

Aspiring “Child Whisperers:” How Student Teachers’ Beliefs about Good Teaching Shape the Lessons They Choose to Learn

Nancy M. Cardwell

The City College of New York
School of Education

Teaching, Learning and Culture Department
160 Convent Avenue, NAC 5/209A
New York, NY 10031
United States of America

Abstract

This small qualitative study examined the role of student teaching in relation to the participants’ beliefs about good teaching and revealed that the student teaching placement is an important integrative experience where teacher candidates can make newly acquired professional knowledge uniquely their own. The twelve participants’ beliefs about good teaching helped them decide whether to accept or resist their school-based colleagues’ advice. Teacher educators can strengthen the student teaching experience by ensuring teacher candidates are equipped with a deep understanding of children’s development, culture and academic content by providing frequent opportunities for guided reflection and to receive feedback on their practice during student teaching so teacher candidates can integrate their personal beliefs with increasing professional knowledge.

1. Introduction

We know that what teachers know and can do matters. What teachers don’t know or understand also matters because teachers can’t teach what they don’t know, which limits the connections teachers help children make. As a result, how teachers are prepared to enter the classroom matters (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2004). When teachers aren’t effective in the classroom, everyone suffers because poor reading scores in elementary school are linked to increased incarceration rates and diminished life outcomes (Alexander, 2012). A student not reading at grade level by the end of the third grade is four times more likely to spend an extended period of time in high school or drop out, potentially leading to incarceration for 23% of black male dropouts (Alexander, 2012; Sum, Khatiwada & McLaughlin, 2009).

The more we understand about the professional preparation of high quality teachers the more we can improve academic achievement for all children. This is a time of transition in teacher education because of the changing state certification requirements and performance-based assessments. As such, this article comes at an opportune time to examine how teacher candidates’ beliefs about good teaching inform their decisions about which lessons they choose to learn during student teaching. In this study, I wanted to learn how teacher candidates’ beliefs about good teaching might inform their decision about the lessons they chose to learn during student teaching.

2. Literature Review

Good teachers understand what students everywhere can confirm, teaching is more than telling and learning is more than listening (Darling-Hammond & Branford, 2005). Recent findings in cognitive neuroscience indicate that learners need to be emotionally calm, receptive and attentive in a physically, socially and culturally safe learning environment (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Gay, 2010; Willingham, 2009; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007). Teacher preparation programs have been found to be weak interventions in teacher candidates’ professional development when their personal beliefs are positioned as impediments to professional teaching knowledge (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). However, teachers’ beliefs, conscious and tacit, shape their pedagogical choices, often reflecting the ways they were taught as children (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Ziv & Frye, 2004; Cuban, 1993; Polanyi, 1968).

2.1 The Sociocultural Context of Schooling

The sociocultural context of schooling views culture as a set of negotiated attributes that are constantly in flux, shaping and being shaped by the interplay of social and economic interactions among human beings (Rao & Walter, 2004:4; Vygotsky/Kozulin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). The sociocultural view of schooling and development positions them as fundamentally social, dialogic and situated in multiple cultural contexts that reflect the realities of daily living (Kuhn, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978). The lives children lead outside the classroom have everything to do with how they feel and what they learn inside the classroom (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Gay, 2010; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers need to construct their classrooms, as an important learning environment, so every child knows that who they are as they are, is welcome, safe, seen and unconditionally valued (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Gay, 2010; Rogers, 1951). The sociocultural context of schooling would include the range of beliefs and life experiences every adult and child brings to the classroom. These varied and layered contexts are the individual frames of reference used to attach meaning to what is observed and experienced in the classroom, rendering teaching a highly complex and challenging profession (Bandura, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). It is the teacher's role to provide materials and resources that welcome and reassure children that they are safe enough in the classroom to take the intellectual risks necessary to learn (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007; Piaget, 1968).

2.2 Teacher Beliefs

Learning to teach is a complex process that rests on teacher candidates' beliefs about themselves and their beliefs about others. It can be argued that teacher candidates' conscious and unconscious beliefs about themselves, others and the world around them shape their beliefs about children's capacities to learn in the classroom (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Polanyi, 1968). Teacher candidates' beliefs about themselves, others and what they can do are mediators of what they allow themselves to learn and try (Bandura, 1997).

The student teaching experience is important because it is an opportunity for student teachers to observe multiple models of good teaching, discuss them with school-based colleagues and college mentors/supervisors. Exposure to multiple models of good teaching, in varying stages of development from beginning teachers through master teachers, provides student teachers with models of good teaching they experience as immediately accessible as well as into the future (Bandura, 1997; Lave, 1996; Rogoff, 1991). This is an effective model for student teachers because it helps build student teachers' confidence in their ability to teach children in real time (Skovholdt, 2004; Bandura, 1997).

Teachers' beliefs about others are important because they shape perceptions and pedagogical choices (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Moll, 2000; Bandura, 1997). There is a danger when teachers use unconscious beliefs to attach meaning to children's classroom behavior because they react automatically to children's behavior without thinking (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko & Hoffman, 2010; Polanyi, 1968), leading them to ignore children's individuality, culture and sociocultural context (Gay, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers' perceptions of children's knowledge and capacity to learn, informed by teachers' conscious and unconscious beliefs, determine whether or not they teach (Ziv & Frye, 2004).

2.3 Good Teaching

The literature on good teaching outlined three main elements: knowledge of academic content; knowledge of children; and the capacity to forge meaningful connections between the children and the academic content (Nieto, 2003; Palmer, 1999). Good teaching involves love, trust and respect imbedded in the sociocultural context surrounding the relationships between teachers and students (Nieto, 2003; Cardwell, 2002; Noddings, 1992). As such, teaching is "a vocation based on love" (Nieto, 2003:37) that emphasizes the importance of balancing the emotional distance of professionalism with the emotional intimacy of care without sacrificing one for the other (Noddings, 1992). "Loving" teachers are able to figure out not only what children need to learn but also how to teach it in ways that children can understand, relate to, find meaningful and use (Howard, 2006; Nieto, 2003; Noddings, 1992).

Good teaching is about children feeling unconditionally accepted with positive regard so that children know they are safe, seen, understood, received, loved and accepted by their teachers (Nieto, 2003; Noddings, 1992; Rogers, 1951). This unconditional acceptance transcends children's behavior so that a child can take their teacher's support, care and acceptance for granted, in much the same way children with healthy attachments to the adults in their lives take them for granted (Bowlby, 1998; Bandura, 1997; Noddings, 1992; Rogers, 1951).

Teachers' unconditional acceptance of their students requires teachers to have a deep understanding of themselves as individuals and teachers along with a deep understanding of each child's life experiences and culture (Horowitz, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005:88; Howard, 2004; Bandura, 1997; Lortie, 1975). Without understanding themselves and their students, teachers can't develop the adaptive expertise necessary to make academic content meaningful to every child in the classroom.

There are two, main types of teaching expertise enacted in the classroom - routine and adaptive expertise, see Table 1. Routine expertise is a teacher-centered approach that emphasizes efficient curriculum delivery that doesn't require teachers to know themselves, connect with their students, develop cultural competency or become conscious of their assumptions because children fit themselves into their teacher's way of knowing and understanding the world. Teachers develop routine expertise by increasing the efficiency of their curriculum delivery, by sorting children into behavioral categories that the teacher responds to in the same way, regardless of motivation, to continue progressing through the assigned curriculum. Teaching efficiency increases to the point where teachers' responses become automatic so that teachers think less and less about what they are doing, why they are doing it and how their students are feeling, rendering their classroom practice automatic and routine (Shepard, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Rust, 2005:361; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Atkinson & Schiffrin, 1968).

The second type of teaching expertise enacted in the classroom is adaptive expertise. Adaptive expertise is a learner-centered approach that emphasizes innovative practices to maximize children's learning, requiring teachers to reflect on their beliefs, uncover their assumptions and develop cultural competency by learning about their students' lives and cultures because they need to adjust their teaching approach to fit their students' learning needs. Teachers develop adaptive expertise by thinking about everything they do, assessing children's needs, trying various innovations to further children's learning. As teachers increase their capacity to adjust their practice to fit children's needs, they become increasingly innovative and effective teachers. Developing adaptive expertise involves teachers encountering new information about academic content and their students' needs, allowing new knowledge to shift their understanding of the world to make intellectual room to create new insights and perspectives that extend beyond teachers' life experiences (Shepard, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Rust, 2005:361; Kenyon & Randall, 1997).

3. Methods

I used a reflexive qualitative interview approach to examine a possible link between the participants' beliefs about good teaching and their classroom practice (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). I chose this approach to create a guided reflection experience for the participants that they might find useful in their own teaching.

3.1 Data Collection: I used qualitative interviewing to gather data, using the same interview protocol with each participant (Weiss, 1995; Seidman, 1991). This study was guided by the following research questions,

How do teacher candidates describe good teaching?

How do teacher candidates decide whose advice to follow during student teaching?

3.1.1 Entry: I am a teacher educator who teaches child development and supervises student teachers. The purpose of this research study was to help me understand more about how to better support teacher candidates' professional growth and development as teachers through coursework and student teaching placements (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Erikson, 1979).

3.1.2 Population and Sample: The population for this study was graduate students enrolled in a teacher education masters degree program located in the Northeastern United States, leading to state certification. There were approximately 80 teacher candidates eligible to participate in this study who had completed a course in child development and student teaching. I anticipated a 20% positive response rate but, in the end, I had a 15% positive response rate with twelve participants (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

3.1.3 Participants: The twelve teacher candidates who participated in this study worked in varied school settings - public, private and charter schools. Although the eligible population age range was early 20s to mid 50s, the twelve participants were mostly white, middle-class females between 24 and 35 years old, mirroring the teaching force in the United States (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 1990). This was a self-selected group of teacher candidates who had enough interest and spare time to participate in the study but they were not representative of larger groups of teachers, see Table 2 (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Batson, 1989; Erikson, 1979).

Historically, teaching served as a gateway profession where young people from low-income and working class families could gain access to the middle class, which was the case for some of the participants (Lortie, 1975). Teaching wasn't every participant's first career choice but when things didn't work out in their first career choice, they turned toward teaching as an alternate choice, see Table 3.

3.2 Data Analysis: My approach to data analysis was designed to surface patterns of responses across participants without losing the nuance and complexity present in each participant's response (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Bateson, 1989). I created analytic charts that enabled me to preserve the participants' unique voices while situating their responses in the context of their own interviews as well as in the context of the other participants' responses (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 2004). I generated findings in this study by tracking the convergent patterns of responses among the participants, which signaled that the participants were using their shared professional teaching knowledge base to formulate their responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Schwarz, 1999; Weiss, 1995; Seidman, 1991).

4. Findings:

The three main components of good teaching rest on adaptive expertise,

1. knowledge of academic content;
2. knowledge of children and child development theory; and
3. The capacity to connect children with academic content using developmentally grounded practices (Nieto, 2003; Palmer, 1999).

The participants' definitions of good teaching reflected these components with participants emphasizing the importance of connecting with each child in their class and understanding each child's unique cultural context so they could use these insights to design academic lessons that would be personally meaningful and easier to learn (Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007; Nieto, 2003; Palmer, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). The participants believed that good teachers needed to be able to 'read' their students and make adjustments in their practice on the spot to sustain children's engagement in the academic lesson being taught.

4.1 Definitions of Good Teaching: The participants defined good teaching in three ways,

4.1.1 Reach Each Child: Three of the twelve participants defined good teaching as the ability to reach each child in the classroom by listening and talking with them to establish meaningful connections between the content and each child as situated in multiple sociocultural contexts,

Good teaching is being able to teach a whole group and reaching out to each and every child in that group on whatever level they're at. ...everyone in the class should feel equal. Students shouldn't feel that one student is better than the others (Anjali).

Anjali positions children as both cultural and intellectual beings with unique and varied needs. She argues for creating a learning environment in which every child feels equally valued (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Nieto, 2003; Noddings, 1992). A learning environment that greets differences with respect and interest helps children navigate the complex and varied diversities that constitute the sociocultural context of the classroom. To create and sustain this kind of learning environment, teacher candidates need to develop strong cultural competencies that go well beyond their personal experiences to be culturally inclusive so that all children know they are safe, seen, welcome and unconditionally accepted (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Rogers, 1951).

For Jessica, content knowledge alone wasn't enough to create meaningful learning experiences,

A good teacher can recognize the strengths of any child and bring out those strengths and make them feel good about what they do. Good teachers do what they have to do to help their students do good in the world. It's important for a good teacher to know that all the kids want to be seen. All kids want to be validated. All kids want you to call them on their bullshit, even if they don't act like it. But that's part of being seen and being understood and being helped (Jessica).

Jessica believes that good teachers see their students clearly and accept them unconditionally while supporting children to do their best. At the same time, unconditional acceptance isn't about letting children do anything and everything. Rather, it is about good teachers being invested in their students' success by providing support and limit setting to steer children toward productive adulthoods. As such, Jessica calls for good teachers to accept their students unconditionally and balance the emotional intimacy of care with maintaining the emotional distance of professionalism (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Noddings, 1992; Rogers, 1951).

For this group, good teaching is about making a personal connection with each child so that every child feels safe, valued, seen and accepted. The unconditional acceptance of children's strengths and struggles frees good teachers to draw on their adaptive expertise to use innovative teaching approaches that sustain children's engagement in the academic lessons longer, which in turn supports increased academic achievement. Establishing personal connections in the classroom requires good teachers to understand the lives children lead outside school and view children's home cultures as the context within which each child's development takes place. These insights can inform the specific materials and texts teachers choose, favoring content that connects to and reflects each child's culture. Further, good teachers don't allow children's struggles to obscure children's strengths and find ways to help children feel good about themselves while being mindful of preparing them to become educated adults capable of improving the world they live in (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Noddings, 1992; Rogers, 1951).

4.1.2 Engages with Children: Five participants defined good teaching as the ability to engage with children in a way that places learning in the center where teachers and students are learners together. Michael said,

A good teacher is always learning and realizing that they have more to learn. Good teachers should be knowledgeable about children, like child development, and knowledgeable about the content they're teaching. ...knowing what is actually helping the children and fostering independence in their growth versus...hurting children (Michael).

Good teachers take a learner-centered approach and should be knowledgeable about children and the academic content they're teaching so that they can construct connections between the children and the lessons they teach (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). For Michael, good teaching is about modeling learning where teachers serve as guides in the learning process to promote children's independence and growth (Bandura, 1997).

Heather believes good teachers bring a deep understanding of children to create a respectful, collaborative learning environment,

A good teacher is somebody who is able to help their students learn but not in a dictatorship...one who can foster a good social environment within the classroom and also really build upon the strengths of the kid (Heather).

For Heather, a good teacher provides opportunities for children to have a say in what and how they learn. Valuing children's voices to inform how teachers teach is a learner-centered approach grounded in adaptive expertise. This definition of good teaching focuses on supporting each child's strengths, struggles, interests and culture with innovative teaching practices, informed by and devised to meet children's constantly shifting learning needs.

Ron believed that caretaking alone isn't teaching without rigorous and engaging academic content,

...I remember my first grade teacher put so much energy into finding something that was genuinely interesting for kids that made them feel good about being engaged in this experience of being in school. She certainly was no caretaker. A teacher is an artist; a teacher is a shepherd; a teacher is an example (Ron).

While good teaching involves care, Ron believed that good teaching requires care coupled with interesting and engaging academic content. He described a good teacher as an artist and guide, providing a model that is worthy of children's emulation. This can be accomplished with good teachers knowing each child well enough to create multiple points of entry that make the academic content accessible and engaging for all children.

This group describes good teaching as taking children's questions seriously, opening the possibility of using children's life experiences as resources to make the academic content personally and culturally relevant to each child in the class, creating a learning environment where children feel safe, seen and unconditionally accepted (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Rogers, 1951). These definitions of good teaching are learner-centered and grounded in adaptive expertise.

4.1.3 Adjusts to meet Children's Needs: Two participants defined good teaching as the ability to adjust their classroom practice to sustain children's learning,

A good teacher is excited about teaching. A good teacher should know, 'oh, I need to change my tactic' and that can be the hardest thing to (a) admit to yourself and (b) to ...just stop and redirect your efforts...it's something I want to get better at... (Valerie)

For Valerie, good teachers have a passion for their work that can capture and hold children's attention with learner-centered, innovative teaching approaches that sustain engagement with meaningful academic content. This approach requires professional confidence fueled by dedication to keep the learner's needs at the center of their practice.

Professional confidence enables good teachers to admit when their planned lesson isn't working, quickly shift gears using their knowledge of children and adjust their teaching approaching the moment to more closely fit their students' learning needs,

I think a good teacher can look at their students at any given day and say, 'This is what we're going to do' and, if it's not working, throw it out. That was the first lesson I learned and one of the best was that it's ok to have a plan and get rid of it. ...a good teacher is the teacher who reads her audience, or his audience, and is able to say, 'Ok. This is going to be really awesome.' And also understand that maybe this really awesome thing isn't going to be awesome in this moment... (Liz)

For Liz, good teachers have the ability to 'read' their students and act on the children's behavioral cues and clues to change their approach to sustain children's engagement and learning. Being able to adjust their teaching approaches in the moment depends on teachers' deep understanding of children's development. For some, adjusting their teaching may feel like a public failure because their plans didn't match children's needs. However, for good teachers who understand the nature of learning, adjusting and readjusting their teaching approaches to sustain engagement to increase children's academic success is a way of life. Each experience of adjustment and readjustment is an opportunity for good teachers to become increasingly effective in their practice as they increase their students' academic success.

Across the three groups of definitions, the participants defined good teaching as connecting with each child personally, culturally and intellectually. Good teaching included teachers who are open to learning and adjusting their practice in the moment to meet children's learning needs. The participants' definitions of good teaching are learner-centered; using innovative teaching approaches to adjust their teaching to meet children's learning needs. This creates multiple points of entry to meaningful academic content in an emotionally supportive, culturally responsive learning environment, using adaptive expertise (Cardwell, 2014; Gay, 2010; Immordino-Yang & Domasio, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Bandura, 1997; Piaget, 1968).

4.2 The Intersection of Beliefs about Good Teaching and the Clinical Placement: As in other professions, clinical experiences provide learning professionals with multiple opportunities to apply and hone newly learned professional knowledge and skills with real people, in real time, in typically occurring circumstances (Skovholdt, 2004). These experiences are particularly valuable because it gives learning professionals a chance to observe multiple models of good practice and have multiple opportunities to engage in supervised professional practice and receive consistent feedback designed to support improved practice (Bandura, 1997).

In teacher preparation programs, the student teaching placement is the clinical experience during which teacher candidates can construct and reconstruct their own individualized approaches to teaching under the supervision and guidance of classroom teachers (cooperating teachers) and teacher educators (college supervisors). The participants in this study made conscious choices about whose teaching advice they would follow, using their definitions of good teaching as a guide, see Table 5. There was a split among the participants about whether they would or wouldn't allow their school-based colleagues to shape their practice. This split wasn't clearly linked to the way participants defined good teaching but appeared more closely linked to their role in the classroom and whether their teacher preparation program had a say in their student teaching placement.

4.2.1 Yes: Seven participants allowed their school-based colleagues to shape their teaching practice because they observed their school-based colleagues enacting classroom practices with children that matched their definitions of good teaching,

I work with someone who didn't share my views on children or my teaching philosophy or anything so I didn't take much of her advice. But there are certain teachers in the school who I would follow just because of interactions I have had I feel like they are who I want to become as a teacher. There's this one woman I call the child whisperer -- anything she says, she can do no wrong by them. There are other people who say things like "he's troubled", "he's so bad" or "he has issues." I think that if I would have said "Okay, she's the head teacher, so she must be smarter than me, she must know." Then I would go along and say "yeah, he's a bad kid" even though that's not what I want to do (Claudia).

Claudia had a clear vision of the teacher she wanted to become based on her definition of good teaching. Although she and her cooperating teacher weren't a match, Claudia found other mentors among her school-based colleagues who matched and, in some cases, exceeded her definition of good teaching. Because she didn't passively accept what she was told based on seniority or position, Claudia was able to seek other models of good teaching during her student teaching experience whose example and advice she did follow.

Anjali described the active role she took in deciding which lessons she would learn and from whom she would learn them in her student teaching placement,

I come in with my own views based on my experiences, what I see happening in schools and what I agree with and what I don't agree with. The teachers offer a lot of valuable input, especially the ones with experience who can explain things to me or highlight things in ways that I may not have seen before. So when that happens, it helps to shape my views (Anjali).

Anjalientered student teaching open to learning but she wasn't a blank slate who accepted what she saw and heard without question. Anjali used a critical eye and ear to choose whose input she would follow and use. Anjali's cooperating teacher offered insights that she valued. Even though she had a clear set of beliefs, Anjali was also open to new ideas and approaches.

Michael embraced the values, beliefs and practices in his student teaching placement because they aligned with his beliefs about good teaching,

Since kids are so central in our lives at the school and in the mission of the school, kids are talked about in a positive light. So if a family came in they would be happy about the discussion. ...kids are always talked about in a positive light (Michael).

Talking about children in a positive light is a clear indication to Michael that the teachers in the school aligned their practice with the school's learner-centered mission. Michael was surrounded by multiple models of learner-centered teaching from which he could develop adaptive expertise. As such, he was willing to follow his school-based colleagues' advice about teaching because of the positive way they talked about children.

This group paid close attention to how their school-based colleagues talked about and worked with children as measures of whether they were good teachers. For this group, there was a match between their definitions of good teaching and their school-based colleagues' interactions with children. The participants who were willing to follow their school-based colleagues' advice about teaching were all in assistant teaching roles and placed in classrooms with their college supervisors' approval.

4.2.2No: Five participants said they wouldn't allow their colleagues to shape their classroom practice because they observed interactions and practices that didn't match their definitions of good teaching. There was a mismatch between their beliefs about good teaching and the practices they observed among their colleagues and cooperating teachers. In the absence of good teaching models, the participants resisted their school-based colleagues' advice and influence. Resisting their school-based colleagues' advice and influence was a lonely path for this group. As a result, these participants expended valuable energy struggling to hold on to their aspirations to become good teachers as they worried about getting burned out. These student teachers are in the precarious position of knowing what is good for children without knowing how to put it into practice on their own (Skovholdt, 2004).

For example, Amaya's student teaching placement was in her own classroom where she was placed as a lead teacher in a struggling public school by Teach for America (TFA). There wasn't any coordination between TFA and Amaya's teacher preparation program around this placement. Amaya actively resisted her school-based colleagues' teaching advice,

I have to work hard and not let them get to me. I can remember my first year teaching and having troubles with some of my students' behavior. After one was removed from my class for whatever reason, teachers said "Oh, now that's not your problem anymore." But I don't want to think about him like that. I'm the minority when it comes to that so I didn't feel like saying anything because I knew they wouldn't understand. And I think that if I listen to everything that they said, I would have a negative view of these kids and I didn't want to do that (Amaya).

Amaya worked hard to resist her school-based colleagues' negative views about children so they wouldn't 'get' her to have a negative view of children.

To keep the peace, Amaya didn't say anything to her colleagues because she felt they were so far apart that she didn't believe they could understand her perspective and she didn't want to take on theirs. In her silence, Amaya resisted internalizing her colleagues' views about children and teaching so that she wouldn't emulate her school-based colleagues' negative views of children and teacher-centered practices. Although the child who had been disruptive was removed from her class, Amaya didn't see it as a source of relief that would make her job easier as her colleagues' response indicates. Amaya seemed to feel sorry to see him leave and that his needs were beyond her teaching expertise.

Heather also worked as a lead teacher in a struggling public school and resisted her school-based colleagues' influence,

I hope not. It's hard to be around them and not be shaped by it. To be honest, it's the way in which they speak. Some of it seems true, and it's not positive but it seems to be an accurate assessment of what's going on. Part of me doesn't want to think about that assessment and what people think about the kids but I also think people in the school automatically categorized kids according to who they thought they would be and what their potential was and what their potential was not. I wasn't willing to do that at the age of five or six because I think there's a lot more flexibility and those kids' lives can change a lot (Heather).

Heather struggled to resist her school-based colleagues' influence to sort and categorize children, especially because theirs are the voices she hears most often. Even though she doesn't agree with a constrained view of possibilities for young children, Heather can understand the rationale that supports her colleagues' negative assessments and sorting of children. Heather actively resists her school-based colleagues' views about and sorting of young children into categories based on perceptions of future success, which could become the children's reality despite alternate possibilities. Heather wasn't willing to decide a child's future at 5 or 6 years old because so much can change. At the same time, she seemed to struggle on her own to construct the kind of teaching expertise she wanted to develop to fully support her students' success using learner-centered practices.

Katalina, a lead teacher with TFA in a teacher-centered school with high test scores, not only resisted her school-based colleagues' influence but also advocated for children by trying to change her colleagues' approach to teaching as a potential school change agent,

I'm holding my own. My viewpoints are pretty dissimilar from almost everybody else that I work with. It's been a really difficult year and I'm like "I'm not gonna go back" but then I think somebody has to kind of help in terms of pushing the school. There are a lot of things the school is doing like the kids do really well on exams and read really well. So there's that structure in place but they need to grow in other areas. The school started with the viewpoint of 'these children' need strictness to be successful in school, negating the fact that they're kids developing like other kids and so they need those things too (Katalina).

Katalina was a learner-centered teacher working in a teacher-centered school, allowing children's questions, interests, learning needs and culture to inform her pedagogical choices. Katalina struggles as a lone voice for children's needs in her school. She is torn about whether or not to return. The school's mission positions children in a negative light, in need of strict, teacher-centered approaches to succeed. Katalina disagrees. She values the school's rigor and believes, based on her developing professional knowledge, that children thrive in socially supportive learning environments with rigorous, engaging academic content. Katalina wants the children in her school to be nurtured in ways that encourage their curiosity, questions and learning by moving her colleagues away from treating children harshly. She isn't sure that she can sway enough of her colleagues to adopt a learner-centered teaching approach to increase children's already strong academic achievement.

The five participants in this group worked as head teachers alone in the classroom and used the ways their school-based colleagues talked about children and how they treated children as measures of whether they were good teachers or not. This group resisted their school-based colleagues' advice and influence. They worked hard to resist the pervasive views about children and teacher-centered practices surrounding them in an effort to hold on to their learner-centered teaching approaches and beliefs about good teaching. It was a struggle and some seemed isolated and losing ground in their struggle to develop adaptive expertise by enacting learner-centered practices in teacher-centered schools. In the absence of ongoing, daily feedback and good, learner-centered teaching models to emulate, this group of participants was particularly vulnerable because they constructed their teaching approaches and practices in the negative by avoiding their colleagues' attitudes about children and teacher-centered practices anchored in routine expertise.

Overall, the participants used similar definitions and measures of good teaching to arrive at different decisions about the lessons they chose to learn about teaching from their school-based colleagues. Those participants who viewed their school-based colleagues as good teachers followed their colleagues' advice about learner-centered teaching practices to develop adaptive expertise that used children's development, culture, questions, experiences and interests as resources to promote and sustain learning by adjusting their practice to meet children's learning needs. The participants who didn't view their school-based colleagues as good teachers, resisted their colleagues' advice and influence to use teacher-centered approaches, anchored in routine expertise, that focused on delivering curriculum in increasingly efficient ways without considering children's culture, development, questions or interests.

Although the participants held similar beliefs about good teaching, their willingness to follow their colleagues' advice varied based on their role in the classroom and whether their teacher preparation program was involved in selecting the student teaching placement. The participants in the first group who were willing to follow their school-based colleagues' practices and advice were assistant teachers who worked in schools their teacher preparation program considered good places for student teachers to learn how to teach. All of the participants who resisted their school-based colleagues' advice worked alone in the classroom as lead teachers in schools that their teacher preparation program had no say in choosing.

4.3 Findings Summary: The participants were pro-active student teachers who valued learner-centered approaches to create innovative teaching practices that would give every child a chance to achieve. They resisted teacher-centered advice and using a triage approach where teachers focus their efforts on a select few who are seen as likely to succeed while letting the other children fend for themselves. The participants' beliefs about good teaching played an important role in helping the participants decide which lessons they chose to learn during student teaching and who they chose to learn those lessons from.

There was a split among the participants based on their role in the classroom and whether their teacher preparation programs had a say in the student teaching placement school. The participants who worked as assistant teachers in student teaching placements approved of by their teacher preparation program were willing to learn from their school-based colleagues because they saw them as good teachers. This was a useful experience for these participants because they were exposed to multiple models of good teaching and received ongoing, learner-centered feedback everyday, in real time helping them develop adaptive expertise from their school-based colleagues. The participants who worked alone as lead teachers placed in teacher-centered schools without consultation with teacher candidates' teacher preparation program, resisted their school-based colleagues' influence because they didn't see their colleagues as good teachers because they talked about and interacted with children in negative ways. For this group, student teaching was less useful because they weren't exposed to multiple models of good teaching and didn't have ongoing, learner-centered feedback on their practice in real time to help them develop adaptive expertise, a cornerstone of good teaching (Cardwell, 2014).

Given the difference in quantity and quality of feedback on student teachers' classroom practice who hold different roles in the classroom, it would be important for teacher preparation programs to differentiate the supports they provide so that all student teachers experience frequent, ongoing feedback in real time on their classroom practice with the purpose of helping student teachers develop adaptive expertise and a repertoire of innovative, learner-centered teaching practices. The structure of student teaching needs to be differentiated to address student teachers' varied needs based on the different roles they can hold during their student teaching placements so that all student teachers receive the support they need to use learner-centered practices and develop adaptive expertise. The participants' responses indicate that they need to be surrounded by multiple models of good teaching, where school-based colleagues talk about and work with children in positive and respectful ways to support their aspirations to become good teachers (Bandura, 1997).

5. Discussion

Children's lives have become increasingly stressed due to a faltering economy, unstable food supplies, insecure living arrangements with struggling parents and caregivers (McLoyd, 1998). Student teachers need to be equipped with content knowledge, applied professional teaching knowledge and increased cultural competence to consider the full range of possible motivations for children's behavior situated within each child's layered sociocultural contexts to consider possibilities outside the boundaries of their own life experiences (Cardwell, 2014; Nieto, 2003; Palmer, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

Good teaching rests on children knowing they are safe, seen, understood, received, unconditionally accepted and loved by their teachers (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Nieto, 2003; Palmer, 1999; Noddings, 1992; Rogers, 1951). Examining the role of the student teaching placement in relation to the participants' beliefs about good teaching showed that the student teaching placement is an important integrative experience where teacher candidates can make newly acquired professional teaching knowledge uniquely their own. It is also where they learn to balance the emotional distance of professionalism with the emotional intimacy of care without sacrificing one for the other (Nieto, 2003; Noddings, 1992). To ensure that student teachers, across their varied roles and placements, receive frequent feedback on their practice in real time with opportunities to reflect on that practice, teacher education programs need to provide differentiated models of student teaching to ensure that every student teacher receives frequent, ongoing feedback on their classroom practice.

Schools aren't emergency rooms or battlefields where only a select few survive. They are places of hope, hard work, care, struggle and triumph. No matter how well prepared teacher candidates are at the end of their teacher preparation programs, they can't be ready for every situation. However, through consistent, sustained and frequent opportunities to engage in guided reflections about the intersection of their beliefs, experiences, coursework and classroom practice, teacher candidates can construct the necessary principles, developmental understandings, cultural competencies and learning concepts to help them develop adaptive expertise so they can easily adjust their teaching practices to meet each child's diverse learning needs to sustain students' academic success with increasingly effective teaching practices throughout their careers (Cardwell, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

List of Tables

Table 1: Routine and Adaptive Expertise

Routine Expertise	Adaptive Expertise
<i>Teacher-Centered Approaches</i> Emphasizes efficiency and links with Piaget's concept of assimilation	<i>Learner-Centered Approaches</i> Emphasizes effectiveness and links with Piaget's concept of accommodation
Teachers develop a core set of competencies that they apply throughout their teaching careers with increasing efficiency so they no longer have to think about their actions. Their reactions to children come automatically, without thought, privileging efficiency over innovation and effectiveness.	Teachers change their core competencies and continually expanding the breadth and depth of their expertise through thought, reflection and innovation, balancing effectiveness with efficiency.

Table 2: The Participants[12]

Name	Role Program Placement (1)	Race	Social Class As a Child	Social Class Now	Other Important Descriptors
Heather	TFA/EC Public	White	Lower Middle/ Upper Middle	Middle Class	
Michael	Assistant EC/Ch Charter	White	Middle Class	Middle Class/ Lower Middle Class	
Katalina	TFA/Gen-Sp Charter	Bi-racial/ Multiracial (2)	Middle Class	Middle Class	
Jessica	Museum Ed/ Public	White, Jewish, Israeli	Poor to Middle Class	Subsistence	Immigrant, Advocate
Ron	Assistant EC/Private	White, Jewish (3)	Upper Middle Class	Mixed/Lower Middle Class	Artistic, athletic energetic hopeful
Amaya	TFA/EC Public	Latina	Lower Middle Class	Middle Class	
Claudia	Assistant EC/Ch Private	My parents are Jewish	Upper Middle Class	Middle Class	
Valerie	Assistant EC/Ch Private	White			
Emily	Assistant Non-Matric Private	White Caucasian	Middle Class	Middle Class	Artist
Liz	Assistant Ch/ Private	Caucasian American	Upper Class	Lower Middle Class/ Upper Class	
Melanie	Assistant Infant/ Toddler	Jewish White	Upper Middle Class	Hand to mouth /super in debt	Artist, parent harried, frazzled parent of a preteen
Anjali	Assistant EC/ Private	Indian American (4)	Upper Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	

1-- EC = Early Childhood; Ch = Childhood; TFA = Teach for America; Gen = General Education; Sp = Special Education

2 – African-American, Caucasian, Native American (Cherokee)

3 – I’m white, I’m Jewish. My father’s Jewish, Eastern European background and my mother was Southern Baptist. Intellectual, that’s my culture, my ethnicity.

4 – Indian-American or South Asian Indian – American, first generation. I think I’m considered first generation. I’m the first in my family to be born in this country. My parents are from India.

Table 3: Participants’ College Major, Prior Work Experience or Career Aspiration[11*]

Names	College Major	Work Experience or Career Aspiration
Heather	Psychology-Neuroscience	Medical Doctor
Michael	Political Science	Education Policy Analyst
Ron	Philosophy	Journalist
Valerie	Theater Arts	Actress
Melanie	English	Interior Design & Teacher
Anjali	Computer Science & Economics	Finance
Katalina	Developmental Psychology	Psychologist
Jessica	Political Science & Theater	Unsure
Claudia	Criminal Justice & Education	Social Worker
Liz	Environmental Science & Political Science	
Emily	Studio Art	Artist

*Due to technical difficulties 1 participant’s response to this question were lost, n=12.

Table 4: Definitions of Good Teaching

Definition of Good Teaching	Number of Participants
Reach Each Child	3
Engage with Children	5
Adjust to Meet Children's Needs	2

Table 5: Allow Colleagues to Shape Practice[12]

Yes		No	
7		5	
Name	Good Teaching Definition*	Name	Good Teaching Definiton*
Michael	Engages	Heather	Engages
Jessica	Reach	Katalina	Engages
Claudia	N/A	Amaya	N/A
Ron	Engages	Emily	Reach
Valerie	Adjusts	Melanie	Engages
Liz	Adjusts		
Anjali	Reach		

*Reach = Reach Each Child; Engages = Engages with Children; Adjusts = Adjusts to Meet Children's Needs; N/A = Due to technical difficulties these responses were lost.

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