Becoming a reflective community of practice

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This paper explores the collaborative research relationship among a faculty of education, district school board and a teacher's self-regulatory body. Each group possessed different objectives; however, all agreed that reflection, teacher inquiry and standards of practice would unite their research journey. These educators' awareness of 'reflective' inquiry grounded their project in the belief that personal professional narratives can reflect and address the challenges of teaching. With a strong focus on narrative and associated narrative-activities such as narrative discussion and narrative-writing as qualitative research tools, these educators deepened their own reflection on practice, and eventually gained insights that led to transformations in their teaching. Over 200 teachers were involved. The implications of this partnership exceeded the writers' initial purpose and revealed the importance of reflective teaching in a community of inquiry. This project reminded the writers that professional learning is at the center of practice and teacher educators who engage in ongoing processes to refine their teaching will be better able to support classroom teachers in refining their professional practice.

Introduction

Collaboration partnership—buzz words, trendy words, bantered about by institutions to describe a process of coming together.

Our story begins when three educational institutions began to make meaning of these words through a collaborative partnership that would mirror and celebrate the enthusiasm, vibrancy and commitment found in their respective educational landscapes.

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The staff of Organization A, a self-regulatory body for the teaching profession, had considered involvement with a faculty of education and a district school board. Their objectives were clear: explore how inquiry-based teaching within in-service teacher education fosters deeper awareness, understanding and integration of standards of practice and ethical standards—descriptors to answer the question, 'What does it mean to be a teacher?'

Organization B, proponents of a model for in-service that includes commitment to equity, adult learning and information technology, was interested in collaborative ways to enhance the model's fourth strand—teacher inquiry. They were attempting to move away from the baggage that the word *research* carries and the detachment that is found in many research questions.

Staff members at Organization C, a District School Board, were interested to how notions of equity and standards knit together to illuminate teachers' knowledge and feelings about teaching and learning. More than that, they sought to encourage and support a community of inquirers—to build a culture of inquiry in their school district.

**Context**

Organization A has responsibility for accrediting teacher education programs, providing for ongoing education of members, and establishing and enforcing standards of practice and ethical standards for over 200,000 members of the teaching profession. Created by the input of thousands of educators, the standards underpin all courses offered by educational faculties. During the revision of nearly 200 in-service teacher education guidelines, it became evident that awareness of the standards was limited. Staff sought to foster deeper understanding through practices based on inquiry and reflection.

Organization B wished to enhance in-service teacher education programs. For 10 years, this faculty and 12 district school boards collaborated to provide quality in-service. These cooperatives recognized educators as ultimately responsible for their own learning and shared the conviction that transformational learning occurs when job-embedded professional development is experiential, self-directed and occurs over time. Courses seemed to meet the needs of teachers, wanting to deepen understanding and change practice to improve learning and life chances of students.

A number of exciting initiatives were in progress in Organization C, but facilitators were aware that, while educators acknowledge and advocate for an environment open to inquiry, the characteristics of educational organizations often unintentionally interfere: closeting teachers with more than 30 students; giving them lists of several thousand expectations to *transmit*, leaving them with little time for reflection and little sense of community. For district school board staff, the challenge was to find ways to encourage and support teachers to enter into a collaborative, yet deeply personal research process that would delight in *messiness*—comprehending muddle as essential to clarity and acknowledging methodology as influenced by the observer.
A vice-principal with the district school board and instructional leader with the cooperatives contacted a representative of Organization A in the Fall of 2001 with questions regarding the cooperatives. When asking for feedback about best practices in teacher inquiry, she was challenged to consider, 'How is the role of “teacher’s story” aligning with candidates’ teacher inquiry? How are the stories of “us” deepening and broadening our teaching practice? How do the standards of practice align with teacher inquiry?'

These questions were the catalyst for a collaborative journey interweaving story, standards and inquiry in unique ways. Our tensions, dilemmas and shared spaces are the subject of this paper.

Methodology

In the Fall of 2001, a meeting was arranged with the three organizations. The conversation centered on teacher development as the group worked to devise a shared focus. Through ongoing dialogue, the research intent, and process began to emerge. First, we looked at the in-service programs that were the glue that held us together and wondered how we might interact with instructional leaders (the teacher educators who facilitate in-service courses) to advance our project. As a fledgling group, we were grappling with the how’s and why’s of our project. Some of us were still speaking from our own interests, but even our early discussions revealed the common spaces. Methodology was emergent, and theoretical underpinnings in most cases were illuminated by the work itself.

While we were guided by a shared belief about reflective practice, we had no preset notions about how best to attain our goals. We were to discover upon reflection that our journey mirrored the messiness and the muddle of individual teacher inquiry. We agreed that journal writing, metaphors, action research, story writing, oral and written exchanges and the formation of learning communities were key to our thinking, strategies we would model as practice and theory. We didn’t immediately recognize we were engaging in emergent design. There were specific interests and communal goals, but we had no clear notion of the exact direction our adventure might take. We believed in our experiences as teachers to lead the way.

What evolved was a shared understanding of the standards, reflective practice and inquiry. We came to understand that there were trials and errors that occur when people, previously unknown to one another, work together. We came to understand the ‘give and take’, the careful listening that must occur when a group coalesces and grows into a learning community... We crafted a tentative outline for a series of meetings for groups of instructional leaders that we hoped would, through discussions and activities, uncover connections to the standards, begin to answer some key questions, and establish a much more expansive rationale for our strategies. Some of the questions that emerged were:

- What professional learning processes can be used to facilitate reflective practice?
- How can narrative, teacher inquiry and reflection illuminate standards of practice?
- What is the significance of teacher inquiry for student learning?
Just as teachers involved in inquiry revise their questions many times during the course of their investigation, so our group continued to refine our questions. The exact wording of these key questions persisted throughout our journey.

**Theoretical framework**

For some, the theoretical frames emerged from within the process. For others, the theoretical informed us from the outset. Quite regularly it was in the *doing* that we recognized the theory. As educators, we had theoretical backgrounds, but also were steeped in the practical. The process was fluid, without beginning or end in our professional growth as partners.

Over time, our collaborative inquiry invited us to consider the perspectives of: phenomenologists (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Van Manen, 1995) who analyze lived experience, acknowledging that wisdom and knowledge are founded in the behaviors of people; of action research by Judith Newman (1987) who describes the researcher as a detective. Metaphor by (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and (Cole & Knowles, 2000) was also a direction, because the concept of a metaphor expands meaning, and numerous layers of rich, integrated and complex interpretations can radiate from words or situations. As we met with the in-service instructional leaders, we all listened carefully to one another as we extended, built and constructed new meaning (Fosnot, 1989).

By occupation, teachers are storytellers who share narratives in schools. Those narratives describe the successes, but often, address the challenges and frustrations of teaching (Neilsen, 1999). Teachers’ stories of lived experience combine professional and personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987). Private themes (Griffiths & Tann, 1992), beliefs (Pajares, 1992), implicit knowledge (Clark, 1988), and images (Calderhead & Robson, 1991) may also be revealed when teachers write about and discuss their practice (Shulman, 1992; Kleinfeld, 1992). Insights into teacher knowledge of self are useful when we consider how transformation might take place.

Since the standards were developed through consultations based on teachers’ input (Freire, 1970), the group recognized the importance of research by teachers for teachers (Olson, 2000). Cases position teachers as the authors of their own research, valuing teacher expertise (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Doyle, 1990; Harrington & Garrison, 1992) as a means of transformation. As writers write, engaging in social intercourse (Dewey, 1997), they reflect (Schön, 1987) and reconstruct through their memories, their sense of self as teachers.

Work on cases (Shulman & Colbert, 1988; Shulman, 1992; Shulman et al., 2002) revealed narrative as a way to combine practice and theory, specific and general knowledge. We were also aware of Bruner’s work with situated knowledge, linked to strong memories and specific locales (1986, 1990). Another common space was the instigation of a culture of inquiry (Fullan, 2001) through the establishment of collaborative learning communities. Our steering committee was the start of such a community that soon included the larger group.
Some key moments in our narrative

The key moments were structured, yet spontaneous. These insights arose out of separate motivations though tied together by common interests. As we progressed, a desire emerged to build a collective understanding, which valued individual interests. Our first meetings were defining moments, vital to what turned into an extensive research project. We began with interaction between two educators and their speculations. Then, these speculations expanded to include other people, and then the collective group began thinking, 'If we did this, we could ...' Thus, the willingness of all parties to put resources, time and energy into this project grew.

Session with special education candidates, 2001

Our second planned inquiry process involved 15 candidates who were currently enrolled in special education in-service courses. Dr Fran Squire served as an outside facilitator while we engaged in the process as participants.

Fran asked us, 'What is a standard? A banner? A meter?' She described how the standards had been compiled and how they celebrated the work of teachers. Next we identified concepts in the standards that resonated for us. She told two stories: both from her experiences as a teacher that illuminated tensions in her practice. After this modeling episode, we resurrected stories from our own careers, and then began to draft our own stories. It was clear that all members of this initial group were committed to the exploration of this process that they intuited would aid their own professional development.

The following are excerpts from stories written by two participants that day:

It was during this time I met Sara ... a member of one of the literature circle groups. ... They were conscious of her difficulties. ... One could see Sara's confidence grow. ... She was becoming a self-advocate. ... She continues to amaze me every day with her accruing abilities and her confidence.

I've had a moment! While working with grade three students, I sensed someone trying to catch my attention...He had found the book. He was overjoyed that no one other than him and the librarian had ever touched it—it was brand new. He proceeded to give me a solid retell. ... His strategies were evident. Problem-solving was confident and his reading was phrased, fluent and expressive. The best part was his enthusiasm for the story and sharing it.

The insights from candidates in this session reinforced the value of mining the possibilities of inquiry.

Session with 90 instructional leaders

We took advantage of Organization B's annual workshop for approximately 90 in-service instructional leaders to facilitate upcoming in-service programs with the standards as their foundation. The cooperatives provided release time for these teacher educators. Organization A arranged an experiential workshop related to the
standards, facilitating with practicing educators. Participants worked with the standards, examining words, phrases and making connections with personal teaching experiences. Facilitators presented a holistic overview and examined relationships of teachers to their professional learning.

This large group of instructional leaders reported they appreciated the practical nature of the activities that affirmed their daily practice. We had invited participants to do a 10-minute 'free write'. We provided no parameters, for this writing. We did encourage the educators to write freely on a pivotal experience from their professional practice. These would form the narrative seeds that held potential for becoming case narratives. The writing of seed narratives served to deepen their understanding of the standards. After this experience one of the participants wrote:

What was really interesting to me was how the use of a narrative technique disarmed me and allowed me to see differently. I believe it is because we were asked to first focus on a meaningful event in our own teaching careers, independent of any criteria other than the intensity of the experience. This allowed to the surface a significant and authentic story that reflects an image, a snapshot in time.

**Sessions with a study group**

In the Fall of 2002, we met with 12 self-identified instructional leaders who expressed interest in our project. We, as the steering committee, had planned activities that included:

1. The use of metaphor as a way of seeing. ‘Metaphors provide a way of carrying ideas and understandings from one context to another so that both ideas and the context become transformed in the process. When we apply this notion to teaching, we have a way of understanding and representing teaching that is more personally meaningful and able to more adequately capture the qualitative dimensions of practice’ (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 48).

2. PowerPoint presentations. The purpose was to provide participants with a shared understanding of historical, pedagogical underpinnings as well as the theoretical framework that stimulated our own thinking. It would also serve as a resource to be used with teacher candidates in courses.

3. Selected theoretical readings. Judith Newman (1987) and Thomas Guskey (2002a, b) began to influence our thinking. Journal articles were introduced to bridge practice and theory.

4. The use of modified case study narrative approach. In a parallel initiative, one of the partner organizations was working with cases (Shulman & Colbert, 1988). In a Case Institute, Dr Andrea Whittaker facilitated a session on creating case seeds, peer editing and rewriting, connecting them to a matrix of the standards.

Based on the experience and interest of our study group, our steering committee agreed to construct a mini-case institute, using a case based on team teaching. During the ensuing discussion, participants were encouraged to value their own voices and
probe their assumptions. Some participants referred to their journal entries, while others resurrected artifacts already used with additional qualification courses or drew on experiences as consultants and leaders. A defining moment occurred when one of the participants connected personally to the case, recalling a difficult colleague. Another remembered a similar troubling event. Such comments opened the floor for interactive discussion.

With a context and supportive environment for cases established, the group was ready to recall a dilemma from their own practices, write it as a case seed and receive input from peers.

**Analysis of our narrative inquiry**

As inquirers, we began with distinct interests from three separate institutions. While the natural inclination would be to focus exclusively on those, we were increasingly brought into each other’s interests and able to understand multiple perspectives, extending a tapestry of mutual benefit. It was enlightening to acknowledge differences were as important as common goals. We came to appreciate conflicts and tensions played important roles in the evolution of our project, and therefore in our personal professional growth as they do when teachers examine their practice in deep and transformational ways.

**Reflection**

A guiding principle was a shared belief in the importance of reflective practice to enhance teaching practice and professional knowledge. Reflective practice was deepened by our active engagement in this process. As a collective, we acquired a number of insights, which follow.

*The value of narrative*

Narrative illuminates our practice and our professional knowledge. Narrative reveals assumptions in unexpected ways and offers hints into cultural values that impact our judgments. It brings the unseen and us closer to the unspoken in our own narratives. It honors the voice and experience of teachers that, in turn, enhance the teacher’s sense of efficacy.

*The value of dialogue*

Collective reflection intensifies professional development. Reflection occurs with two possibly connected strands—the personal and the social. The writer gains deeper personal understanding through revisions and editing of cases. This inquiry process is greatly enhanced through dialogue with others, extending it beyond the personal to the learning community and back again. Discussion is a community activity that causes our personal assumptions to surface and be transformed.
The value of uncovering assumptions

Through reflection, our assumptions become illuminated. This process is more difficult than we had anticipated. We understand, our judgments are based on our tacit theories, on values and beliefs that are culturally determined not explicitly articulated (Newman, 1987). Investigating the self may be seen as self-absorbed and self-serving. Teachers reflect within and about practice, but often, do so alone without benefit of meaningful dialogue with colleagues. Our inquiry led us to appreciate teachers’ need to reflect on practice and their assumptions in supportive communities. In the spirit of inquiry, we all engaged in the process of unveiling assumptions.

Narrative reading and discussion

The process of engaging in narrative reading and discussion within in-service education can be an effective pedagogical technique. We discovered reading a story of another person’s practice highly engaging and a non-threatening method to invite educators into reflective practice. This led to dialogue which uncovered assumptions and beliefs. When participants examine a specific case through multiple lenses and alter initial impressions, they became convinced cases portray tensions and dilemmas of professional practice, providing a critical tool for teacher transformation.

To reveal and refocus our energy based on these assumptions requires an openness of thinking (Carter & Unklesbay, 1989). Personal responses broke the silence and became the catalyst that transferred external cases to an internal position of personal meaning. Individuals understood the relevance of the case to personal practice.

This transference is a difficult step since most of us have formed notions of teaching due to our own apprenticeship in the classroom (Bullough, 1989; Biddle, 1997), along with instruction from faculties that all too often immerses pre-service teachers in theory rather than practice. In addition, we began to suspect that reading another’s dilemma was a necessary first step for the development of a safe, supportive environment that sustains the next level of risk- taking required to rethink assumptions or revise beliefs about teaching and learning.

Most participants were highly experienced, three on the brink of retirement and two, recently appointed principals. Therefore, their views and skills were likely engrained. In the true spirit of lifelong learning, we embraced a chance to continue our development, revisiting old assumptions, eager to construct new knowledge. This attitude toward professional development that reaffirms teaching as lifelong learning reinforced the standards.

Narrative writing

We shared a belief from the outset that writing is invaluable to capture lived professional experience in order to make sense of it. We understood that when we
write, we can revisit documented events from multiple perspectives. Most of us had been involved in assisting teacher candidates in in-service programs to turn their experiences into reflective narratives that illuminate tensions, disequilibria, and authenticate the struggle between the internal and external worlds of professional practice. However, it was quite another thing to put ourselves in the writer’s seat!

One participant stressed the importance of the process of writing. By constantly reflecting on his story, he uncovered insights about himself, his practice, and his relationships with course candidates. Revisiting a disturbing experience through this focused writing process initiated a renewal.

We came to appreciate why teachers often find it difficult to document and share stories. As a result, we were determined to explore ways that would enable teachers to make space for narrative in their busy professional lives. We found that when participants made their thinking and reflection visible to others, they opened the door for learning and professional growth. Here two writers describe experiences with candidates in their respective courses.

The first excerpt refers to a dilemma that emerged during the intensive four-day institute that launches most Organization B in-service courses:

Institutes are usually like *Teacher Camp*. They always end on a HIGH, with everyone feeling exhilarated by mutual learning and professional collegiality. So why was I feeling so let down on the last day of this year’s Summer Institute?

Both my teaching partner and I were experienced instructional leaders. Our combined Professional Knowledge and Leadership backgrounds were surely strong enough to meet this challenge [but] questions persisted: Why are we spending so much time on action research? We aren’t sure what you want from the Action Research Project. Can’t you be more specific about your expectations? Why isn’t the Summer Institute more practical?

Even though we felt that we had already planned the course, we knew we had to go back to the drawing board and reorganize the weekly outline. We needed a lot more diversity, more-choice, more practical sessions. ... We wonder, what will be their [candidates’] greatest learning? Will they make the obvious connections back to their classrooms and their own students?

In a second excerpt, an instructional leader reflects on the tension of fostering professional learning when confronted with challenging behavior:

I have been an instructional leader for three years. This course is a very hands-on, practical course where candidates develop, practical skills. We were interrupted by a voice that I had not yet heard that morning, ‘Sorry, I’m late, but I am driving in and the traffic was brutal, and I turned right instead of left, and I called a friend, and I’ve been placed in a school and they need me to teach this stuff, and I know nothing about it. Well, I mean nothing about teaching it’. I try to avoid allowing my first impressions to influence me.

As I observed throughout the afternoon, it became apparent that although Mike’s intentions may have been genuine, his manner and ill-focused assertiveness were overpowering. He lacked the ability to listen actively, respect the ideas of his colleagues, and most
importantly could not or would not work as an effective team member. How can I, as an Instructional Leader, help a candidate improve professionally in practice if he is unable to see past the end of his nose?

**Differences**

Different perspectives are the reality of collaborative teaching and learning. Throughout this research, multiple perspectives continually emerged in the professional reading, the inquiry processes, the ongoing dialogues, the planning sessions, the metaphor activities and the narrative reading and writing. These forms of interaction foster understanding of the diverse ways teachers grow and develop. Sharing of these perspectives has the potential to change thinking, beliefs and actions. The following two examples of tensions surfaced to stimulate.

**We struggled with narrative inquiry**

In an inquiry group, one person's question belongs to all. When a question emerges it can become a point of tension and therefore a focus of inquiry for the group. The concept of narrative raised a series of questions that highlighted our multiple perspectives:

- How can the voice and experience of a teacher be used to illuminate the standards?
- What are the links between narrative inquiry and the standards?
- What exactly is narrative inquiry?
- How do we enter into another's narrative in a respectful way? If so, at what point do we edit?
- Who does the editing?
- What happens to the voice of the teacher if someone else does the editing?

A difference of views was voiced regarding the concept of editing others' narratives. Some partners expressed concerns about the writing of some of the examples of narrative:

I asked should we polish them the stories and she responded that would remove the authenticity and spontaneity. She said that teaching was messy business; however, we wondered if the stories would be focused enough, polished enough to communicate the concepts that underpin the standards. Wouldn't our making suggestions to further develop key points work toward improving and refining issues?

Others wanted to avoid editing and agreed that edited stories remove the tone of the first storyteller and create another story altogether. They wanted the playing field to be wide open to allow space for teachers to tell their own stories in their own way and with their own voices. And yet, some wondered how readers would enter into these unpolished pieces. If the narratives were not clearly crafted, would they engage teacher-readers in reflective discussion to stimulate growth? Would the embedded nature of standards be uncovered within unpolished narratives? This ongoing group
debate was grounded in our shared guiding belief and commitment to valuing the voice and wisdom of teachers.

**We struggled with the term ‘authenticity’**

We continue to use this term in our analysis, but we had occasion to contest it. The concept of authenticity emerged for some instructional leaders during additional qualification courses and in the writing of their own narratives and surfaced during dialogues related to narrative inquiry. At first, the term registered differences among us. Too often, this word is used to suggest that authentic means some type of truth that can be stably accessed. Authentic becomes a term to suggest the teller knows the one true meaning about personal experience. Studies of memory and narrative demonstrate that, as we tell and retell our stories, they change and transmute, suggesting truth is being regularly modified and recreated. This process—one that we have, ourselves, experienced through this inquiry—puts into question the notion of a stable type of truth.

Time allows more space for thoughtfulness. Memory allows us to recreate. Truth is a fluid ever-changing condition. However, we maintain there is a place for the use of authentic within our work. When we dislodged the idea of permanence and truth and invoked the idea of ownership and present tense, we could see that if we accepted a situational truth we could also accept the term authentic. From this point on identified the authentic in narrative inquiry as that occasion when the teacher is the teller of the narrative.

**Learning communities**

Standards of practice and ethical standards articulate the importance of educators working collaboratively with members of the school community. The development of learning communities is central to the embodiment of the standards. A central theme for Organization B's in-service courses has been the creation of temporary learning communities that meet over time to support the growth in professional knowledge and the inquiry into personal professional practice as fundamental program goals. All participants in the project through personal and professional interaction shared the belief in the power of such communities. The creation of a learning community with all members provided a forum to take risks, challenge personal beliefs and practices. We agreed that, 'A learning community consists in a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward both the mysteries and the challenges of teaching and learning' (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 125).

We knew capacity for a learning community needs to be built deliberately and explicitly and such communities require some sort of glue to hold the members together, whether that is a shared vision, common understandings or a common goal (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). We also knew capacity was enhanced when members were able to maintain close contact and communication during and between regular meetings.
Through listening, interacting, considering, rejecting and constructing new knowledge, participants became a web, a support net for one another. One member observed, 'We accommodated each other's learning styles, diversity and needs throughout. We encouraged discussion, openness and difference...to communicate and express our understandings'.

The educators involved in this collaborative inquiry identified the following strengths and benefits of the processes described. It:

- Celebrates professional teacher's knowledge.
- Allows teachers to construct their own meanings.
- Reinforces the belief that the most effective body of knowledge about the profession lies within teachers.
- Helps to create 'living' (Whitehead, 2005) educational theories through the illumination of the standards.

We came together initially as a group of educators with one overriding characteristic in common: we were committed to making reflection a habit of mind. We held a fundamental conviction that teacher inquiry conducted in a collaborative community would be effective in helping teachers to examine issues and tensions authentic to their practice and provide opportunity to effect positive change. Our professional experience as educators suggested that transformational learning occurs when professional educators reflect deeply on practice and that storytelling or the writing of narrative is a powerful tool to capture that learning in order to share it. However, at the outset of our collaborative journey, we had very different notions about the form that narrative inquiry might take.

Case methods offered a process for teachers to address their authentic narratives—that is, told within the frame of their own words and their self-chosen experiences. Educators who participated in these sessions embraced the case methodology (Louden & Wallace, 1996) as one reflective tool and considered using it with their candidates in courses. They were modeling a process of identifying a tension or troubling issue of practice, generating diverse points of view (McAninch, 1993) with which to analyze, offer judgments, recommendations and test theories with the support and further questioning of colleagues who had joined in a collaborative learning community (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001).

As a learning community, the group continued to deepen their collective understanding of inquiry and ongoing professional learning. Whether it is recognizing the possibilities for inquiry-based professional learning through teacher education additional qualification programs, case writing institutes, inquiry-focused school board initiatives, the collective goal of improving student performance and enhancing professional development are north star moments that keep educators focused.

**Educational significance**

One of the many rewarding aspects of this endeavor has been the ripple effect we experienced, both individually and as a group. The teacher leaders all used the
experiential standards-based workshop with their candidates in their respective additional qualification courses and report success in deepening knowledge of the standards. They plan to continue writing and working with cases or narrative and use these techniques with their teachers enrolled in in-service additional qualification courses.

In December 2002, our collaboration resulted in a team presentation at the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), ‘Illuminating the revolution in professional learning’. Our session ‘Narrative knowledge: reflective practice’ identified the following outcomes for NSDC participants as observed with study group participants:

- Deepened reflection on the relationship between personal and professional practice.
- Enhanced understanding of narrative as a professional learning approach.
- Heightened awareness of the power of teacher inquiry through storytelling and metaphor.
- Deepened appreciation of the role of narrative and teacher inquiry as tools of qualitative research, along with the ability to construct narrative as a technique to illuminate the processes of teaching and learning.
- Illuminated the embodied nature of the principles of professional practice.

The participants at NSDC engaged passionately in the workshop. As a result, we have carried on electronic dialogue with colleagues from across North America and have been invited to present an overview of our work and facilitate in-depth, experiential workshops.

Participants report numerous invitations by principals to replicate the standards workshop and model other strategies they learned in sessions for staff and professional organizations. Another participant is considering the use of the narrative process with at-risk secondary students.

We all benefited from the reflection that had become a habit of mind. We transferred meaning, reflecting on our own and our colleagues’ practices and used the standards to guide, frame and underpin our dialogues of practice. We came to appreciate the value of draft talk and draft thought. At the heart of the inquiry were the standards: the underlying focus, the diagnostic tool, the vehicle for improved professional practice, the vision for growth.

Although cases have been used in teacher education, scholarly articles address case methodology in pre-service, rather than in-service communities. During our venture into the use of narrative and cases for in-service teacher education, participants acknowledged that the cases were a ‘touchstone’ to reflection. Reflection enabled them to make connections to practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and encouraged ownership of the profession as a specialized field with specific tools, language, and skills, described in the standards. Participants realized the standards were already inherent in their practice, and were affirming, rather than threatening.

Casework also provoked practitioners to confront assumptions, accept new points of view and model the strategies and processes they had added to their repertoire
through this collaborative project. They expressed satisfaction in being able to examine dilemmas of practice that have been or may be experienced in their own professional context. They now realized there was not one right approach to resolve a situation, or even that some cases don’t have a resolution, but the standards serve as guiding principles for professional practice.

Conclusion

What can occur when three unique institutions, whose goals and aims differ, collaborate? After our experience, would we recommend a similar partnership to others? Resoundingly, Yes!

Certainly, we witnessed multiple examples of the integration of the standards into in-service teacher education. The 200 instructional leaders who participated in two standards-based sessions and the self-identified group who wrote cases about the dilemmas encountered in teacher education perpetuated their professional learning in diverse ways, becoming catalysts for those they taught or would teach in the future. Through reflection and dialogue, we examined assumptions, challenged our beliefs and strengthened our professional practice. We continue to ask questions and pursue our professional growth in myriad venues.

But it was much more than this. It was a spirit that permeated our original group and those who gathered later. It was the knowledge that by forming a partnership, we had developed trusting relationships and had taken chances. We had risked messiness, not knowing where we would go, or what might happen. Passionately involved, we had modeled our openness and excitement at being on a journey that, although seemingly familiar, was altogether new and wondrous. We had become a reflective community of practice deepening our knowledge of in-service teacher education alongside one another.

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