JUST WHO DO I THINK I AM?: EXPLORING MY IDENTITY AS A NOVICE

ENVIRONMNETAL EDUCATOR IN AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SETTING

A THESIS

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Abstract

While concern for the environment has increased in recent decades, environmental education remains an underprioritized field of study in most U.S. schools, especially public and alternative schools. However, environmental educators can promote environmental literacy among students in a variety of contexts to help bring environmental education to educational settings in which it otherwise may not have been present. In attempt to help environmental educators better support environmental education, I investigate how I, as an environmental educator, can work to improve my educational practice using a self-study methodology with data sources including journal entries and a critical friend meeting. Findings focused on highlighting tensions that occurred between my teaching practice and the environmental content I taught, the context in which I taught, and the students whom I taught. These findings and subsequent practical implications demonstrate a progression in the development of my teaching practice, that other teacher educators and pre-service environmental educators may build upon to develop future early career environmental educators.

Introduction

You're 19 years old and the credit equivalent of a junior in high school. You haven't been to class in the last four days because the busses aren't running, and your mom needed the car for work. You head towards your first period, expecting to see the usual: a kind man, well past retirement age, calmly sitting behind a desk directing students open laptops and complete online assignments. Today, however, someone with zealous eyes and a t-shirt that reads, "You are special" greets you at the classroom door and asks you your name. You glance past them, towards your peers, trying to ask them with your eyes if this is supposed to be happening. At the sound of the bell, the stranger saunters to the front of the room and proudly introduces themself as an environmental educator and student-teacher, who would love for you to explore and learn about the field of environmental education with them. What is this person talking about? Why are *you* getting *environmental* education from *them*? Such was a potential perspective of students I taught as a novice environmental educator initiating my self-study project. This self-study explores my instructional experiences as a novice environmental educator in an alternative high school classroom.

Environmental education (EE) seeks to provide the global population with environmental literacy, or the knowledge and skills necessary to solve and prevent environmental problems (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976). Still, most states in the U.S. lack standards for environmental education, and many secondary schools see EE as an easier, more elective science alternative than chemistry or physics (Ferreira et al., 2012; Hart, 2010). In addition, pre-service educators are sometimes placed in academic contexts that do not parallel their own educational experiences, though the influence of their experiences in school affects the delivery of their instruction (Ng, 2010; Schmidt, 2013). In an academic landscape that often neglects EE and

places pre-service educators in unfamiliar educational settings, pre-service environmental educators must navigate fostering environmental literacy among students in a variety of contexts, including alternative, secondary settings.

Pre-service educators can employ self-study methodology to help them navigate the complexities of teaching by helping them better understand themselves in relation to their role as an educator (Dinkelman, 2003; Hamilton et al., 2008; Laboskey, 2004). This self-study investigates my experience student-teaching about environmental education at a public alternative high school. Over the course of three months, I worked with ninth through twelfth graders to complete a portfolio that demonstrates their understanding of the five themes for environmental educators according to the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education (CAEE), the state where in this study takes place. The study works to examine how I, a pre-service environmental educator, could use literature informed practices to alleviate discomforts with tensions that arose at my student teaching placement. Specifically, I use daily practicum journal entries and a critical friend conversation as data to analyze interactions between EE content, an alternative high school placement, and my developing teacher identity. Connecting the experiences of being a novice educator, an environmental educator, and an alternative educator intrigued me, as my niche is a combination of all three. The implications of this work seek to support other pre-service and/or alternative environmental educators as they manage their unique roles.

Literature Review

This thesis seeks to use education literature to inform practical implications for the alternative, environmental, pre-service educator. As such, this section will explore the literature that can support environmental educators through unique aspects of the context of a student

teaching placement, the challenges of teaching their EE content, and the development of their teaching practice. I frame this literature review around the major themes that have informed my evolution as a pre-service teacher: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Responsive Teaching, Environmental Education, and Teacher Identity Development.

Context: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Responsive Teaching

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings published a revolutionary paper "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," that highlighted the need for educators to connect their classroom to the world students experience outside of it. Ladson-Billings suggests that educators are accustomed to injecting small elements of students' culture into the classroom, rather than inserting relevant education into an existing cultural setting, resulting in students feeling disconnected from their curriculum. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) attempts to make the classroom environment so visibly relevant to students' lives that they choose to pursue academic success.

A related concept to CRP is Culturally Responsive Teaching, or CRT. CRT focuses on fostering a classroom culture that welcomes and supports students as they challenge themselves academically and encourages teachers to create a learning community that centers students' needs. Where CRP works to make classroom content relevant to students, CRT seeks to make the classroom environment more suitable for students' needs to support academic success. This requires educators to use their understandings of students' backgrounds to establish an appropriate classroom environment. While many student teachers are eager to implement culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies in theory, there are several aspects of teaching out of the student-teacher's control. Such aspects as frequent student absences and an alternative

learning environment are examples of circumstances that require student teachers to adopt more creative strategies for implementing CRT.

In Conversation with Frequent Absence

School attendance rates are the result of a variety of cultural components, as both school and non-school factors contribute to how frequently students can attend their school (Chang et al., 2019). As a response to cultural influences that prevent students from coming to school, current literature explores the potential for hybrid virtual classrooms. Hybrid virtual classrooms are classrooms that use technology to allow remote students to experience learning activities either synchronously or asynchronously with their in-person classmates (Hew & Brush, 2006; Raes, 2019). Such classrooms allow students who struggle to get to school, such as those with chronic illness, to experience education in the context of their lived experience, which is consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy (Klunder et al., 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zydney et al., 2018). In addition, hybrid virtual classrooms respond to the cultural needs of students by increasing the amount of time that they can connect to their peers and access classroom materials, in agreement with the practice of culturally responsive teaching (Vavrus, 2008; Zydney et al., 2018).

In Conversation with Older Students

CRP and CRT also serve as excellent frameworks when educating adults. Raymond Wlodkowski (2004) describes effective methods for motivating adult learners using his Motivational Framework. The framework includes 1) establishing inclusion, 2) developing attitude, 3) enhancing meaning, and 4) engendering competence, all of which help adult learners feel engaged in the classroom. Establishing inclusion relates to CRT's practice of creating a

welcoming classroom environment. CRP helps students develop healthy attitudes towards school and enhance the meaning behind content by making the content relevant to students.

Relatedly, in 1984, Malcolm Knowles developed his theory of andragogy, or the practice of teaching adult learners. He offers six characteristics of the adult learner that contribute to their success in their adult education:

1. The Need to Know: Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. The decision to be coached is a choice of the individual, [which is] a self-driven initiative.

2. Self-concept: As a person matures his/her self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being. Coaching seeks self-awareness and acceptance.

3. Experience: As a person matures s/he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. Coaching provides the opportunity to evaluate what we have learned, what we should retain or change, and what we could learn.

4. Readiness to learn. As a person matures his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles. Coaching inspires the development of new skills and recognition of a full range of options.

5. Orientation to learning. As a person matures his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness. Coaching encourages a worldview, embracing new opportunities for continuous growth.

6. Motivation to learn: As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal. Coaching embraces life-long learning and self-coaching. (Maddalena, 2015, p. 4)

The first characteristic, "The Need to Know," highlights the requisite relevance that motivates adult learners. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that curricular relevance connects students to their learning experience and bridges the gap between school and the outside world. In addition, the third characteristic, "Experience," notes the importance of allowing adult learners to acquire learning experiences that will be relevant to their goals outside of school. Wlodkowski's (2004) framework suggests that when students see the connection between their curriculum and their lives outside of school, they are more motivated to pursue academic success. Accordingly, effective methods for motivating and educating adult learners are consistent with CRP.

Content: Environmental Education

Concerned with the new global perception of abundance and the environmental and social consequences of the growth the world experienced in the 1960s and early 1970s, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) addressed environmental education in 1975 by hosting the International Environmental Workshop in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, from which a new framework for EE emerged: The Belgrade Charter (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The Belgrade Charter states that the goal of EE is:

To develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, p. 3).

Using the Belgrade Charter as a foundation, the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education developed five themes to evaluate environmental educators (Archie et al., 2005) as outlined in Table 1.

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning theory asserts that learners and learning communities construct knowledge through learning experiences, and therefore no knowledge exists outside of the meaning the learner assigns to an experience (Hein, 1991). Hence, true learning requires students to construct meaning that relates to information as they engage in a learning activity, rather than just recall rote facts. By its nature, EE content requires teachers to engage in constructivist learning theory because EE works to instill more than just "knowledge," but also "skills, attitudes, motivation, and commitment" (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976), p. 3). The themes for environmental educators include verbs like, "embrace," "understand," "build," "enable," "engage," "foster," and "evaluate," all of which require learners and educators to do more than just remember facts (Table 1).

Constructivist learning is student-centered, because it considers how the learner experiences the lesson, not just the content being taught (Hein, 1991). However, students generally find assigning meaning to their content challenging and prefer a lesson that they can easily reproduce on an exam (Lord, 2008). Consequently, some students are tempted to disengage from EE content because of its constructivist nature. Still, there are pedagogical strategies that potentially ease discomfort with the challenge of constructing new knowledge in environmental education. Consequently, teachers are tasked with employing strategies that illuminate a clear path to learning and knowledge construction.

Table 1

CAEE Themes for Environmental Educators

Theme	Description
Environmental Literacy	Environmental educators possess the knowledge and skills associated with environmental literacy. Environmental educators should not only possess the competency to help their learners achieve these objectives but also embrace the *spirit of environmental literacy* by modeling it in their own endeavors.
Foundations of Environmental Education	Environmental educators have a basic understanding of the goals, theory, practice, and history of the field of environmental education. This knowledge provides a solid foundation on which educators can build their own practice.
Professional Responsibilities of the Environmental Educator	Environmental educators understand and accept the responsibilities associated with practicing EE. Environmental educators maintain consistent and high standards for instruction and professional conduct.
Planning and Implementing Environmental Education	Environmental educators combine high-quality education with the unique features of environmental education design and implement effective instruction. Environmental educators enable learners to engage in inquiry and investigation, especially when considering environmental issues that are controversial and require learners to seriously reflect on their own and others' perspectives. Proper preparation should enable environmental educators to provide the interdisciplinary, place-based, hands-on, investigative learning opportunities that are central to environmental education. Environmental educators foster an environment such that student interactions are conducive to learning.
Learner Assessment and Program Evaluation	Environmental educators possess the knowledge, abilities, and commitment to make assessment and evaluation integral to instruction and programs. Proper preparation should give environmental educators tools for assessing learner progress and evaluating the effectiveness of their instruction.

Teachers can focus on intentional scaffolding, especially for writing, as well as lesson planning strategies like Understanding by Design (McTighe & Wiggins, 1998) to help lead students to success.

In Conversation with Understanding by Design

In 1998, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe published their book *Understanding by Design*, changing the way classroom teachers plan instruction. Understanding by Design is a framework that encourages instructors to use a three-step process for lesson planning: 1) identify desired results, or select a learning objective or outcome for students 2) determine assessment evidence, or decide how students will demonstrate that they have met the learning outcome, and 3) plan learning experiences and instruction, or plan the activities that will take place in the classroom to help students demonstrate their achievement of the learning objective (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). This framework works well with constructivist learning theory because, by determining desired outcomes prior to desired learning activities, it focuses on how the learner's experiences will help them construct knowledge.

In Conversation with Writing Scaffolding

Writing about content is one way of practicing knowledge construction and writing assignments have long served as opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning (Bryson & Scardamlia, 1991). However, when students struggle with the writing process, it can inhibit their ability to express their ideas. As such, I review the literature surrounding strategies for writing instruction. Pre-writing is the process by which students decide on a topic, audience, and purpose (Marra & Marra, 2000). Studies have shown that when teachers teach students how to prewrite, rather than forgoing a lesson on

the prewriting process and allowing students to write as soon as they receive an assignment, students perform better on their writing assignments (Goldstein & Carr, 1996; Allen, 1989; Sawkins, 1971). However, Sadoski et al. (1997) found that prewriting activities were only significantly effective for students in lower grades and had a minor effect on middle schoolers. The study attributed this decline in learning gains from pre-writing to the general, predictable decline in learning gains that comes with age, but further research could be conducted to investigate better strategies for older learners.

Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) might serve as an effective strategy for older learners in their writing. SRSD teaches goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement in combination with six stages of teaching writing: 1) explicitly teach content knowledge, 2) define and discuss a writing strategy, its purpose and its benefits, 3) model the strategy for students, 4) help students memorize the steps of the strategy, 5) support and scaffold students as they master the strategy, and 6) encourage students to use the strategy with little or no supports (Graham & Perin, 2005). Baker et al. (2009) found that SRSD is an evidence-based practice, as defined by Gersten et al. (2005), based on both group and single-subject studies.

In addition to pre-writing and SRSD, there are many other strategies for facilitating writing instruction. Bryson and Scardamlia (1991) explore effective writing instruction strategies for "at-risk" learners. They describe working to change students who explain and recall content in writing into students who construct new meaning in relation to the content. They call this transition moving from a student as a "knowledge-teller" to student as a "knowledge-transformer." In addition, students should be given ample exposure to exemplary writing after which they can model their own prose. Bryson

and Scardamlia (1991) also advise helping students see how expert writers think. Often, the thought process of a good writer remains invisible to students, and as a result, they do not know the necessary steps to produce expert writing. Finally, Bryson and Scardamlia (1991) suggest giving voice and visibility to "at-risk" students by expanding the educator's definition of literacy. They cite using more relevant writing tasks (such as texting and writing songs or raps) as a scaffold for more complex tasks.

Teacher: Professional Identity

Teachers' professional identities are generally understood as a perception of how a teacher sees themself, in combination with the roles society expects them to play, and how well they believe they play them. Pre-service teachers work to develop their professional identity as they enter their career in education, but professional identities are complex, and their development is ongoing throughout one's teaching career (Beijaard et al., 2003). Due to its close relationship to the roles that teachers play, emerging teacher archetypes can inform and promote examination of teacher identity. Teacher identity also includes intersections between teachers' self-perceptions, perspectives on teaching and learning, and the pressures of their educational context (Beijaard et al., 2003; Rouhotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). Pressures of teaching in combination with ongoing career development require thriving teachers to demonstrate remarkable emotional regulation and control (Lee, 2019; Yin & Lee, 2011). Accordingly, the following section explores how teacher archetypes and emotional investment relate to teacher identity.

In Conversation with Archetypes

Alison King (1993) transformed how educators conceptualized teaching by illuminating the difference between being a "Sage on the Stage" or a "Guide on the Side." Where the Sage

plays a preacher's role, proclaiming facts before students as they diligently work to memorize the information, the Guide subscribes to a more constructivist approach and walks beside students as they assign personal meaning to content. Similarly, Clifford Mayes (1999) describes components of a teacher's identity by assigning them archetypes. He describes one archetype as "The Student as Archetypal Hero and Teacher as Archetypal Sage" (p. 7), where the educator encounters a curious hero on their journey and considers themself a sage who must deliver the hero to true meaning. Such archetypes contribute and relate to teacher professional identities. For example, the hero and sage archetype considers the teacher in relation to their students (the heroes) in the same way that one's professional identity describes their self-perceptions in relation to their context. In addition, Mayes's (1999) archetypes are not prescriptive, meaning educators may embody some elements of an archetype without being confined to it, which is consistent with teacher identity being continuously developed over the course of their career.

In Conversation with Emotional Investment

Teaching is an emotionally taxing career that often requires tremendous emotional investment from those pursuing it (Lee, 2019). Lee (2019) argues that the process of hiding one's own emotions and instead displaying more situation-appropriate emotions is a common emotional labor task for teachers. Yin and Lee (2011) found that Chinese teachers generally adhered to four rules to govern their emotions: 1) commit to teaching with passion, or demonstrate commitment to and joyfulness in your work to your students 2) hide negative emotions, or avoid displaying any disturbed emotions in the classroom as a professional requirement 3) maintain positive emotions, or display positive emotions even when those emotions are not felt to preserve a sense of joy in the classroom, and 4) instrumentalize emotion to achieve teaching goals, or create an emotional climate in the classroom that is conducive to

content, such as big gestures when exciting information is revealed or a solemn demeanor when discussing emotionally heavy content. Since teacher identity relates to teachers' perceptions of themselves within a context, teachers' emotional displays in response to what happens in the classroom can affect their teacher identity.

Chang (2009) appraises teacher burnout and explores causes and mitigative and preventative measures. Findings suggest that developing effective coping strategies help teachers enjoy and sustain their career. Chang (2009) offers two types of coping: emotion-focused and task-focused. Named appropriately, emotion-focused coping refers to teachers' ability to regulate negative emotions in response to unchangeable circumstances, whereas task-focused coping refers to teachers' ability to cope with a negative circumstance by working to improve it. For teachers, emotion-focus coping might include exercise, meditation, journaling, or therapy, and task-focused coping might look like contributing to school initiatives one values or advocating for larger change in school administration (Chang, 2009). Finding ways to cope with the challenges of a career in education helps teachers have a better self-perception, in turn fostering positive development for their professional identity (Chang, 2009; Rouhotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). It also helps teacher sustain their career, which again contributes to teacher identity development because professional identities evolve over time.

Purpose

While research on the topics of alternative educational settings, environmental education, and teacher identity is evident, there is less research available on the tensions that appear among these topics. Using the qualitative research practice of self-study, I sought to understand ways to improve my teaching practice in relation to my experience as a novice, my content in EE, and my placement at an alternative high school.

Methods

Site Description

  This study took place in a public, urban alternative high school (AHS). According to the school website, 95 percent of AHS students are at risk of not graduating from a traditional high school. All students must complete an application to attend AHS, and other schools in the district often support the application process for students who have been expelled from their school. AHS enrolls students ages 14 through 20. AHS had a 72 percent attendance rate in the 2021-2022 school year (Colorado Department of Education, 2022). There is a school-wide no homework policy, in which teachers are expected not to assign homework, but students are expected to complete classwork they do not finish at home. The science curriculum at AHS is primarily delivered via EdPuzzles, a video learning software in which students watch a short video and then answer a multiple-choice or open-ended question before moving on to the next short video.

Context

  I taught two classes with approximately 20 students in each class, but attendance varied daily, sometimes with as little as five students present. I was supervised by a host teacher, Mr. A, who allowed me to enter his classroom and teach. I taught about EE, and I designed my lessons based on the goal of students producing a portfolio that would demonstrate their understanding of the five themes of EE as defined by the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education (CAEE): Environmental Literacy, Foundations of Environmental Education, Professional Responsibilities of the Environmental Educator, Planning and Implementing Environmental Education, and Learner Assessment and Program Evaluation (Archie et al., 2005). Well

completed portfolios had the potential to be submitted to the CAEE for apprentice certification as an environmental educator.

Positionality Statement

Pre-service teachers' experiences as a student can influence their practice as an educator (Ng, 2010; Schmidt, 2013). Thus, I seek to describe my educational experiences with this positionality statement, as those experiences influence my practice. I attended a predominantly white, wealthy, suburban, and well-resourced high school in the western suburbs of Minneapolis. I worked up to 30 hours a week while in high school, and I received free school lunch every year. I presented with my gender assigned at birth (as a cis woman) all throughout middle and high school, although that presentation has changed with age. I look white and carry the privileges associated with looking white. English was my first language, and I have been privileged to study Spanish and Portuguese and achieve fluency in both languages. From middle to high school, I was encouraged to become an educator. I loved going to school, and despite being a first-generation college student, I never questioned pursuing post-secondary education. A full scholarship allows me to attend my post-secondary institution.

Self-Study Approach

Since AHS was an educational context in which I had never taught or learned, I selected a self-study methodology to align my teaching identity with the needs of my students. Dinkelman (2003) notes that self-study helps educators find their teacher identity in educational contexts outside of their lived experiences. The process requires deconstructing and reconstructing my teacher identity while constantly striving to improve (LaBoskey, 2004). The self-study methodological approach requires a researcher to examine their identity, actions, and thoughts, as well as relate the self to elements outside of the self (Hamilton et al., 2008). The

self-study process, when applied to teacher education, focuses on exploration of the self through personal experiences, while the results seek to both inform the self and other pre-service educators (Hamilton et al., 2008). Self-study seeks to help educators examine how they relate to their teaching practice by helping the educator understand themselves (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This aligns with Feldman's (2003) argument that improving one's teaching practice necessitates improving the conception of the teacher identity, so the existential component of self-study is critical (Feldman, 2003). Self-study pushes researchers and educators to generate critical questions about their practice and challenge existing perspectives, rather than affirm them (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Data Collection

I primarily collected data in practicum journals, in which I reflected on my daily experiences in the classroom. The journal entries were supported and informed by Mr. A, my host teacher. Mr. A and I had critical and reflective conversations daily following my teaching. He provided insight into my strengths and areas for improvement, and his comments heavily informed my practicum journal entries. While my practicum journal entries were informed by conversations with Mr. A., the conversations were not recorded or analyzed. These conversations were critical for the validity of the self-study, as self-study is an interactive and collaborative process of improvement (Laboskey & Richert, 2015). Before completing each journal entry, I posed three questions to myself: What worked in the classroom? What did not work in the classroom? How could I improve both what worked and what did not? I also allowed myself to write about other notable experiences in the classroom that day.

I also engaged in critical friend conversations regarding my classroom experience as another form of qualitative data collection because multiple qualitative methods lend validity to

self-study (Laboskey & Richert, 2015). I consulted Maddison Schink, a Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education (CAEE) master-certified environmental educator and fellow Colorado College student. Schink ran a similar EE lesson series at a public alternative high school in the area while I was teaching at AHS. She worked to question how my identity relates to the context, as well as how to use my identity to overcome the challenges I faced as an educator in this context. While the timing of the conversations did not allow me to implement conversational outcomes in the classroom, they were an important part of reflecting on my teacher identity and how it changed over the course of my time in the classroom.

Data Analysis

I coded daily practicum journals and transcriptions of critical friend conversations using an open, grounded theory coding process (Saldaña, 2021). I looked for common themes among entries (Saldaña, 2021). The coding process focused on highlighting questions about and conflicts among my teacher identity, my student-teaching placement, and the student body with which I worked. Initially, I created 70 open codes. I then used second-level axial coding to organize existing, related codes into broader categories that accounted for 12 sub-themes. I used thematic coding to organize the subthemes into three more encompassing themes that would go on to inform the results and discussion of this paper. I re-analyzed codes following each step in the coding process to confirm correct placement. Misplaced codes were re-examined in the context of the journal and then re-coded or placed under a more appropriate existing code.

Findings and Interpretations

In this section, I explore three tensions between elements of my student teaching: intersections between Teacher and Context, or myself and the school at which I was teaching; between Students and Content, or my students and what I wanted them to learn; and between

Table 2

Findings Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example Entry
Teacher and Context	Admin	I had to get special permission to let the students outside, or so I thought. I emailed the principal ahead of time and made a huge deal out of it, only for them to tell me that it would be perfectly fine for the students to go outside. I was slightly frustrated by this because it had been explained to me that we were not able to go outside for safety reasons -- they wanted to preserve the school's single point of entry. That ended up being not a strict rule. If I would have known I would have administered a lot more of these lessons outside or allowed for more outside activity.
	Structural Issues	I am also starting to realize that absences are going to be a much bigger issue than I originally anticipated.
Students and Content	Curriculum	When it comes to science, especially at this level, the curriculum is often focused on the retention of scientific information (as much as I would like it to be more about critical analysis). The retention of such information does not require as much differentiation, as it is simply either knowing a fact or not knowing it.
	Student Affect	Many of them struggled to see--or struggled to show me that they--saw how their skills might relate to the field of environmental education.
	Student Preparation	Looking back, I think my students liked this subject matter because they felt like they had more background knowledge on it.
	Student Resistance	I re-wrote the rubric in more student friendly language to help students understand it, but they still don't want to read it.
Teacher and Students	Failures	I tried my best to make it relevant to students by explaining what they could do with this certification and what it might mean for them. it did not land. Students looked at me like, "who is this chick and why does she think she's allowed to tell me this certification is going to help me."
	Pathways to Success	I think I just need to understand that as much I know I can relate to these students, my job is not to relate to them. My job is to teach them.
	Teacher Affect	It was really hard on me, emotionally, just to put myself in the place every day where students were ignoring me or asking me what I was doing there.
	Teacher Assumptions	As a result, most students are used to watching a video and responding to multiple choice questions, so they are out of practice with the task of having to read or write something.
	Teacher Prior Experiences	I thought because I had designed so many wonderful lesson plans in the past that I would be able to design a strong curriculum that could support these high schoolers through this project.
	Teaching Strategies	I tried to use lines and colors to help my students keep track of where I wanted their lines of thinking to go and keep track of questions that they might not have to answer or should really pay attention to depending on their lessons. I was really trying to be supportive of learners who might not be as comfortable with just plain written text.

Teacher and Students, or between my instructional practice and the instructional needs of my students. Each section seeks to describe and analyze the tension as it appeared at AHS, and then explore practical implications as they relate to current scholarship. These tensions were the 3 major themes under which I organized my findings (Table 2). I wrote the following exploration of strengths and challenges in my teaching practice with the hope that other novice educators might find my experiences helpful in developing their practice.

Teacher and Context

I had never learned nor taught for an extended period in a context like AHS, and as a result, I was presented with unexpected challenges. I struggled to facilitate group and long-term work due to frequent absences and had to adjust my teaching style to cater to older students enrolled at AHS. This section explores how novice teachers can adjust their classroom practice to accommodate unique aspects of their student-teaching placement, especially those aspects that novice teachers may not be able to control.

Absence

Chronic absence rates made group and continuous work challenging and prevented students from completing assignments on time. I struggled to find systems for functional, collaborative work when I was unable to anticipate which members of groups would be present each day. I was challenged to determine how novice educators can facilitate productive, continuous work when some or most students attend class sporadically.

Absence and Group Work. Frequent absences made completing group work challenging, because when students started an assignment as a group, it was possible that their peers would not be present to finish it. For example, when I planned to have students work in the same groups two days in a row, I wrote, "I had them plan their lessons in certain groups but I'm

not confident that everyone in every group will show up again tomorrow." My inability to anticipate the number of students present on a given day became an organizational challenge because group size affects how knowledge is constructed in group work (Burke, 2011; Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011). Thus, instructors use groups of different sizes because an ideal group size could change based on the activity at hand. Large group sizes increase the potential for introducing new ideas and perspectives but also present a greater amount of communication lines that can hinder productivity (Csernica et al., 2002). I struggled to facilitate group work with varying group size needs and student needs. At one point, I reflected that:

> It's difficult to differentiate for differing group-work needs because of the absence rates at AHS. I've thought about working out systems to have consistent groups of groups of two, three, and four that students become familiar with to use for different activities, but the inconsistencies in attendance make that almost impossible. Even if I did have a good idea of who liked to work alone and who liked to work in groups, I wouldn't have consistent group numbers because attendance is so variable.

An educator could simply allow students to choose their own groups or randomly assign present students to groups, but instructor-assigned groups tend to perform better (Felder & Brent, 2001). Instructor selection allows consideration of the needs of those in the group by grouping students with mixed ability levels, knowledge bases, and lived experiences (Burke, 2011). However, the 72 percent attendance rate at AHS makes such strategic grouping complicated, as, for example, five pre-mediated groups of four students could easily turn into two groups of four, a group of three, and two groups of two.

Absence and Continuous Work. Absence issues also made it challenging to facilitate work over time. This should be a major consideration when attempting to launch a cumulative curriculum in schools with chronic absence rates. I express my frustrations with time loss due to

absence in my practicum journal: "Students also aren't used to being assigned homework, which means that if a student loses a day due to absence, it feels like it is unlikely that I will be able to make it up with them." This presented problems when the current day's assignment directly related to the assignment for the next day.

While a student teacher cannot directly solve the problem of chronic absences, administrators and school communities should use multifaceted, community-wide supports to help students attend schools, as well as find ways to operate within chronic absence prior to its mitigation. Preventing absence requires investigating both school and community factors to identify and address the causes of absence, which is often outside of the job description for a novice or student-teacher (Chang et al., 2019). Still, novice classroom teachers can work to accommodate students who struggle to attend school.

Absence: Practical Implications. Unfortunately, there is no denying that accommodating frequent absences increases teacher workload because it requires more organization (Raes et al., 2019). Although it necessitates significant effort by teachers, there is growing research on realistic ways that teachers can work to accommodate students who struggle to attend school (Hew & Brush, 2006; Klunder et al., 2022; Raes, 2019; Zydney, et al., 2018).

Teachers have reported that for students with chronic illnesses, hybrid virtual classrooms have helped students who are frequently absent get through their predominantly in-person courses (Klunder et al., 2022). In fact, teachers noted that continuity issues were one of the biggest factors that helped them decide to use hybrid virtual classrooms (Klunder et al., 2022). A strategic hybrid virtual classroom could help to alleviate group work stress caused by absences if students still have access to one another's work outside of the classroom. However, there has yet to be a defined best practice in the implementation of such classrooms (Rehn, 2018). One of the

most challenging components of implementing a hybrid classroom is learning how to operate educational technology to maximize student potential, and lack of technical knowledge was a barrier reported in technological classroom integration studies with 23% frequency (Hew & Brush, 2006). EdPuzzles are easy to assign and make content accessible to students outside of the classroom, but they do not challenge students beyond multiple-choice responses. Thus, pre-service and novice educators should devote time to developing educational technology skills by exploring tools like Canva, Canvas, PowerSchool, Schoology, and mastering those that work best for them and their classroom. In addition, student-teachers are often limited by the technological resources at their student-teaching placement. Thus, pre-service educators should also take care to communicate with supervising instructors about the technological tools used school-wide, as hybrid instruction is more effective when it is implemented on a school or district wide scale (Raes, 2019).

When selecting technology to use to support frequently absent learners, opting for simple and consistent interfaces is most beneficial to students (Zydney, et al., 2018). That is, instructors need not link a FlipGrid that relates to a Kahoot! to their decorative Canvas page for every lesson. Rather, they should develop a straightforward technology routine for both in-person and virtual learners. Instructors might also assign students roles, making a student responsible for notifying the teacher when a virtual chat goes unanswered or troubleshooting weak internet connections (Zydney et al., 2018). This helps alleviate instructor workload and allows students to take responsibility for their classroom environment.

Older Students

AHS is a credit recovery school, so it enrolls older students (ages 18-20) working to recover credits and finish high school. I noted in my journals that, in my class, I felt my older students were particularly disengaged:

> By the age of 18, after years of being told they don't perform sufficiently in school, are they going to be interested in reengaging for their final semester of their academic career because I have a mildly interesting lesson plan?

When I write, "years of being told they don't perform sufficiently in school," I attempt to recognize that adult high school students often carry challenging histories with the classroom, often born of factors outside their control (Martin, 1987; Sum, 2009; Quigley et al., 2006).

While there exists research on adult learners (Knowles, 1984: Maddalena, 2015; Ross-Gordon, 2003; Taylor & Trumpower, 2014) there is less research available on adult learners in the high school classroom, where some of their peers are as young as 14. In Taylor and Trumpower's (2014) study, a teacher shares,

> What I have noticed is that some of the younger students who are back in the adult high school program after a year or two of dropping out, have a hard time with developing a support group or social network with my older students (p. 8).

AHS culture could be experiencing something similar, where older students who are still in high school six years after starting have a hard time developing meaningful social support from their younger peers. Though I lament, "I feel ridiculous trying to explain to legal adults that you need to at least behave professionally, if not kindly towards the people who work at your school," the teacher in Taylor's and Trumpower's (2014) study issues the reminder that these "legal adults" are often without social support, which may influence their comfort level and behavior in the classroom.

Older Students: Practical Implications. Novice teachers in credit recovery classrooms are tasked with catering to the differing needs of adult students. Taylor and Trumpower (2014) explored conditions for engagement at an all-adult high school in Canada and presented their findings within Wlodlowski's Motivational Framework, which includes 1) establishing inclusion, 2) developing attitude, 3) enhancing meaning, and 4) engendering competence (Wlodlowski & Galbraith, 2004). Within this framework, a teacher in the study notes a few effective instructional strategies that support this framework, including integrating topics of conversation that arise outside of class into lessons, creating real-life scenarios in the classroom, creating work-placement credit options, and knowing every student's name.

Schink agrees that working to create a classroom culture comes before learning outcomes in a critical friend conversation:

> Klaers: It was tough, but I do think some of the positives is that I knew all of the students' names, and I think because of that, students learned each other's names.
>
> Schink: Yeah, good, and that's the impact that I was talking about. Regardless of Environmental Education knowledge, or skills, or behaviors, or outcomes, or whatever, the classroom culture gave a change of pace and let students know that education can look different than it does right now.

In addition to creating engaging conditions for adult learners, adult educators need to be prepared to offer culturally relevant curriculum and supports. Maddalena (2015, p. 4) offers six characteristics of adult learners based on Malcolm Knowles (1984) theory of andragogy: 1) The Need to Know, 2) Self-concept, 3) Experience, 4) Readiness to learn, 5) Orientation to learning, and 6) Motivation to learn. Adult learners are more likely to be pursuing education with specific career or life goals in mind, and considering Knowles theory of andragogy by adjusting curriculum content to help students meet those goals can help adult learners engage with school

(Maddalena, 2015; Soney, 2003). In addition, adult learners often have lifestyles and support systems that are less conducive to completing course work than the high schooler aged 14-18, and adult educators must prepare to communicate and problem solve with adult learners when situations arise that hinder their potential for academic success (Ross Gordon, 2003). Not only does a more flexible curriculum benefit adult learners to give them more control over managing their time, but it can also increase engagement. By leaving space to change some of the content covered in a curriculum, teachers of adult students give themselves an opportunity to make curriculum relevant to students.

Students and Content

By its nature, EE requires pupils to collaborate to construct and express knowledge, but collaboration and idea construction are challenging skills for the high schooler accustomed to EdPuzzles. The 1977 Tbilisi Declaration outlines the following goal: "To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment," suggesting that EE is meant to help young environmentalists form a tool kit that helps them construct environmental knowledge that improves the environment (UNESCO-UNEP, 1977). In addition, the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) outlines guidelines for excellent EE materials, including criteria like fairness and accuracy, skill building, and action orientation (NAAEE, 2021). Fairness alludes to students considering multiple perspectives, skill building requires students to practice something new, and action orientation suggests students engage in action other than traditional academic reading, writing, or completing worksheets (NAAEE, 2021). As such, EE brings a style of learning to the classroom that may be unfamiliar to a student who was previously engaged in more traditional schooling. This section explores how AHS

students related to the unique nature of EE curriculum and what novice environmental educators can do to ease the transition from note-taking and testing to participating and constructing environmental literacy.

Desire for Correct Answer

Environmental education encourages the construction of new ideas and perspectives surrounding the environment rather than achieving a single "correct" answer, but I found my students uncomfortable with not being deemed "right" or "wrong." When presented with open-ended assignments, students often grew frustrated with my unwillingness to present a final, correct perspective, when I was happy to leave them considering theirs and their classmates' thoughts. For example, I challenged my students to consider ideas that might fall under the five themes of the CAEE portfolio, hoping students would foster a better understanding of the themes by considering actions that best represent each. I write in my journal, "I wanted students to think critically about what they were matching and see if it made sense underneath different themes, but they seemed only interested in whether or not they had the 'correct answer.'" Most students commonly prefer teacher-centered instruction that entertains and informs, so when asked to think through complex problems or invent new ones, students often struggle to execute (Lord, 2008). Many teachers attest to students protesting the use of exam questions that ask them to apply content learned in class to a new scenario, arguing that they "didn't see this in class" (Lord, 2008).

Thus, I tried to highlight moments when constructivist assignments allowed for more opportunities for success. I attempted to emphasize that there were no wrong answers when helping students complete a creative assignment that asked them to reflect on their relationship to the environment:

I told [a student] and a few other students that this was supposed to be the "funnest," easiest assignment, and she told me, "You know what the 'funnest', easiest assignment is? EdPuzzles," referencing her affinity for the video and multiple-choice response questions.

Although my students groaned upon learning that there was no answer key for an assignment, I empathize with their disappointment. In my journal, I reflect on my experience in school facing discomfort with a similar situation.

The transition between having a correct answer memorized and constructing ideas on my own was difficult because I feared my ideas would be wrong. I didn't realize that it afforded me more opportunities to construct a correct answer.

Based on my reflection, it is evident that I can empathize with being put out by an assignment informed by constructivist learning theory. I felt that, when faced with an open-ended assignment, students were overwhelmed with the anxiety of not knowing exactly how to get a desired grade. Lord (2008, p. 71) recounts a similar experience with his college students:

[A student] had been encouraged by his classmates to convince me to return to a more traditional, teacher-centered style of delivering class information. I patiently listened as he laid out the class's reasons for wanting me to return to lecture; and I took the time to carefully explain why I didn't want to do that. Finally, frustrated that he wasn't going to get me to return to lecturing, he said, "Darn it, Professor. Just tell the class what we need to know to pass the course!"

College students in Lord's class were frustrated by being left without a clear path for earning their desired grade, likely considering the consequences of failing a course or being rejected from graduate school, so they worried more about their grade than the learning opportunities their professor was providing. My students had arguably higher stakes; some of my students were on their last chance, and if they did not pass their course, they could fail to earn a high school diploma, which could be contributing to their discomfort with constructivist learning.

Desire for Correct Answer: Practical Implications. Students' anxiety about having a clear path to success suggests that when assigning more open-ended tasks, teachers should carefully explain the criteria upon which the assignment will be evaluated. However, creating assignments with clear criteria that ask students to construct knowledge is a remarkably difficult task. A way to mitigate students' anxiety as they transition into knowledge construction is by using Understanding by Design to help outline a clear path to academic success in the curriculum. Using Understanding by Design's three-step framework: 1) identify desired results 2) determine assessment evidence, and 3) plan learning experiences and instruction, educators plan instruction by clearly defining a learning outcome and charting a course for that outcome (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). This framework shows students that they can trust you to assign learning tasks that are relevant to the assessment, therefore reducing the number of times students ask, "Will this be on the test?"

Additionally, novice teachers often feel the need to get their students back on the "right" train of thought as quickly as possible because they see confused students as a failure (Wilson, 1990). Novice teachers are often quick to judge a student as correct or incorrect, and "accept students' right answers as evidence of understanding and to see students' wrong answers as signs of confusion or carelessness" (Crespo, 2000, p. 162). Novice teachers can work to challenge their and their students' assumptions about correctness versus understanding by acknowledging the correct work that was done in the process of finding the "wrong" answer (Crespo, 2000). I could apply this in my classroom; a student submits a report that suggests we can manage the aridification of the American Southwest by allocating less water to farmers and more water to urban and suburban homes but does not explore the consequences of allocating less water to farmers. Rather than giving the feedback "Must add consequences of farmers having less water,"

I provide the feedback, "Great job exploring the positive consequences of allocating more water to homes. I challenge you to consider how you could use similar questioning to evaluate the consequences of taking water from farmers." This acknowledges the work the student has already done and reminds the students that they have demonstrated that they know how to do what I am asking.

Writing Challenges

Writing serves as a critical link between the student and the content they attempt to learn and construct knowledge around (Bryson & Scardamlia, 1991). Writers often find themselves learning as they write, an experience described by Henry Miller, author of *Tropic of Cancer*: "Writing, like life itself, is a voyage of discovery." As such, educators often encourage students to construct knowledge through writing. However, one of the most difficult aspects of moving students towards completing classwork was getting students to write down their thoughts in connection with the content.

Schink recounts her experiences implementing writing assignments at a similar school: "A lot of my students had so much anxiety about writing, so much anxiety. They were just like, 'I can't write this, it's too many words!'" Anxiety surrounding writing prevents students from easily creating comprehensible writing. It can drive students to procrastination, discomfort, and low self-efficacy when it comes to writing assignments (Marra & Marra, 2000; Petzel & Wenzel, 1993). Students' beliefs about their writing skills influence the quality of their writing; more efficacious students tend to produce higher quality writing (Anderson, 2010; Lodewyk & Winne, 2005; Pajares et al., 2007). Some studies suggest that students' fear of writing is linked to inadequate writing practice (Pajares & Viliante, 1997; Walsh, 1986). This may explain why writing also seemed to be one of my students' least favorite academic tasks. Some avoid as much

writing as possible until they are at risk of failing a course. I tell Schink in our conversation: "I asked one of the students, 'Are you guys learning how to write?' and the student said, 'We don't write. If I get a writing assignment, I just don't do it if I can still pass.'"

Students' anxiety surrounding writing and the lack of practice instilled at their school resulted in my students struggling to put the knowledge they constructed into written form. Schink and I attempted to brainstorm solutions to our students' writing avoidance. Schink mentioned that a smaller class size allowed her to help her students overcome their struggles with writing by talking individual students through their thoughts before they began to write.

> And I, in that space, because I had five students, I could just sit down and say, "Say it out loud; I can scribe for you." Usually, after we had a conversation they would write about it, but you can't do that in a class of 20 students. Especially in a class where you're trying to manage behavior.

Schink notes that her strategy is unrealistic to implement across public school classrooms. With the average Colorado public high school class size at over 24 students, the number of students in classrooms makes opportunities for one-on-one writing support few and far between (NCES, 2018). Thus, investigating strategies for writing instruction effective in large groups proves pertinent. Some strategies recommended for writing instruction include pre-writing, self-regulated strategy development, and more (Baker et al., 2009; Elbow, 1973; Marra & Marra, 2000).

Writing Challenges: Practical Implications. Engaging students in pre-writing tasks can be an effective means to reduce writing anxiety and improve writing performance (Allen, 1989; Goldstein & Carr, 1996; Sawkins, 1971). Pre-writing tasks include asking students to identify their topic, audience, and purpose to brainstorm the content of the writing product (Marra & Marra, 2000). This research suggests that helping students organize their ideas prior to starting the writing stages of an assignment could have alleviated some of my students' challenges when

initiating a writing assignment, which may have helped augment writing assignment submission rates.

Another strategy that can support struggling writers, especially older students, is Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) (Graham & Perin, 2005). SRSD focuses on goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement, encouraging writers to practice frequently checking in on themselves and their writing as they participate in the writing process. Teaching my students how to monitor and reinforce their writing progress could have alleviated some students' need for constant writing support, reducing how often I, as an instructor, am needed to liberate students when they get stuck while writing and thus supporting writing assignment turn-in rates.

SRSD also outlines six stages of teaching writing: 1) explicitly teach content knowledge, 2) define and discuss a writing strategy, its purpose and its benefits, 3) model the strategy for students, 4) help students memorize the steps of the strategy, 5) support and scaffold students as they master the strategy, and 6) encourage students to use the strategy with little or no supports (Graham & Perin, 2005). Upon reflection, my writing teaching practice only included steps 1, 5 and 6 of the SRSD process. I often failed to define and model writing strategies for students prior to issuing them an assignment. This limited my scaffolds, as I tried to teach writing strategy amid putting words on paper and did not provide students an opportunity to develop their skills earlier in the writing process. Accordingly, many of my students maintained their "We don't write," mindsets throughout my course.

Additionally, Bryson and Scardamlia (1991) describe hoping to change "knowledge-tellers," or writers who explain and describe content, to "knowledge-transformers," or writers who engage with the content to create new meaning. Rather than summarizing and repeating

content covered in the class, students are encouraged to invent new ideas that relate to the content, connect content to other lines of thinking that had not previously been considered, or explore other creative ways to interact with classroom content. An implication of Bryson and Scardamlia's (1991) work is that students should have more practice with written language uses as opposed to spoken ones. This suggests that instructors should often include texts that look like desired assignment products in the curriculum, so students are frequently exposing themselves to model texts. Students in Schink's class who were overwhelmed by the number of words in their assignment might find themselves less discouraged when equipped with a repertoire of academic words that help them craft their words. Giving students more opportunities to engage with academic language can help them perform better on writing assignments (Hull & Rose, 1989).

Educators should also work to help students think like expert writers (Bryson & Scardamlia, 1991). Students are often unfamiliar with the steps of producing strong writing because educators struggle to demonstrate the processes that good writers use when crafting expert writing. Authors compare the practice of teaching expert thinking prior to writing as scaffolding, but it is a scaffold I frequently missed in writing instruction for my students, so it is worth noting. Finally, educators should work to diversify their considerations of expert literacy and writing (Bryson & Scardamlia 1991). When educators expand their definitions of exemplary writing, they give voice to students who struggle with more traditional forms of academic writing. Employing more relevant composition tasks, such as texting or freestyling, helps scaffold students as they attempt more complex tasks. Starting with familiar tasks is expected to increase engagement, and hopefully, encourage students to be more willing to engage as writing assignment complexity increases.

Teacher and Students

  I have always been a confident person, and it translates to my work in the classroom. When I took my first course on education in high school, I taught a lesson to kindergarteners and stood before 25 six-year-olds and confidently delivered instructions while they sat with rapt attention. My experiences in education courses since have been similar, with supervising instructors commending me on how teaching came so naturally to me. However, I had only ever been in the classroom as a brief visitor, not as a continuous, authoritative figure that students recognize as a part of their school. Three months of continuous teaching at AHS challenged my previous perception of myself as a meritorious educator. This section examines how my experience at AHS contributed to my developing teacher identity in the classroom.

Differing Experiences

  Teaching is a unique profession in that many of those who enter it have 12 or more years of experience watching others demonstrate the practice. As a result, pre-service educators often enter teacher training with ideas about what good teaching looks like based on their own classroom experiences (Ng et al. 2010; Schmidt, 2013). I certainly had ideas about what my dream teacher would look like, and I tried to embody them in the classroom. I tried to present myself as a funny, relevant, approachable educator who would do anything necessary to help their students; at the beginning of my experience at AHS, I really felt like that person. That person, however, was the educator I wanted, not the one my students at AHS needed. As a student, I was hungry to earn high marks and was desperate to continue my education post-high school, but my AHS students had a wide variety of motivations beyond school. In trying to be the person who would put it all on the line to help their students earn high marks, I failed to

remember that some students don't want high marks, they just want to graduate, and that's okay (Martin, 1987).

The first assignment I issued to my students was an environmental issue investigation, in which I asked them to research and report back on an environmental issue in presentation or essay form. Very few were turned in, and I am ashamed to admit that those that were turned in disappointed me. There were grammar, spelling, and structural issues beyond what I thought a high schooler should produce, which at the time, was defined by my perception of my productivity as a high schooler. In my practicum journal, I notice that my expectations were informed by my experiences, not by my students' needs. I write:

> By now, to me, research is just research. However, to someone who's just starting out, research is typing something into the search bar, deciding on criteria to filter the search, selecting appropriate sources, reading and vetting the sources, deciding if and why you need more sources to support your argument, developing the argument, referencing your sources to find evidence to support it, and many more steps.

With this reflection, I realized I needed a much more scaffolded approach to the assignment. Still, I graded the assignments based on a rubric that I provided to my students and returned their work with heavy feedback, mostly focused on shortcomings and areas for improvement. Stehlic (2018, p. 163) describes a similar situation as a novice teacher of ninth graders:

> One female student had written a page and a half on the topic, but her spelling, grammar and punctuation were very poor, and being the pedantic English teacher that I was, I used my red pen to make a lot of corrections before returning the paper with a low mark. I was then very surprised to receive a request from the girl's mother for a meeting [...] At the meeting, the girl sat there while her mother angrily waved the assignment in front of me. [...] What did I mean by doing this

to her daughter's paper? She had worked hard on it only to have it returned looking like a dog's breakfast. What about the content? I had only focused on the presentation and given it a low mark as a result. Who did I think I was just because I had been to university?

The final question of this quote rang in my head for a long time. Who did *I* think *I* was to teach these students? My resume is filled with environmental-education-oriented achievements and experiences, but does that make me sufficiently equipped to teach AHS students?

Differing Experiences: Practical Implications. I felt so comfortable in the teacher's role that I quickly assumed the role of Sage on the Stage, who teaches at students, rather than the Guide on the Side, who teaches and learns with their students (King, 2010). I was happy to assume a position at the front of my class and guide my students on a learning journey that would make their eyes widen with wonder. Accordingly, I fell into what Mayes (2006, p. 13) describes as the Archetypal Sage, enlisting my students as Archetypal Heroes whom I would shepherd into a world of understanding with the use of the knowledge that has been bestowed upon me by my extensive experiences in environmental education. Allowing myself to step into the role of the Archetypal Sage limited my ability to respond to my students' struggles. I often comforted myself with the idea that students just do not get it yet, and that with my help, they will. Seeing myself in that role prevented me from examining exactly what I was asking my students to "get," and if they even wanted to "get" it. I should have stood as a Guide on the Side, giving my students autonomy over their learning experience and letting go of my rigid expectations for content mastery (King, 2010). Mayes (2006, p. 13) offers this piece of advice: "As teacher-students, we must be willing to change; we must be capable of doubt, susceptible of reforming and rejecting our own precious paradigms."

Emotional Investment

Emotional Regulation. Throughout my time at AHS, I endured what I can only imagine is the full spectrum of human emotions. Teaching is one of the biggest sources of joy in my life, and the thought of not pursuing it as a career can bring me to tears. That said, the emotions I experienced during my time at AHS ran deep. In my journal, I write about how it felt to have so many students not completing their work: "It was actually fairly devastating and anxiety-inducing to have my students be so unsuccessful at something that's critical to their success with the portfolio." I struggled to manage and process my emotions, as for the first time, I experienced a student teaching placement that was not all rainbows and butterflies. I practiced hiding my negative emotions from students, taking deep breaths when frustrated, and once, even removing myself from the classroom to shed a quick tear.

Emotional Regulation: Practical Implications. Regulating my emotions in the classroom to prioritize my students' needs pushed me as an educator. Educators commonly work to hide their authentic emotions to display emotions they consider more appropriate for the classroom (Lee, 2019). Yin and Lee (2011) For example, one of the rules that Chinese teachers used to regulate their emotions in the classroom was "instrumentalize emotion to achieve teaching goals," referring to the practice of portraying a different emotion than the one they are truly feeling in order to promote learning. This "rule" exemplifies the extent of emotional labor teachers perform each day. In what other profession might you be asked to "instrumentalize" your emotions? However, such emotional labor can degrade the teacher's well-being, so it is important that educators invent ways to cope with the emotional labor of educating (Lee 2019).

As my time at AHS went on, I realized I was going to need to figure out how to manage my emotions well enough to have a sustained career in education. I write, "I'm also going to have

to learn to cope with not everything being in my control and acknowledge myself for doing the best I can in a given situation, but I feel almost guilty doing that." In this entry, I note my desire to recognize myself for taking on a difficult teaching task in a context over which I had little control, but I stop myself because I feel so guilty giving myself credit. I feared that accepting that I cannot do my job perfectly in the student-teaching context would mean I would never do it perfectly in my teaching-teaching context. Low administrative support, lack of resources, and chronic absence are issues amongst many American public schools, so if I blamed my failures on those factors, where in the world could I succeed?

I struggle with the balance between acknowledging the relative impossibility of some teaching tasks and staying motivated to tackle such teaching tasks. For example, I recognize that it is impossible to get 40 high school students to meet every single learning objective of every single day of class and remember it all by the end of the semester, but how do I prevent myself from dying trying? Chang (2009) suggests teachers find coping strategies that fall into two types of coping: emotion-focused coping, where the teacher works to process their emotions about something out of their control, and task-focused coping, where the teacher works to address and potentially change the cause of their emotions. While there is no best practice in emotion- or task-focused coping—teachers should find what works best for them—Chang (2009) warns that avoidant coping, or evading the things that are causing stress, can be the most damaging to educators. My emotion-focused coping strategy was joyful movement, (I am privileged to have access to a gym, volleyball courts, and rock wall through my college) and my task-focused coping strategy was, frankly, this thesis. After my time at AHS, I felt heavy with the things I felt like I could have done better, and in this work, I highlighted my missteps and attempted to find

solutions. I am grateful to have the space to explore and the academic support to develop my teacher identity as it relates to my content and my placement.

Limitations

In self-study, the researcher and the subject are the same, so data collection and analysis should be held to a rigorous standard if the results are to support literature in the field (Loughran, 2007). Data collection could have been made more robust with more diverse data sources, such as video recordings of my lessons. Such video recordings could have been analyzed by transcribing and coding them, similar to the analysis of the practicum journal entries. In addition, only one critical friend conversation was conducted shortly after my time at AHS. Having multiple conversations with this critical friend throughout my time at AHS could have better supported my goal of finding ways to improve my teaching practice. Regarding data analysis, my critical friend was not available for consultation while coding, which may limit the results, although coding was supported by this work's primary advisor.

Conclusion

This self-study was a labor of love, as it pushed me to delve into tensions in my teaching practice and improve them. While this thesis is only a first step, and my teacher identity will continue to develop over my career, I feel my work deconstructing my teacher identity through data analysis and reconstructing it in conversation with literature was fruitful (Beijaard et al., 2003; Laboskey, 2004). I found that the need for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching was a theme that arose from challenges specific to alternative education, including absence and unique student communities. I realized strategic instruction in Environmental Education can include specific student writing strategies and lesson planning strategies. Finally, I sought literature that informed and supported sustained, positive Teacher

Identity Development. I now feel more equipped to handle contextual challenges outside of my control, to take strategic approaches when helping students interact with content, and to cultivate positive teacher identity development. I hope readers may feel this way as well.

This self-study explored but a narrow window of the contentions I experienced at AHS. For every experience outlined here, there were ten more that were formative to developing my practice. The literature to which I relate my findings is also but a sliver of potential strategies for classroom success. Certainly, not every effective instructional strategy exists in the literature yet. For example, educators reacted to the coining of the term CRP with the phrase, "But That's Just Good Teaching!" giving Ladson-Billings' 1995 paper its title, and suggesting that some educators were using CRP before its publication. Hence, I do not intend the implications I outlined in this study to be prescriptive, but to serve as an exemplar for pre-service educators with similar questions as they begin their careers.

You're 22 years old and a month away from being the first one in your family with a bachelor's degree. In August, you will pursue your master's degree in education—the closest you've ever been to achieving your lifelong goal of being a classroom teacher. In just over a year, you will enter a classroom and for the first time, you will be its sole conservator. Now, such a thought is less daunting, because you have proved to yourself the remarkable amount of effort you'll put into improving your teaching practice. Such is my perspective after conducting a self-study that asked me to deconstruct my practice as it relates to my students, my content, and myself, and put it all back together again. I will not always be a perfect teacher, but I will always know how to get better.

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