

Pre-Service Teacher's Growth in an Internship

An Autoethnographic Study

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### Abstract

This thesis presents the findings of an autoethnography of my growth as a pre-service teacher in a semester-long classroom internship. The research question posed in this study was, “How does a pre-service teacher grow in an internship?” I examined this question in order to reflect on my teaching identity and how this identity is shaped through experience and beliefs. Data collection for this study included journal writings that detailed my experiences in my internship, my university coursework, and autoethnographic reflection on my experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. Through close reading and consistent coding, analysis, and interpretation of data, I produced findings that answer my research question. These findings offer insight into the experiences that cause teacher beliefs to be strengthened, challenged, and changed. Through autoethnographic reflection, I have found that teacher beliefs are challenged when dissonance is created between beliefs and observations, teacher beliefs are strengthened when beliefs are confirmed through experience, and teacher beliefs are changed when dissonance is relieved through accommodation. Findings also illuminate the idea that reflection is a key piece of identity formation, stating that teacher identity is grown through reflection on experiences and beliefs. The process of monitoring and interpreting my own growth has changed my mindset as a teacher, making me more confident, self-aware, and adaptable. In addition to its effect on me as the researcher, this work provides developing teachers and teacher mentors with insights into the growth process and inspiration for self-reflection promoting identity awareness.

For years, I have been working to learn to teach. It matters to me. I want to teach because I cannot think of any vocation that influences the world in a more profound way. Teachers lay the foundation for all other careers. In their classrooms, doctors, lawyers, community leaders, public servants, scientists, engineers, writers, artists, musicians, and so many others are launched, including teachers who perpetuate the cycle of growth. I want to teach because I am truly passionate about learning and eager to nurture that passion in others. I want to teach because some children hurt, and they need someone to see, celebrate, and love them. I want to teach because I want to help people learn to care for each other – all others, including the ones who are different from them.

For three years, I have taken classes to deepen my content knowledge, to learn about how children learn and how to help them do that. I have engaged in practicum experiences and classroom observations, and I have sought out every opportunity to learn more, joining reading and discussion groups and attending professional development sessions. As my senior year approached, though, things were about to get real. I had been accepted into the OSU ExCEL program and would embark on a year of focused internship, the fall semester in a third grade classroom in the district near my university and then the spring semester in a bilingual school in Costa Rica. I was excited, a bit afraid, and most of all curious to see how this intense experience would make me grow. I was so interested, in fact, that I decided to research it. The results of this research are published in this thesis.

The guiding question for this research study was, “how does a teacher grow in an internship?” In my first three years of university, I was challenged by my coursework and experiences in the classroom. However, I had not experienced anything quite like what I would be doing in my senior year. I knew that participating in university classes and journeying through

a classroom internship would be more formative and intense than any of my prior learning experiences. I knew that this semester would make me grow. I developed my research question to help me focus in on the details of my own personal and professional growth. I wondered, "I know this semester will challenge me, bring me new insights, and change me as an educator, but how will this happen? In what ways will I grow, and what exactly causes this development?" Though I was unsure of what answers I would find, I was beyond ready to seek them.

### **Methodology**

This thesis was conducted through an autoethnographic study of my own development as a pre-service teacher in a semester-long classroom internship. Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology through which the researcher examines their own experiences, drawing conclusions through introspective analysis (Mendez, 2013). This methodology "combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography," meaning that the author writes about and analyzes "epiphanies" that stem from their experiences "being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). For my research, I wrote about and analyzed my experiences and epiphanies that happened as a result of my immersion in "teacher culture." I began my study in July 2017 with an autobiography of my teaching beliefs and formative experiences. I entered my teaching internship in August and continuously recorded my thoughts, beliefs, and experiences relating to my internship and university coursework in a journal through October. With the guidance of a faculty advisor, I interpreted this data as it was being collected. Several times throughout this period, I closely read my journal and looked for recurring themes. This process is referred to as "coding" data and allows data to be organized by theme (Mendez, 2013). As I began to see common themes throughout my writing, I connected these themes to the experiences that prompted me to write about them. These reflective

connections were written in my journal as “memos,” which are “impressions as to related topics, emerging themes, salient patterns, and mini and grand categories” (Mendez, 2013, pg. 131). This initial interpretation of my own growth became a part of my journaling; in addition to the reflections I wrote on my experiences, I wrote down my conjectures about how I was growing. Throughout this collection period, my journal was highly reflective and became a collection of thoughts on my identity and beliefs, and on how my identity and beliefs were forming and changing.

### **Pre-Internship Identity Reflection**

In July 2017, before the beginning of my teaching internship, I reflected on my identity and beliefs at the time: who was I as a teacher? What philosophies did I believe in? What experiences had shaped my teaching identity up to this point? This teaching autobiography gave me practice analyzing my beliefs and the experiences that have shaped them. I began this autobiography by writing my ideas and beliefs about teaching and compiling a list of experiences that had a strong impact on me as a developing teacher. To connect these data, I reflected on how my experiences may have affected my philosophies. Through this process, I was able to identify both my identity as a teacher and experiences that shaped this identity. It also helped me enter the mindset of viewing my identity objectively and interpreting my growth as a pre-service teacher. In the section that follows, I share my brief analysis of this written autobiography.

One key aspect of my teaching philosophy at the time of this reflection was that students must create meaning for themselves. As a teacher, it is my role and responsibility to be a facilitator of learning. Rather than merely being a giver of knowledge, I should be a provider of opportunities for learning and success. This belief is heavily influenced by Jean Piaget's theory of constructivism. The ideas of constructivism were not something I was aware of before I began

my education theory and methods classes in college. The first time I heard the word constructivism was in a children's literature course that I completed as a sophomore. At the time, my understanding was that students make meaning of literature with their own prior experiences acting as a lens through which they understand a text. As a result, each student would interpret literature in slightly different ways because each student has a unique background and identity that is used to interact with a text. I held this general idea of constructivism until I took a children's psychology course the following semester. In this course, I learned that constructivism can be applied to all academic subjects and even non-academic learning. Constructivism is a learning theory that explains how understanding is acquired by people, both children and adults. According to Jean Piaget, "knowledge construction takes place when new knowledge is actively assimilated and accommodated into existing knowledge" (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). My teaching philosophies were heavily influenced by this psychology class because it was the first experience I had learning about children's development and the learning process. As I read about and discussed multiple theories that explain the way children learn and develop, I became better able to apply theories such as constructivism to my teaching practice. As a result, I developed the belief that pedagogy should be designed according to children's developmental stages and the processes that they use to acquire knowledge and skills.

Another one of my core teaching beliefs was that I must empower and affirm my students. I stated that self-efficacy is key to students' success; if a student believes that they are able to achieve a task, that mindset will make them much more likely to reach their academic goals. For my first three years of college, I worked as a classroom tutor. I spent multiple days a week in the same classroom and observed students' growth over the course of the academic year. This was my first extended experience on the teaching side of the classroom, and it heavily

influenced my identity as a teacher. In this school, a “growth mindset” was emphasized to both teachers and students. The growth mindset is the idea that brains are capable of change and growth, and those who are in the mindset that they can grow their understandings through challenge and mistake-making will be better able to learn (Boaler & Dweck, 2016). My tutoring experience was the first time I had ever heard of a growth mindset. I saw information about the idea through posters and bulletin boards on the walls of the school. However, I did not have an understanding of the research behind this idea or how I could apply it in the classroom. As I continued through college, growth mindsets slipped to the back of my mind. However, I heard the term again in a primary math methods class that I took as a college junior. This class prepares teachers to deliver math instruction to children in primary grade levels. The textbook used for this class, *Mathematical Mindsets*, was written by Jo Boaler and Carol Dweck, leaders in growth mindset research. As I read this text and discussed its ideas with my classmates, I had the background knowledge necessary to make sense of what a growth mindset is and how it can help students learn.

Another statement that I made before my internship was that learning should be enjoyable for both the teacher and the students. I have been taught by many dedicated and passionate professors with a clear passion for education. I believe that the attitude a teacher has toward their subject is sensed by their students and can be infectious. Teachers who are passionate about their subject and enjoy working with students create environments that make me excited to learn. Through my interaction with enthusiastic professors, I have grown a strong passion for education and inspiring a love of learning in others. I do not expect my students to love every subject or every lesson that I teach, but I do hope that I can help them explore their

passions and interests in school. Ultimately, I strive to develop a love of learning and curiosity about the world in my students.

In addition to noticing and writing about my teaching philosophy, I stated my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher prior to my internship. At the time, I wrote that one of my strengths was appreciating student diversity. I believe this strength comes from my experience interacting with children's literature. My first year of college, I was involved in a project in which I read and discussed multicultural literature with other pre-service teachers in the form of a book study. The books that I read illuminated cultures and perspectives that I was not previously aware of, and the conversations I had about these topics helped me develop an awareness and appreciation for diversity. Another one of my teaching strengths is guiding students' thinking with questions. My college professors have used guiding questions that allow me to explain my own thinking and remain active in my learning. This type of instruction has been effective with me, and I have observed its effectiveness with my peers and younger students as well. Since I view guiding questions and student inquiry as an effective teaching strategy, it has become a component of my teaching philosophy and manifests in my interactions with students. Another one of my teaching strengths is student engagement. I understand the importance of active learning, and I provide opportunities in my lessons for students to explore content and collaborate with others. I believe that student-driven learning keep students engaged in their work and helps them gain strong, relevant understandings of content. Engaging, student-centered curriculum is a key element of my teaching philosophy and is evident in the lessons I write.

As a developing teacher, I stated that my areas of weakness were confidence in my teaching self, differentiation of curriculum, classroom management. I have been concerned about my ability to teach effectively because I understand that effective instruction is complex. The



more that I learn about the learning process and teaching strategies, the more critical I am of my teaching abilities. I believe that some self-doubt is beneficial because it keeps me motivated to continue learning and seeking professional development. However, I also need to have enough self-confidence to feel comfortable taking risks and growing as a teacher. Differentiation is another aspect of teaching that I identified as a struggle. I know the importance of providing opportunities for success to every student, but I am unsure of my ability to meet the needs of diverse learners. Another area in which I hope to grow is classroom management. I have studied pedagogy and written many lesson plans, but I have minimal experience with managing a classroom. One of my fears before beginning my internship is not being able to manage the classroom well enough for my lessons to be effective. I anticipate that practicing teaching in an internship that provides me with guidance and opportunities for growth will help me improve in my weakest areas.

These philosophies, strengths, and weaknesses composed my teaching identity at the moment at which they were written. Writing about myself as an educator caused me to reflect and discern how my identity had been constructed. Which experiences had caused my teaching beliefs to develop? Where did my teaching identity come from? As I reflect on the statements I made about my teaching beliefs, I realize that my teaching philosophy was forming before I even knew that I would become a teacher. When I decided that I would become a teacher, I had no experience teaching others except for the many times I attempted to tutor my classmates. I had no training in education and no knowledge of education research. When I tried to help others learn a concept, I emulated the ways that I saw my teachers giving instruction. Subconsciously, my philosophy of teaching was a compilation of the strategies I had seen used by my own teachers. When I began studying pedagogy and education research in college, my teaching

beliefs expanded rapidly. All of the teaching jargon, theories, and strategies were new to me, and I absorbed what I learned, constructing it into a web of knowledge about teaching. Once I had heard the most general and foundational aspects of learning theory, my understandings continued to grow but at a slower pace. As my classes delved deeper into theory and pedagogy, I formulated a teaching philosophy – my ideas about teaching formed by my personal experiences and supported by the theories that I had studied. Once these beliefs had been formulated, they remained generally steady and solid, sometimes expanding or altering as I gained clarifying information. As I gained more experience studying education and applying my knowledge to teaching scenarios, my beliefs continued to solidify. I began taking classes that focused on teaching different subjects, such as math and literacy, and I observed and taught children in both of these subjects. I began to notice the same concepts and theories applying in both literacy and math situations. The teaching beliefs that I could apply in multiple classes and teaching experiences became deeply rooted in my teaching philosophy because I could confirm them in multiple areas. This stage of solidifying and clarifying my teaching beliefs was the stage that I feel I had reached when I began my research this semester. As I entered into my internship, I wondered how I, a pre-service teacher, would grow through my experience. I felt that a close look at my own personal and professional growth would help me become more aware of my identity as a teacher. I believed that knowing who I am and what I strive for as a teacher would help me become better able to select pedagogies that align with my philosophies, increasing my confidence in my efficacy. In order to monitor my ideas, experiences, and growth in this internship, I kept a journal of my teaching beliefs. I wrote in this journal continuously for three months of my internship. I also frequently stepped back from my role as a writer and took on the role of a more objective interpreter. I read my data, searching for themes and insights throughout

my writing, searching for patterns that would reveal my growth process. Through these methods, I was able to closely examine how I grew in my internship and what caused my teaching beliefs to be challenged, strengthened, and changed.

### **Findings**

My autoethnographic study led me to draw conclusions about my growth in my internship. I have identified the core teaching beliefs that currently compose my teaching identity. I have also drawn conclusions about how these beliefs were strengthened, challenged, and changed through my internship experience. In the following section, I present these findings and discuss the experiences that illuminated them.

#### ***Teacher Identity is Grown Through Reflection on Experiences and Beliefs***

As my internship comes to a close, I feel more confident in my teaching identity. Through my keeping of a purposeful and reflective journal, I have been able to explore and notice the ideas that are important to me as a teacher. As I interpreted the data that I had collected in this study, I noticed the appearance of common themes. Their consistent presence in my writing shows that these ideas are closely connected to the teacher identity that I am constructing. Therefore, I have identified these themes as my core teaching beliefs. In this section, I will describe these beliefs and connect them to my internship experiences. I will also discuss the process through which I have discerned my teacher identity.

In my journal, much of my writing uses a student-centered focus. When I write goals that I have for myself as a teacher, they are framed around my goals for the students. On the day before my internship began in August, I wrote down some goals that I had for the first day. I wrote, "My main goals are to be observant, get to know my students, and make them feel welcome and capable of success" (pg. 4). Though my internship is a professional development experience, my

goals were externally focused. However, I feel that this is appropriate because teaching is an interpersonal, service-oriented career. The goal of my professional growth is ultimately to help students succeed. This student-centered focus is consistently present in my writing. Nearly every time I wrote goals for myself as a teacher, they were connected to my goals for students. Some statements that I wrote are, "I want my students to strive for growth, not perfection", "I want my students to feel empowered as learners", and "I must give my students chances to develop their own ideas and passions" (pp. 12-15). These statements reveal that my impact on students is inseparable from my goals, beliefs, and identity as a teacher.

Another key focus of my writing is my goal of creating an engaging classroom. I want to bring vibrancy and fun into my classroom, fostering a love for learning in students and promoting their interest in various subjects. I currently hold this as a main component of my teaching beliefs, and this is evident in my writing. In September, I responded to the questions: "Who am I as a teacher? Who do I want to become?" The first thing that I wrote is that I strive to be engaging. I explained this idea further, stating that "I want my students to take an active role in their learning" and "I want my students to feel inspired by my enthusiasm and love of learning" (pg. 12). I believe that an engaging classroom is one that students enjoy being a part of; it is a place where students are excited to learn. I want to enjoy teaching, and I enjoy it most when my students are enjoying learning. As I reflected on my goal of student engagement, I realized this aspect of my teaching philosophy seems to have been inspired by my university professors. As I wrote in my journal, "my professors at OSU have given me real world experience...This made me personally invested and confident in my own ideas. I want to inspire my students in the same way" (pg. 12). My professors of education have shown an evident passion for their subjects and have provided me and my classmates with engaging opportunities

for exploring and interacting with content. I have been taught through methods such as inquiry-based learning and collaborative discussions. These methods allowed me to take an active role in the classroom. Instead of feeling like I was memorizing or absorbing information, I felt like an important member of a classroom community. I was learning from my own experiences and sharing my own ideas. Through this style of teaching, I have been fully engaged in my classes, and I have developed ideas and understandings that I proudly take ownership of. As I reflect on my experiences and my writing, I understand that my college learning experiences have not only taught me about teaching but inspired me to create a similar classroom environment for younger students.

As I have written in my journal, I hope to create a collaborative learning environment in my classroom. I believe that student collaboration benefits children in many ways, promoting both academic and social growth. In September, I wrote, "I want my students to feel comfortable disagreeing with someone, using reasoning to support an argument of their beliefs, and openly listening and interacting with an opposing side...I believe learning can occur through justifying your own ideas and learning from others' ideas (whether by opposing or accepting)" (pg. 15). In these statements, I described my goals for collaborative learning in my classroom. I formulated these goals for myself because I taught several lessons and mini-lessons in my internship that included a collaborative component. Every lesson I taught involved some sort of group discussion in which students were invited to share their ideas and questions about the concepts of the lesson. I believe that collaboration has become deeply ingrained in my pedagogy because I have had many positive experiences with it. I have read about Vygotsky's sociocultural theory many times in my classes, and I have participated in classes that revolved around collaboration and social learning. As I experienced the practice of sociocultural theory for myself in my

classes, I was able to connect the theoretical ideas to the context of my own learning. Since I could identify the benefits of collaboration in my academic life, I felt strongly that it could benefit my students. In my internship, my most positive and fulfilling teaching experiences revolve around the rich and productive discussions I orchestrated with my students.

These beliefs overlap and form the core of my teaching identity when connected. Through the process of writing and reflecting throughout my internship, I have become aware of my teaching identity. As I wrote in September, "Honesty [when writing and reflecting] helps me see when my beliefs have been strengthened or altered. When they are altered, I can reflect and see what beliefs have been left behind and what caused them to be challenged" (pg. 16). In this statement, I realized that when I notice and document a change in my beliefs, I am able to reflect and discern what experiences caused the change. This realization is helpful because I am now able to notice subtle changes in my beliefs and challenge myself more purposefully. In October, I wrote several entries about my teaching identity and developed conjectures about the identity-shaping process. During this time, I wrote, "My beliefs may form without my conscious awareness, but reflection helps me see myself and my beliefs, forming a teacher identity" (pg. 18). In this entry, I expressed an understanding that my beliefs often form subconsciously. I am constantly taking in new information, interacting with my observations, and adjusting my belief systems. As I actively notice and reflect on my growth, my mental processes become apparent and I am able to see the identity that I am constructing.

### ***Teacher Beliefs are Challenged when Dissonance is Created Between Beliefs and Observations***

There are many cases in my internship in which my teaching beliefs were challenged. Most of these challenges were subtle, but my close reflection on my growth helped me see that

my beliefs are challenged more frequently than I previously thought. There have been cases this semester where I felt my beliefs being rattled. Through my observations in the classroom and my discussions with other educators, I have seen new possibilities and perspectives that I did not previously consider. In the following paragraphs, I will describe two situations in which my beliefs were challenged in my internship.

During my internship semester, I am also taking several theory and methods classes at my university. One of these classes is devoted to exploring curriculum and its design. Prior to this semester, I rarely thought about the definition of curriculum. I knew it referred to what is taught in schools, and I associated it with lessons and textbooks. My considerations about curriculum stopped there. I thought to myself, "What else is there to know?" Therefore, when I started this class on curriculum, I assumed that it would refer to different styles of teaching and assist me and my classmates in making lesson plans. I was correct that it includes these things, but it is also a deeper exploration of curriculum and its definition.

The first time I remember my beliefs being sharply challenged in this class was in the second week of the semester, after reading and discussing one of the course's required texts. This text is the "Students as Curriculum" chapter from Christine Sleeter's *Un-Standardizing Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom*. This chapter describes curriculum as a dynamic concept with students and their cultures as its foundation. While I acknowledged and appreciated cultural diversity in the classroom, I did not previously think that culture could be so interwoven with curriculum. The reading and discussion of this text with my peers showed me that I do not know as much about curriculum as I originally thought. My experience in this class has continued to challenge me, and I have connected my questions and ideas about curriculum to my internship classroom. I have asked myself questions such as,

“What exactly is being taught in this classroom, both explicitly and implicitly?”, “What are we as teachers valuing and encouraging students to value?”, and “Do the students in this classroom affect the teaching?” Though I have been exploring these questions, I have not determined their answers. However, I intend to continue challenging my thoughts on curriculum and using my dissonance to consider new possibilities.

I have also been challenged in my professional development goals and my ideas about teaching and learning. Before my internship, I was highly concerned with my confidence and knowledge as a teacher. I held the idea that I should eventually feel like an expert teacher, know all there is to know about education, and feel totally confident in my teaching ability. I now know that these ideas are unrealistic, and perhaps they are not the goals I should be striving for. I thought this was the goal, but perhaps it isn't. My writings frequently mention teaching confidence, and I explored this concept in depth in September. I found myself nearing the end of my college education and still not feeling like I had answers to all of my questions about teaching. My reflection on this idea of confidence provoked these thoughts: “Will I ever feel like an expert? Should I? Or is it better to be always aware of my flaws and weaknesses? Do accomplished teachers still feel unsteady and incompetent in some areas?” At the time of this writing, my understanding of what it means to be an effective teacher was being challenged. Before this point, I assumed that I would eventually have solid answers to my questions about teaching. I assumed that, with enough training, I would be able to handle any teaching scenario with complete confidence. However, I have taught lessons that I felt confident in, and I have watched these lessons miss some of my students. There have been instances in which I attempted to convey ideas that I thought were easily accessible, and they simply did not “click” with every child. I have noticed that learning is much more complex and nuanced than I anticipated. There



is no one way to learn, and there is no one way to teach. While I can explore the learning process and adopt research-based pedagogies, I now understand that my goal as a teacher may not be to “know it all.” My new goal is to continuously reflect on and challenge myself, knowing that my teaching philosophy will be growing and adapting with me.

### ***Teacher Beliefs are Strengthened when Beliefs are Confirmed Through Experience***

One of the most satisfying experiences that I have had in my internship is the conformation and strengthening of my teaching beliefs. Throughout my journal and in my lesson plans and other assignments, I have seen some of my beliefs coming to the forefront of my work. Nearly all of the lessons I have taught this semester were inquiry-based, and I designed them to be engaging and interesting for my students. Through my internship experiences, my belief in engaging and inquiry-based learning has been strengthened. My goal of creating an engaging learning environment was inspired by my professor's teaching styles. For example, I have taken math classes that, instead of lecturing me on how math should be taught, allowed me to explore challenging math concepts in the way a child would. I was encouraged to ask questions and seek answers while being guided through explorations and discussions by my professors. These hands-on, investigative experiences gave me control over my own learning and made me interested in the content. As my professors taught, they made their methods known to me and my classmates. We were informed that the lessons were purposefully designed in a way that is research-based, active, and engaging. We were also taught how to plan and structure these types of lessons, and we were given the opportunity to practice writing and teaching lessons. Teaching these inquiry-based lessons in my internship classroom has been the most powerful method of strengthening my belief in this pedagogy. My teaching experience confirmed the beliefs that I had developed from my understanding of theory and my previous learning experiences. I

expected that my lessons would motivate students, generate interest in content, and increase students' enjoyment of learning. I was thrilled to see my beliefs being confirmed through my teaching experience. For example, I taught a science lesson that required students to use their understanding of engineering concepts to build models that would achieve various tasks. This lesson was generally open-ended, and I feared that my students might be overly dependent on teacher guidance. Instead, I saw my students excel in this lesson and exceed my expectations. Just as I hoped, students were self-sufficient, invested in their work, and eager to share their ideas with others. This positive teaching experience confirmed what I believed to be true about engagement and inquiry, strengthening my belief in these ideas.

Another aspect of my teaching philosophy that I frequently write about is collaboration in the classroom. Through my internship, I have found that a collaborative environment is possible in an elementary classroom. I previously had concerns about my ability to promote productive collaboration in the classroom. I feared that a talkative class may be too difficult to manage, and I worried that giving students the opportunity to speak freely may drive learning away from the intended objectives. However, I felt strongly enough about the benefits of collaboration that I endeavored to try it in my internship. I understood learning theories that claimed collaboration increases academic and social development, and I had positive experiences collaborating with my peers in my own classes. My prior knowledge and experience served as the basis for my belief in collaboration as an effective learning strategy, but my internship observations and implementations are what truly solidified this belief. Throughout my internship, I watched my mentor teacher develop an innately collaborative classroom environment. Students were seated in small groups, they were encouraged to talk to their classmates, and the importance of community was explained and emphasized to students. In this classroom, collaboration was not

an extra component or a distraction to student work. Instead, it was a natural and valuable part of the classroom environment. Seeing collaboration promoting student learning and being managed effectively reinforced my belief in the efficacy of this strategy and made me feel more comfortable implementing it in my lessons. Each of the lessons I taught in this classroom allowed for student discussion and idea sharing. For example, I used a math “quick draw” activity in which students are shown complex geometric figures for a few seconds and are instructed to develop a mental image of and draw the figures from memory. The students examine and draw the figures independently, but the most essential component of a quick draw is the discussion of strategies that follows the students’ drawings. When I used this activity, I asked students to share how they constructed their mental images in order to draw the figures from memory. The students were eager to share their ideas and strategies, and they listened intently to the ideas and strategies of others. As students explained their thoughts, I saw their classmates watching inquisitively. I saw some nodding their heads in agreement. I even observed some students taking notes on the statements of their peers. After seeing young students collaborate respectfully and productively in a well-managed classroom, I feel that my belief in the efficacy of collaborative learning has strengthened considerably.

### ***Teacher Beliefs are Changed when Dissonance is Relieved Through Accommodation***

There are some beliefs I held before my internship that have been challenged and changed through my experiences. Before entering into my internship, I believed that engaging, inquiry-based lessons alone would effectively teach content. I do still believe in the power of inquiry, but I now believe that there are other aspects of teaching necessary to promote student learning. In addition to engaging activities and lessons, students need individual practice of skills, a variety of assessments, and to discuss and reflect on their learning.

The causes of this change can be traced back to several of my internship experiences. For months, I have observed my mentor teacher planning and delivering instruction. Many of these lessons were engaging and inquiry-based. They were similar to lessons that I would write and teach, but they included components that I had not thought necessary before. For example, my mentor teacher used pre- and post-assessments that helped her guide her instruction. These assessments helped students know what was expected of them and helped them make learning goals for themselves. I also observed my mentor teacher teaching math concepts in collaborative, investigational lessons followed by individual practice. I had previously assumed that assessments and concrete practice were best used sparingly. I thought they were an “extra” component that could detract from teaching. However, this was not at all what I witnessed in this classroom. Contrary to my former belief, these practices did not take away anything from the exploratory and engaging lessons. Instead, they added to the teaching, making ideas more concrete to students and making understanding visible to the teacher.

Mid-semester, I wrote and taught an inquiry-based lesson on multiplication. I planned for my lesson to be an exploration of the concept because it was one of the first times that these students had seen multiplication in school. I gave students a contextualized conceptual problem to solve in multiple ways with a small group. I encouraged students to devise multiple strategies as they worked. After the lesson, I gathered students together for a discussion of learning in which students shared their strategies with others. I feel that this lesson went well and was an effective exploration of multiplication, but I received a piece of feedback from my mentor teacher that sparked a change in my ideas. While my mentor praised positive aspects of my lesson, she mentioned that it would have been useful to give some sort of post-assessment and/or individual practice for the students to complete after the lesson. I had observed her using these

practices in her teaching, but their purpose became apparent to me when I could apply it to my own teaching practice. I realized that my teaching strategies had merit, but could be more effective if expanded upon. Through the experience of teaching a lesson and observing a shortcoming in my teaching, I realized that an aspect of my lesson plan was ineffective. Therefore, my understanding of what makes an effective lesson was challenged. The lesson that I wrote did not accomplish all of the purposes I intended, so I knew that I must revise my lesson and adjust my understanding of lesson planning. Through the advice of my mentor teacher and my reflection on my teaching, my teaching beliefs were changed. While I previously believed that assessments and individual work were only supplementary to good lessons, I now understand them as necessary components of effective teaching.

I believe the area in which I have grown the most this semester is classroom management. Before my internship, classroom management was a somewhat foreign concept to me. I knew that it was important and that it would help my classroom run smoothly, but I did not know what it should look like or what an effective management strategy might be. Therefore, I relied on my elementary school memories and my assumptions of what a well-managed classroom should look like. I generally assumed that classroom management is best conducted through consistent, pre-determined consequences for behavior. I believed that students need consistency and accountability in order to feel safe and learn, and I believed that students need to know what is expected of them in the classroom. I still hold these beliefs about students' needs, but I have found that my previous classroom management ideas may not be the most effective way to develop the classroom environment I envision.

Through my internship, I have learned that classroom management is more than behavior management. My university course on classroom management, the professional development I

attended at my internship school, and the practices of my mentor teacher have given me insights to what classroom management truly is and what it looks like in practice. I have been taught that it is not a disciplinary system or a set of rules. Instead, it is the sum of procedures and expectations established that create a productive classroom environment. This idea of classroom management was different from what I had assumed classroom management is. The explanations of my professors, school faculty members, and co-teachers seemed to be logically sound, so I gladly chose to explore ideas of what a well-managed classroom is.

I previously believed that students need accountability and consistent expectations in order to demonstrate positive behavior. I also believed that the best way to hold students accountable was to have pre-established rules and consequences for rule breaking. I did not like the idea of punishing students, but I thought it was the only way to enforce positive classroom behaviors. This is not at all the type of classroom management that I observed in my internship. Early in the school year, the students worked together with teacher guidance to develop and agree upon class rules. Through modeling of expectations, students knew what behaviors were expected of them, and they seemed to truly care about following the rules they established. This classroom implemented consequences for behavior, but they were not pre-established. Instead of using rigid consequences for accountability, logical consequences were used to guide students into reasoning about their actions and demonstrating the established classroom expectations. I closely observed how my mentor teacher handled classroom management and student behavior, and I found that her management strategies created the type of classroom environment that I strive for. Ultimately, I want my students to be thoughtful, empathetic, and resilient people. As I reflected on situations in my classroom, I asked myself questions such as, "What sort of response or consequence would help this child learn from a mistake, mend a relationship, or build a life

skill?" As I continued to explore this question, I realized that a more rigid, authoritarian management style would not teach students the effects of their actions or help them change their behavior of their own accord. Through this observation and reflection on my beliefs, my understanding of what effective classroom management looks like has changed.

In each of these cases, I was faced with scenarios that contradicted beliefs that I held about teaching. I was left in dissonance as I realized that my ideas of teaching strategies would not create the learning environment that I intended. Fortunately, my internship allowed me to explore and challenge these ideas in a safe and mentored environment. When I detected issues in my teaching beliefs, I was able to observe my mentor teacher for ideas and ask for suggestions and insights. Through my observations and experiences, I was able to gain the information necessary to adjust my beliefs. I believe that my revised teaching strategies will be more effective in creating a productive learning environment for my students. I also expect that, as I continue my career, my beliefs will continue to be challenged and changed by my experience and self-reflection.

### **Implications**

Through this autoethnographic study, I have gained new insights about myself and my beliefs. I have also taken a glimpse inside the processes that shaped my beliefs during my internship. Conducting this study has shifted my perspective, making me a more purposeful and thoughtful reflector. I have grown in my ability not only to see my experiences but also to see how I grow in these experiences. As a whole, I have become much more aware of my identity and its dynamic nature. I intend to carry this reflective mindset with me throughout my life and career, always striving for self-awareness and growth. I believe this will help me maintain philosophies that I feel strongly about and that are closely linked to my identity. When I

consistently challenge and evaluate my beliefs, I will be thoughtful and adaptable while working to become a more effective educator.

This study has influenced me as a teacher, and I believe that it may positively influence readers – especially those involved with or interested in the field of education. This study may inspire practicing and pre-service teachers to reflect on themselves, their beliefs, and their growth. Those who strive to gain a stronger understanding of and elaborate on their teaching philosophies may be able to do so through reflective processes similar to the methods of this study. This study may also be of interest to those who mentor and/or monitor the growth of pre-service or practicing teachers. Mentors of teachers may gain insight about how a teacher develops through experience. This may help them provide learning guidance and present opportunities for reflection and growth.



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