

CHAPTER 2

DEEP CURRICULUM

Guiding the Inner Lives of Early Career Teachers

Kristina M. Valtierra and Paul Michalec

ABSTRACT

This chapter argues for a framing of curriculum in teacher education that we call *deep curriculum*, which consciously brings themes of courage, heart, passion, and the inner-life of teachers into teacher preparation and beyond. Deep curriculum is framed around contemporary issues in education including the epidemic of teacher attrition. We offer concrete examples from a qualitative study and a pilot program of *deep curriculum* conducted in a teacher education program.

DEEP CURRICULUM: GUIDING THE INNER LIVES OF EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

Why is it that a person of good heart and good intention willingly enters the profession of teaching with a high rate of burnout? What happens when the calling to serve collides with a work environment that rarely recog-

nizes heart, passion and courage as core professional elements? What can teacher educators who care about the inner life of teachers do to support new teachers in the face of high rates of burnout and limited social-emotional support?

This chapter examines the sources of these questions as well as strategies for helping early career teachers navigate the professional terrain of teaching, which is often inattentive to the heart of teaching. We propose a conceptual framework of *deep curriculum*, present findings from a qualitative study, and describe a pilot program to support our model of heart-based teacher education.

This chapter offers an analysis of the emotional and relational pitfalls of teaching in K–12 schools where the climate tends to undervalue the instructional gifts of teachers by narrowing definitions of effectiveness to test scores, accountability frameworks, and curriculum pacing guides (Hare & Leboutillier, 2014). One focal point of our concern is the high rate of teacher attrition (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012) where a contributing factor is the lack of attention paid to the social-emotional needs of teachers. Our other focus is the rich inner life of teachers that emanates from a teacher’s calling, often manifesting in the form of passion, courage, open-heartedness, and resiliency (Korthagen, Kim, & Greene, 2012).

To address our concern, we offer an argument for a *deep curriculum* in teacher preparation: an approach to teacher education that values resources and skills to strengthen the connection between the call to teach and the teacher-self that materializes at the interface between a teacher candidate’s ideal sense of self and the actual experience of teaching in K–12 schools. We describe the features of a *deep curriculum* through analysis of a teacher preparation course specifically designed to offer candidates a framework for effectively transitioning from preservice to in-service while resisting burnout. The essential question for the course exemplifies our *deep curriculum* framework: “who is the self that teaches?” (Palmer, 2007, p. 4).

THE TEACHER ATTRITION PREDICAMENT

Even though it is more sensible to retain established teachers than to recruit and replace teachers on a recurrent basis (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2008), at least half of all new K–12 teachers leave the profession by the time they reach their fifth year of teaching (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Perpetual burnout is the leading factor in teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In stark contrast, Intrator and Scriber (2003) referred to the ideal of “teaching with fire” as an “exuberance, vitality, and passion” (p. xiv). Unfortunately, many teachers burn out, extinguishing their fire

immediately, or they find that teaching smolders away “until it dims and flickers low” before snuffing out (p. xiv).

Teacher attrition, particularly in underresourced and underserved schools, is quickly approaching a crisis point (Barnett & Hudgens, 2014). Nationally, the attrition rate is an astounding 50% within 5 years (Carroll & Foster, 2010; Headden, 2014). In a study by The New Teacher Project (2012), school districts lost between 13% and 27% of their teachers in one year; a percentage consistent with other studies of attrition. Perhaps even more striking is the data point that the modal teacher in 2008 had three years or less of classroom experience, compared to 15 years of experience in 1988 (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

The reasons for teacher attrition are varied, but a significant contributor to the problem of retention is the lack of social-emotional support for teachers. A 2014 Carnegie Foundation report pointed to the gap that can sometimes emerge between a teacher’s ideal sense of school as a site of learning and the reality of school dominated by high-stakes testing and teacher accountability (Headden, 2014). Adding to the challenge is the shifting role of professional learning communities (PLCs), which are now primarily focused on the technical and data-driven features of teaching while rarely providing time for conversations that support the social-emotional needs of teachers as a source of instructional success (Martinez, 2004). As noted by Headden (2014), “Quite simply, teachers don’t think the people they work for care about them or their efforts to improve” (p. 5). And, when teachers feel unsupported and dishonored for the work of teaching in conflicted spaces, they begin to feel like no one cares if they stay or go, so they leave.

DEEP CURRICULUM TO COUNTERACT TEACHER ATTRITION

In *Courage To Teach*, Palmer (2007) argued that learning to teach can be organized around four questions: (1) what is the content or curriculum being taught?; (2) how is it most effectively delivered?; (3) why is the curriculum and pedagogy chosen to address learning needs?; and (4) who is the self that teaches? A review of standards written by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2015) and the Interstate Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (CCSSO, 2013), two prominent organizations in the area of teacher preparation, point to the importance of three of the four elements: what, how, and why. Palmer argued that the last question, “who is the self that teaches?” (p. 4) is rarely raised or addressed in teacher education. Although researchers have called for greater attention to the inner life of teaching (Jenlink, 2014), the technical elements of teaching still dominate the field (Michalec, 2013).

In an effort to better understand and support the inner drivers of teachers, we designed and closely studied a course for pre-service educators focused entirely on ways of forming and framing teacher identity through a *deep curriculum* focused on Palmer's essential question: "who is the self that teaches?" The course we studied occurred prior to candidates entering a licensure program that has a reputation for preparing teachers highly proficient in the technical domains of teaching. We consciously introduced our students to a *deep curriculum* that honored their call to teach and highlighted their instructional gifts and developing pedagogical identities. We hoped that through our *deep curriculum* participants could be equipped with tangible tools to lessen the burnout effect that permeates the profession. Successful implementation of this preservice *deep curriculum* then led us to pilot a similar model with early career teachers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The metamorphosis of burnout into teaching with fire begins with a curricular model of teacher identity formation that emphasizes the highly conflicted power dynamics of teaching that can overtly message to new teachers a narrow range of identities and pedagogical choices. It is common to refer to this form of curriculum as a "hidden curriculum" in that it implicitly situates new teachers as individuals with little agency and cultivates a sense of acceptance of the institutional power of school systems (Apple, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

Consistent with Pinar's (2000) formulation of curriculum as "reconceptualization" we argue for a direct unveiling of the hidden curriculum and the use of curriculum to empower new teachers to author their own pedagogical identities. In this sense, we are hoping to develop a new form of emancipatory curriculum more attentive to the spiritual formation of teachers called *deep curriculum*, which intends to bring to the forefront the calling, passions, and inner-drivers that underscore the professional longings of many teachers.

We recognize that accountability and performance standards for teachers are helpful and that many teacher preparation programs do promote reflective practice. For instance, inTASC delineates knowledge, performances, and dispositions for all 10 teaching standards (CCSSO, 2013). Dispositions, commonly defined as one's beliefs, attitudes, and values, call educators to recognize their biases, continuously reflect on their practice, and sincerely believe that all students can learn with appropriate pedagogy and relevant curriculum (Howard, 2007). *Deep curriculum* is aligned with this reflective impulse in teacher education while also calling for an emphasis on the inner-life of teachers. It resonates with Friere's (2000) call

to resist the “banking model” of education where pre-formed notions of truth anchor the basic structure of curriculum and instruction.

In its broadest definition, curriculum is the full array of tangible and intangible features of a learning environment that students and teachers interact with during the pursuit of knowledge and understanding (Uhrmacher, 1997). This might include textbooks, instructional relationships with colleagues, the arrangement of furniture, types of assessments, and sociocultural values about different forms of knowledge. For the purposes of this chapter, we will limit the description of *deep curriculum* to the more tangible features of the learning space that invite educators into dialogue with their inner-drivers.

DEEP CURRICULUM WITH PRESERVICE EDUCATORS

What follows is a description of a *deep curriculum* offered as an introductory course to students interested in applying for a dual undergraduate-graduate degree teacher education program in the Western United States. The timing of this course intended to give potential teachers a clear-eyed view of the teaching profession and begin to develop their teacher identities prior to technical training. Our *deep curriculum* relied upon poetry, reflective writing assignments, movies, and digital storytelling.

A primary goal of the course, as noted in the syllabus, was the invitation to examine the “unique qualities of teachers”:

In this course we will turn the lens of analysis away from the student and toward the teacher (you). As Nieto (2009) suggested, effective communication is a two way process and it is essential that teachers know, as fully as possible, the unique characteristics of each student in the class. But what about the unique characteristics of the teacher? Do the particular gifts, talents, and inner capacities of the teacher play any role in facilitating communication and learning in the classroom?

Essential questions (Wiggins & McTigue, 2005) around inner-identity for the course included:

- Why do I teach?
- What will I (likely) experience as the greatest joy in my teaching?
- What am I most fearful of in my teaching?
- How will I (likely) stay fresh in my teaching and avoid stagnation?
- What do I find most mysterious and wonderful about teaching?
- How will I (likely) remain connected to my hopes and dreams for my teaching?

- What will (likely) continue to fuel my passion for teaching?
- What vision of the future do I hold for schools?

Poetry was used throughout the class as an element of the curriculum to invite teacher candidates into deeper understandings and naming of inner gifts, talents, and the validation of nonlinear ways of knowing. We reasoned that poetry offers participants the invitation to see educational wisdom first through the lenses of imagery, metaphor, and storytelling. As such, the truth is told “at a slant,” as suggested by Emily Dickinson (1960), calling for insights and understandings that enter the consciousness at a gentle angle rather than arriving forcefully head on. One poem that seemed to resonate with study participants was “The Way It Is” by William Stafford (1998).

“The Way It Is”

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn’t change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can’t get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die;
and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.
You don’t ever let go of that thread.

Stafford’s (1998) poem invited students to think about what image best described their particular understandings of teaching. Second, the poem can be read as a cautionary tale about the virtue of hanging onto your thread (core identity) and never letting it go or giving it up. In many cases, the thread of identity is so particular and precise to the individual that others might not fully see the linkages between actions and identity. Stafford’s poem creates emotional space to grapple with the social forces in and out of schools that can distort understandings of the thread.

Another aspect of the *deep curriculum* anchoring this course was the assigned readings: *Courage to Teach* (Palmer, 2007), *Teaching with Fire* (Intrator & Scribner, 2003), and *Inside Mrs. B’s Classroom* (Baldacci, 2003). *Courage to Teach* set the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for describing the inner landscape of the teaching-self and brought to awareness the ways that forces external to the teacher can deform a teacher’s core identity, leading to broken-heartedness and a loss of instructional purpose (Palmer, 2007). *Teaching with Fire* is a collection of poems submitted by practicing teachers

who turn to poetry for sustenance and meaning-making during times of pedagogical crisis and inner uncertainty as to why they continue to teach. The poems are organized into relevant themes that provide markers of the journey for new teachers as they navigate the social-emotional terrain of teaching. *Inside Mrs. B's Classroom* is a first-person narrative of a White female newspaper columnist turned teacher in Chicago's underresourced schools. Baldacci's (2003) rich descriptions of teaching and learning to teach includes themes and stories that speak to the condition of her inner teacher as she navigates the challenges of teaching in an underresourced school.

In addition to the readings, students wrote four papers. Three papers addressed student perceptions and emergent understandings of why they want to teach. The fourth targeted student reflections on learning about oneself as a teacher and the broader social context of schools. As the course syllabus indicated: "The process of becoming a teacher is less about arriving one day at a coherent role and more like the slow and interconnected stages of forming and re-forming an identity." Writing prompts for these assignments included questions such as: "Why do I teach? Is teaching a calling or a job? Why might this distinction be meaningful? What does it mean to you to exercise power and authority in your teaching? Where does your sense of authority come from?"

In an attempt to broaden and deepen the narrative of what it means to teach, students viewed and analyzed movies relative to their developing sense of teacher identity. Movies selected for the course covered a range of domestic and international films including: *Dead Poets Society*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Chalk*, *Class*, *Mona Lisa's Smile*, *Finding Forrester*, *Aladdin*, and *Freedom Writers*. A central question around the films viewed during class was: "What is the main characters' most significant and disheartening crisis as a teacher, and how does the teacher regain heart for teaching?"

The most impactful assignment, as reported by study participants, was the final project: a personal narrative in digital format depicting emerging images and ideas of teacher identity formation and the sources of strength embedded in this identity. The digital stories combined music, images, and text into a touchstone of identity that was intended to anchor their selfhood during the early years of professional service when the social context tends to submerge heart under external forms of accountability and de-skilled curriculum. Essential questions for this assignment included: "What are the unique characteristics and qualities that are beginning to define you as a teacher? How did you come to discover these features? What difference will these qualities make in your teaching, particularly in your relationships with students?"

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

What follows are salient findings from the *deep curriculum* pre-service course articulated above. We analyzed if our preservice course focused on *deep curriculum* could cultivate resilient teacher identities and offer participants tangible tools to mitigate the burnout epidemic that permeates the profession.

Participants

The data reported in this chapter represent the voice and perceptions of students in different phases of their teacher preparation. The primary source of data for the study was a series of semi-structured interviews with two sets of graduates from the course ($N = 10$). The first pool of participants ($n = 5$) were in the process of completing their teacher preparation courses and student teaching. This group of participants had completed the identity formation course one academic year prior to the interviews. The second group ($n = 5$) had completed their teacher preparation courses and student teaching. They were in their final year of studies, leading toward a Master's degree in education and had completed the course two academic years prior to their interviews. Seven interview participants identified themselves as White, two as Asian-American, and one as Latino. Three interviewees identified as male and seven as female.

Data

A semistructured interview protocol guided our data collection (Seidman, 2006). Open-ended questions targeted participant meaning-making around the course and engaged them in reflecting on their course learning experiences while student teaching and as they anticipated their early years as teachers. Interview participants were asked to recall and reflect upon course activities, assignments, readings, and intended outcomes related to their emerging teacher identities and responses to career related challenges. To triangulate interview data, artifacts from all course participants ($N = 25$) were collected, coded, and analyzed. Artifacts included written reflections on aforementioned digital stories and in-class reflection papers.

Analysis

Each interview lasted around 45 minutes and was recorded, transcribed, coded, reduced, and analyzed for salient themes related to our framework (Creswell, 2012). We analyzed all data sources using thematic analysis

inclusive of familiarizing ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, enacting thematic revisions, and, finally, defining themes (Spradley, 1980). We identified, named, and cross-checked themes to ensure credibility and confirmability (Trochim, 2006).

FINDINGS

Findings suggest that participants articulated and worked through initial fears about teaching, found value in opportunities to reflect independently and with peers, and developed robust teacher identities that they could draw upon to resist burnout and attrition.

Facing One's Fears

As suggested by our findings, the direct identification of fears associated with aspects of schooling and teaching that could potentially deform their professional identities positively influenced our participants. Participants frequently identified their fears and articulated how they had productively processed through them. As one participant affirmed:

So [my] fear has definitely decreased. I am not as afraid of teaching, because I see it much more as a process, not as much something to be worried about.

I'm not scared of anything anymore. That's [fear] out of the way. (Participant 8)

Agne (1999) surmised that “to be the teacher, we must first be healthy, that is, not functioning in constant states of fear. If one is full of fears, one’s teaching reflects that fear” (p. 184). One of our participants made a similar connection:

I like that in the class we spent time talking about and thinking about what we're afraid of as new teachers. I was terrified going into student teaching.... Talking about our fears in class helped me not think that I had to be perfect. (Participant 9)

Writing samples and interview analysis suggested that students learned to apply fear as a positive analytic tool for naming personal inner gifts, talents, and insights of teaching, instructional qualities that—once identified—could help blunt the external forces that often mold a teacher into a narrow definition of what it means to teach.

Individual and Community Reflection

Both individual and community efforts produced teacher identity formation and resilience to burnout in our participants. The strongest understandings of teacher identity emerge from self-reflection on internal

qualities, commonly referred to by our participants as a “personal journey” or “introspection” and “self-critique,” along with the simultaneous invitation to articulate and refine these inner inklings of self-knowledge in the presence of a liked-minded community. As one participant articulated:

Realizing good teaching, being effective, doing your job well is as much about developing relationships with your peers and making sure you do take the time to reflect on what you are doing. (Participant 3)

An appreciation for the personal journey while concurrently valuing the support of community was, as one participant articulated, a “reciprocal process, a symbiosis” (Participant 10) that contributed to resilient teacher identities.

Resisting Identity Deformation

Many of the stressors that cause teacher burnout can be attributed to societal intrusion. The most prominent in the U.S. is the overwhelming expectation that teachers will raise standardized test scores, which forces many teachers—especially those serving in underresourced settings—to prioritize test preparation over the inner-impulse to teach with integrity (Valtierra, 2016). Our data revealed evolving understanding, acceptance of, and resistance to societal intrusions. As one participant put it “teaching is about discovery and fiercely guarding identity” (Participant 2).

When faced with the elements of teaching that can foreshadow burnout, participants expressed an affinity for developing a robust identity. They believed that a well-formed identity could play a role in protecting them from the overwhelming pressures to forgo personal and instructional integrity. For instance:

I had no idea going into it how quickly you can get discouraged ... it's so easy to lose sight of it. I think that is what is going to continue to fuel my passion (is) going to be the kids. I have to continually be reminding myself about why I am into this. (Participant 5)

Participants’ identification of their metaphorical “teaching threads,” from William Stafford’s aforementioned poem “The Way it Is” was consistently named as influential. Participants ruminated that their “thread” continued to keep them grounded in their values, even when experiencing or anticipating the many stressors of societal intrusions: “I keep going back to that, I can’t lose that thread” (Participant 7).

Course participants valued the focus on professional identity formation because they developed an awareness and clear-eyed appraisal of teacher

burnout. They viewed the role of *deep curriculum* as reassuring in that they may experience aspects of burnout, but they had internal tools for coping with the inevitable symptoms of burnout. As one participant said: “It [teaching] is a passion for me, it is a calling. I need to reconnect with that every so often to remember that this is where I need to be” (Participant 5).

DEEP CURRICULUM WITH EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

Given the many requirements in teacher preparation, we recognize that dedicating an entire course to a *deep curriculum* is not always practical. What follows is an example of a potentially more feasible version of a *deep curriculum* that was implemented with early career teachers and informed by the findings articulated above.

The Leadership Academy Fellowship

The Leadership Academy Fellowship (LAF) was a professional development program for early career teachers cohosted by one of the authors. The purpose of the program was to bring a little levity as well as deep reflection and resiliency strategies into the stressful lives of teachers who had recently completed their teacher preparation. According to a recruitment flyer for the program the goals of LAF included: “a support for Teacher Education Program graduates through workshops and seminars throughout the academic year that provide a community of engagement built around leadership, mindful teaching, tips, and techniques for survival that maintain the ‘humanness’ that encourages successful teaching.” The structure of five meetings consisted of two 3-hour sessions and 3 full-day seminars. The works of Parker Palmer (2007), Hargreaves and Fullen (2012), and Korthagen, Kim, and Greene (2012) were influential to the design of the LAF *deep curriculum*. The facilitators gathered and analyzed detailed field notes and artifacts from the LAF program that are the basis for the discussion that follows.

A typical session began with a moment of silence to allow participants to gather together in the shared space followed by a poem selected for the purpose of helping leaders and participants to transition emotionally into the session. Next, participants were invited to share a word, image, or phrase that grabbed the attention of their teacher heart. The sharing was less a back and forth conversation amongst participants and more of an open sharing of “this is how I feel right now as a teacher.” As the sharing naturally drew to a close, the focus of the session shifted into the content of the day, which typically meant exploring elements of both the inner

and outer life of teachers. For instance, participants might talk about ways of increasing resiliency through self-care strategies like reading poetry or doing art. Then, the sessions would focus on concrete ways that early career teachers could incorporate teaching techniques acquired during their teacher preparation.

Throughout the meeting, the facilitators heard both a realistic tone of the challenges and the joy faced by early career teachers as they attempted to keep their inner fire to teach alive while also attending to the instructional and institutional demands of teaching. The task of navigating the technical and deep practices of teaching were present throughout the sessions as evident in these quotes from participants during a discussion about silence in schools:

“Silence is hard to find. The squirrel cage is always running in my mind. Personal quiet time, silence, is on my to-do-list.”

and

“Don’t fix me, just listen to me. Silence is important. We need more quiet time in school.”

Similar to preservice *deep curriculum* course, the LAF program turned to poetry as a tool for participants to analyze their current personal and professional experience of teaching. The poems and related reflections depicted the complex ways the early career teachers were struggling to live in the paradoxical space between the heart of teaching and outer demands often associated with standardized testing and accountability in schools. For instance, reflecting on “Imperfection” by Elizabeth Carlson (n.d.) one participant ruminated:

My kids are my peace. My inner space gives me the real answers. The outer is not the right answer.

And another’s response to “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver (n.d.) included:

The alternative is to teach out of love instead of teaching out of fear-ego, which can be quite ugly.

The LAF program provides a model for how *deep curriculum* for early career teachers can initiate and sustain dialogue around the inner life of teaching. The participants in the LAF program exhibited an intricate understanding of schools that could help reconcile the tension between the call to teach and the external demands of teaching. In this sense, they developed skills of resiliency, courage, and realism that reduced levels of

anxiety and fear. This program also offers a practical model for delivering a *deep curriculum* outside of official teacher preparation coursework. In fact, one of the authors of this chapter facilitates a similar *deep curriculum* model that occurs during the student teaching phase of an MAT program. Data from this program is currently being collected and analyzed to enrich our *deep curriculum* framework.

CONCLUSION

Exploration into the deeply personal questions of teacher identity are sorely lacking in most teacher education programs. Through direct uncovering of the hidden curriculum of teaching and the use of *deep curriculum* to empower preservice and early career teachers to author their own professional identities, teacher education can help sustain the call to teach.

Deep curriculum may be instrumental in a new teacher's identity formation in light of the deforming hidden curriculum of schools wherein mandated curriculum and external constituents narrowly focused on student test scores are prioritized. *Deep curriculum* offers a promising counter to teacher attrition through well-formed teacher identities, self-efficacy rooted in personal teaching gifts, fear as a gateway into self-knowledge, and an awareness of early signs and symptoms of burnout. Through a heart-based approach, *deep curriculum* may sustain, and if required, re-ignite the fire to teach.

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Tanji Reed Marshall is a PhD candidate at Virginia Tech studying Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in English Education.

Amy L. Masko, PhD, is a professor of English Education at Grand Valley State University, who studies the intersection of race, poverty, and schooling.

Tara Mathien, EdD, is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at William Rainey Harper College, and has an EdD in Curriculum and Instruction from Northern Illinois University.

Dr. Marva McClean is a teacher-researcher who investigates Indigenous cultures and social justice and equity in education.

Paul Michalec, PhD, is Clinical Professor of Teaching and Learning Sciences at the University of Denver where he focuses on issues of spirituality in Education.

Pardess Mitchell, EdD, is an Assistant Professor, of Kinesiology at William Rainey Harper College and has an EdD in Curriculum and Instruction from Northern Illinois University.

Dr. Peggy L. Moch is a Professor of Mathematics at Valdosta State University where she teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses.

Carol A. Mullen, PhD, is Professor of Educational Leadership at Virginia Tech and Fulbright Scholar, has published scholarship in curriculum studies.

Rebecca Pruitt, PhD, is Assistant Professor and program chair of Early Childhood Education at Lewis University in Romeoville, IL.

Jerry Rosiek, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Education Studies at the University of Oregon.

Alison Schmitke, PhD, is the Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Oregon.

Kristina Valtierra, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Education at the Colorado College where she focuses on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and teacher resiliency.

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