extremely similar. It is only by drilling down to the level of purpose and intention related to learning that we see the difference.

Conclusion and Implications

A good time and place to begin addressing the social-emotional needs of teachers and the professional isolation from the calling to teach is during the early stages of professional preparation. Unfortunately, as noted in our literature review, few teacher education programs have the time or space in their curriculum to adequately account for the recurrent and debilitating sense of isolation experienced by many early career teachers.

As it stands, models of teacher preparation are generally based on technical and procedural aspects of teaching (best practices) informed by state and national standards, accountability and teacher performance measures, and prescribed curriculum (Goldstein, 2014). We believe that teacher educators concerned about issues of equity in K–12 schools have to address the link between the social-emotional aspects of teaching (deep practices) and teacher attrition with as much vigor as they attend to the technical and procedural aspects of effective instruction (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). Because of the

external demands of accountability and state/national curriculum standards and the limited autonomy experienced by many teachers (Goldstein, 2014; Strong, 2005), there is little room in many teacher education programs for building resiliency, courage, and the capacity to weather through the emotional challenges of an early career teacher. We have taken the first tentative steps toward addressing what CAEP (2013) acknowledges as a current limitation in our knowledge of teaching: “Research has not empirically established a particular set of non-academic qualities that teachers should possess. There are numerous studies that list different characteristics, sometimes referring to similar characteristics by different labels” (p. 19).

In our search for ways to more accurately describe the deep practices of teaching, what we are calling the ineffable, we attempted to take seriously Parker Palmer’s (2007) affirmation that like it or not, “We teach who we are” (p. 7). We argued that questions of teacher effectiveness have roots in both the technical (best practices) and the inner core (deep practices) of teaching. By ineffable we mean those elements of teaching that lie at the interface between the hand and heart and as Heschel (1955) argues: “The ineffable, then, is a synonym for hidden meaning rather than for the absence of meaning” (p. 105). After a review of the literature on the inner core of teaching we developed a series of 5 ineffable qualities (IQs): calling, presence, authenticity, wholeheartedness, and imagination. We offered a few tentative examples of these IQs in practice drawing from a pilot study we are conducting for the purpose of showing ways we might be able to see beyond the event horizon of standards.

Our original motivation in writing this article was addressing the high level of attrition among early career teachers in mostly urban and rural schools. Of particular concern are the issues and questions of equity embedded in the rate at which young teachers leave the profession. Additionally, there are both equity and ethical questions confronting teacher educators about the nature of the teaching profession when program graduates enter a profession that is increasingly deleterious to their passions, commitment to equity for all learners, and calling to teach. We grapple with the question: On what moral grounds do we feel justified in continuing to prepare teachers for a profession that will likely force an early exit from the classroom? How can we continue to argue that teaching is a lifelong endeavor when so many teachers are leaving within three years because they feel professionally stunted? What message is perhaps being communicated to K–12 students in under resourced and underserved schools about their importance to society when they experience a nearly constant rotation of passionate but less skilled teachers?

We know that many teachers are leaving because of limited support for the heart of their work (Headden, 2014). It is our belief that by directly attending to the 5 IQs of teaching during the professional development of teachers that we can validate the social-emotional needs of teachers and thus potentially stem the flow of early career teachers out of the field. In *Teaching and Learning*

from *Within*, Korthagen, Kim, and Greene (2012) acknowledge the need to attend to the deep practices of teaching:

Less focus is typically paid to the internal and natural qualities that individuals bring to the context of teaching and learning. We recognize the importance of developing skills and competencies as part of a foundation for learning, but our focus here is on the internal realm as a foundation of learning. (p. 4)

It is our belief that any serious attempt to improve instructional effectiveness and teacher formation should both acknowledge the existence of deep practices beyond the event horizon of best practices and dedicate more time and attention to coaching teachers in ways that bring the inner core to the surface. Through this process we can begin to bring the heart and soul back into the teaching profession and begin the long process of making teaching into a viable, lifelong endeavor for the thousands of educators who work and love every day. And like the astronauts in *Interstellar* we can learn something about the unknown knowns by willingly plunging into the space of knowing beyond the event horizon of standards and accountability.

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