

Thematic Article

Self-Study: Tensions and Growth in Graduate Teaching Assistant Development

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Abstract

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) development is an important undertaking for many higher education institutions in the United States. During the GTA preparation process, tensions can arise when the supervisor challenges GTAs by engaging in critical reflection and pushing them to advance their pedagogical skills beyond their comfort zone. Guided by Berry's (2008) framework of tensions, this self-study aimed to answer the research question: How do tensions that arise during GTA development contribute to the professional growth of teacher educators and GTAs in their teaching? Self-study was the research method, and the data were analyzed using the strategy of inductive analysis and creative synthesis (Patten, 2002). This self-study reports five types of tensions: telling and growth; confidence and uncertainty; safety and challenge; valuing and reconstructing experience; and planning and being responsive. The findings explain how these tensions pushed the supervisor and the GTA to reflect on teacher preparation, manage challenges, and improve teaching. While tensions place teacher educators and novice teachers in uncomfortable positions, this study shows that reflections on and articulation of tensions in collaborative dialogues can help both discover aspects of their teaching that provide opportunities for growth and lead both to transform tensions into teachable moments.

Keywords: Teacher preparation; tensions; graduate teaching assistant; self-study methodology

Introduction

The goal of teacher education, to a great extent, is to improve instruction of learners of teaching (Glickman et al., 2014). To attain this goal, teacher educators not only support but also challenge novice teachers to examine critically the complexity of teaching and to make wise pedagogical decisions in varying contexts. However, learners of teaching are typically not strangers to classrooms, and as such, when teacher educators introduce instructional improvement strategies that are inconsistent with novice teachers' past experiences of schooling, conflicts and tensions can arise, which are understood as "familiarity pitfalls" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Nevertheless, according to Brookfield (2017), such resistance from learners is "an essential rhythm of significant learning" (p. 50) when learning to teach stretches novice teachers beyond where they are. If tensions and resistance signal important learning opportunities in teacher preparation, then it is imperative to articulate how these "feelings of internal turmoil" (Berry, 2008, p.32) that many mentors and mentees experience help both move forward in the course of teacher preparation.

The purposes of the study are twofold: (1) to reflect on and identify the challenges experienced by both the supervisor and the graduate teaching assistant (GTA) during the process of GTA development and (2) to uncover the implications of how tensions can help both revisit their own habitual, familiar, and comfortable teaching practices, consider a teaching practice that may be counterintuitive, and improve instruction of both teacher educators and learners of teaching. The study is guided by Berry's (2008) framework of tensions in asking the following research question: how do tensions that arise during GTA development contribute to the professional growth of teacher educators and GTAs in their teaching? Self-study was adopted as the research method to study the professional settings (Pinnegar, 1998) and to examine one's beliefs and practices and their

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interrelationships (Hamilton, 1998). This self-study offers teacher educators, novice instructors, and researchers a glimpse into fruitful results of methodological, reflective dialogues between supervisors and supervisees through a critical friendship in a research environment. The research findings put forward a further understanding of how reflection on tensions can guide teacher educators and GTAs to professional growth, reconceptualize conflicts, and improve teacher preparation experience for both teacher educators and novice teachers.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Tensions

Berry's (2008) conceptual framework of tensions is an analytic tool for organizing, coding, and understanding varying tensions observed during teacher preparation. Tensions in teacher education can be understood as problematic situations, in which mentors or mentees or both experience intellectual difficulties that cause them "doubt, perplexity or surprise" (p.27) and prompt them to examine underlying assumptions of their pedagogies. Many tensions are conflicting stories that have grown out of the interaction and discrepancy between teacher educators' pedagogical goals and novice teachers' needs and concerns. While having experienced complexities of teaching about teaching, teacher educators and novice instructors do not necessarily learn to articulate what those tensions are and how these challenges can lead to "questioning, to awakenings, to transformations" (Clandinin, 1995, p.31). As teacher educators and learners of teaching find themselves pulled in various directions by competing priorities and attempts to "accomplish complex and even conflicting goals" (Clark & Lampert, 1986, p.28), it is helpful that both recognize the patterns of and interconnections among the tensions, manage those opposing forces within their work, and illuminate how these tensions reshape their landscape of professional knowledge. Berry's conceptual framework categorizes six tensions, and five tensions that were experienced by the supervisor and the GTA in this self-study are reviewed. While presented individually, five areas of tensions are often interconnected.

Telling and Growth

The tension exists between informing novice teachers of what teacher educators know and providing opportunities for them to reflect and self-direct. It is also present between challenging novice teachers to grow independently and acknowledging the needs of novice teachers to be told how to teach and of teacher educators to be perceived as helpful.

Confidence and Uncertainty

This tension arises when teacher educators feel uncertain in deciding what aspects of teacher preparation practice to make explicit and how to make them explicit in terms that enable learners of teaching to find such information useful and meaningful and subsequently develop their trust in the teacher educator as a competent leader. Such uncertainty in teacher educators can be interpreted as a weakness by their learners of teaching and lead to self-doubt regarding whether they are providing a credible and convincing model for beginning teachers to gain confidence in their professional skills.

Safety and Challenge

The process where beginning teachers are challenged to examine their teaching tacit rules, decisions, and actions sets up this area of tension. Some of these teaching moments can even be confrontational; therefore, teacher educators need to exercise their sensitivity and care to create a safe learning environment in which learners of teaching are not belittled or humiliated. This process of challenging novice teachers to grow is risky because not only the self-esteem of novice instructors is at stake; so too is the teacher educators' credibility. However, it is valuable to create constructively uncomfortable learning experiences for novice teachers because such opportunities help them become critically aware of their perceptions of teaching and learning situations and grow beyond the boundaries of customarily accepted teaching practice (Berry & Loughran, 2002).

Valuing and Reconstructing Experience

Helping novice teachers to realize that learning about teaching requires more than simply acquiring experience of teaching lies at the heart of this tension. The tension arises when teacher educators learn to acknowledge novice teachers' authority of experience, value the significance of their ideas, challenge them to "interpret their own meaning in ways that have never been required before, and (we) stress the importance of

the challenge that follows—to translate their insights into their future teaching” (Loughran & Russell, 1997, p.176). This pedagogical task creates tension for teacher educators because they need to move beyond simply confirming beginning teachers’ authority of experience to preparing beginning teachers to suspend their teaching philosophy willingly, consider alternative approaches to teaching, and reconstruct their existing experience into a new approach.

Planning and Being Responsive

Learning moments during teacher preparation can occur as planned or unexpected. For teacher educators being responsive to unplanned issues and concerns raised by novice teachers, and taking advantage of those teaching opportunities can become a source of tension when going beyond predetermined frames of learning. This circumstance challenges teacher educators to be open to understanding the learning moments from the beginning teachers’ perspective, in addition to the particular goals and intentions in the teacher educators’ preplanned agenda.

Reflection in Teacher Preparation

Reflection on tensions can move teacher educators and learners of teaching towards construction of new meanings relative to their professional growth. Dewey (1938) maintains that reflective teaching plays an important role in the professional growth of educators because educators constantly learn from their experiences and reflective thinking guides them to take actions deliberately, instead of randomly and reactively. Critical reflection is defined as a “sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions” (Brookfield, 2017, p.3). When teaching reflectively and critically, teacher educators consistently examine their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning, assess their teaching practices, listen to feedback from learners of teaching, progress from the retrospective point, and consider alternatives to improve their teaching outcomes. When teacher educators are regularly and actively engaged in professional introspection that may lead to reframing their strategies in preparing novice teachers, they are using reflection for professional growth (Shandomo, 2010). To scrutinize teaching assumptions in an effort to uncover when distorted assumptions need further investigation, teacher educators can use the following four lenses to help them unearth their professional practice during reflection: learners’ eyes, colleagues’ perceptions, personal experiences, and theory and research (Brookfield, 2017).

However, Shandomo (2010) points out that “reflection itself is not, by definition, critical” (p. 104), and simply reporting what one does is different from actively questioning one’s own instructional goals, values, and assumptions that pervade an educational context (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The findings of Stegman’s study (2007) suggest that teachers present varying levels of inquiry and diverse content and purposes in their reflections. Restricted by preexisting perspectives about teaching, limited experiences of instruction, and lack of confidence, novice teachers tend to center their reflections on technical, clinical, and personal matters, rather than have their reflection content be more context-specific, learner-centered, or driven towards long-term outcomes of teaching and learning (Stegman, 2007; Wu, 2021). Without critical reflection that leads to creation of new realization and knowledge, educators can fall into the habit of validating what they do as common sense. Brookfield (2017) reminds educators that unexamined common sense is “a notoriously unreliable guide to action” (p.21). On the other hand, critically crafting their teaching experiences by continuously asking why, how, and what if is integral to educators’ changing perspectives and professional development (Merrifield, 1993).

Research design and Methods

In this short section please explain as clear as possible, what kind of methods you used, why you chose these methods, and what the relevant circumstances of the data collection and the analyzing process were. The more reliable this description is, the more impact you can make.

Self-Study

Loughran and Northfield (1998) argue that “there is no educational change without ‘people’ change”, and as such “by focusing on personal practice and experience, teachers may undertake genuine inquiry that leads to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning” (p.8). Therefore, self-study, a method that draws from reflective practice and practitioner research (Russell, 2004), is an appropriate methodology for the purposes of this research project as it allowed for closer scrutiny of my pedagogy in teaching about teaching. The study design drew on the following five principal characteristics of the self-study methodology: it is self-

initiated and focused; it aims for improvement; it is interactive and collaborative during the investigation; it gathers data from a variety of sources; and its validity is defined as a validation process of trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2004). In explaining the concepts of reliability and validity of a self-study, Loughran and Northfield (1998) state that if an account is regarded as authentic and a useful contribution to better understanding the researcher's situation, "then a reader is accepting the account as reliable and valid for personal purposes" (p.4).

Context and Motivation

I am Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and Coordinator of the Chinese Studies Program in a state university in the United States. Anne (pseudonym) was a graduate student of Linguistics in our Department and concurrently served as a GTA under my supervision during the academic years of 2019-2021. In her GTA position, Anne taught undergraduate Chinese language classes as the course instructor, and she also worked with individual students in our Language Support Center. To develop Anne as a language instructor, my supervisory efforts included meeting with Anne regularly to discuss her teaching plans, working with her to incorporate technologies into her instruction, observing her teaching periodically, and conducting post-teaching critique sessions to offer feedback on her pedagogical skills and respond to her concerns related to her teaching.

During Anne's first year as a GTA, we encountered frequent tensions at work, but the GTA development during Anne's second year was a different learning experience for us both. In an effort to reflect on and articulate the tensions that Anne and I shared and investigate how the experience of GTA preparation extends our understanding and enables us to guide our future teaching and learning, I conducted this self-study. To establish trustworthiness in this self-study and to incorporate her voice as a GTA, Anne served as my critical friend who acted like a sounding board (Schuck & Russell, 2005), engaged in dialogues with me, asked challenging questions, checked data and interpretations, prompted me to revisit and reframe critical events, and joined me in this professional learning experience.

Data collection

This self-study was approved by the institutional review board at my university. The four primary data sources were the following: (1) my research journal that reported critical incidents and my reflection, (2) my field notes that documented my observations of Anne's teaching and our discussions, (3) Anne's periodical written reflection reports on her GTA development, and (4) interviews with Anne focused on tensions perceived by Anne and me.

Data Analysis

Adopting the strategy of inductive analysis and creative synthesis (Patten, 2002), I commenced analysis with multiple rounds of reviews of the data sources. This approach places researchers in an "immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships," and allows researchers to begin the analysis with open-ended observations of the data sources and end with "a creative synthesis" (p.41). Following this approach, during the first coding cycle (Saldana, 2009), I looked for emergent, repeated themes and explanations. Subsequently, I labeled and compiled lists of major patterns and dimensions relevant to the theoretical propositions and research question. The second round of coding cross-examined the four data sources to identify and confirm the repeated, focused topics. The third and final rounds of coding analyzed the interactions among thematic sub-datasets and synthesized them. The final codebook was member checked through discussions with Anne to verify that the findings were supported by the data (Guion, 2002).

Findings

The study attempted to answer the research question: how do tensions that arise during GTA development contribute to the professional growth of teacher educators and GTAs in their teaching? The findings show that both Anne and I were able to gain professional growth in our confidence and appreciation for unplanned learning moments from the tensions we experienced.

Tensions in Safety and Challenge, Confidence and Uncertainty, and Valuing and Reconstructing Experience

During the GTA orientation before the academic year of 2019 started, Anne shared that she was a grade school teacher for almost two decades. Knowing this, I felt confident that Anne would adapt herself quickly to college teaching without requiring extensive support from me. Anne also believed that her previous success as a K-12 language teacher had laid a foundation for her college teaching. However, my observations of her

teaching during the first few weeks of the semester showed an unexpected discovery. I noticed that Anne carried herself in an authoritarian manner, and the class climate was intense. The student feedback on Anne's teaching confirmed my observations that they found Anne "overwhelmingly intimidating" (Journal, 9/24/2019). In response to this critical event, Anne explained that her pedagogy stemmed from a "familiarity pitfall" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985), in which her schooling experience as a student led her to form a belief in the benefits of exercising teacher's authority on teaching effectiveness in terms of completing her teaching plan (Field Notes, 12/02/2019). The situation went on for semesters, during which I was constantly made aware that Anne had applied what was familiar in her schooling into her teaching. As a result, I worked with her to transform her traditional or familiar ideas into more flexible approaches to teaching. My goal was for Anne to reflect regularly on her practice based on classroom evidence so that her pedagogical decisions and actions were customary, rather than habitual. However, despite the efforts, I continued to receive student comments regarding Anne's stern mannerism. Over time, this unresolved critical incident resulted in tensions among Anne, her students, and me as Anne's supervisor and the Program Coordinator.

In my attempts to support Anne, I experienced tensions primarily in three areas: safety and challenge, confidence and uncertainty, and valuing and reconstructing experience. I challenged Anne to reflect on classroom-based evidence and articulate the effects of using her instructor's positional power that she had long believed in. One of Anne's initial responses to my inquiries about her unquestioned practice of "monotonous authoritarianism" (Strickland, 1990, p.292) was for her to question my intention. Anne asked, "Why do you think learner-centered is better than teacher-centered? Are you implying that I am not a good Chinese instructor?" (Field Notes, 11/8/2019). My well-intended requests of professional introspection meant to encourage Anne to examine the implications of her teaching decisions and actions made Anne feel "uncomfortable and criticized" (Field Notes, 11/13/2019). Knowing that Anne did not feel "safe" as a result of finding my feedback confrontational, I doubted my pedagogy and experienced uncertainty regarding my role. Anne opened up her teaching practice to my scrutiny, and I aimed to offer constructive critique to prepare Anne to move beyond her authority of experience and willingly suspend her teaching philosophy. We both attempted to perform our respective roles; however, tensions arose and persisted.

After the first year concluded, Anne and I decided to engage in a sustained and intentional self-introspection targeting to improve our GTA development experience. We reflected on why, how, and what if (Merrifield, 1993): Why there were tensions, how these tensions hurt our confidence in our profession, and what if these tensions could lead us to transformations (Clandinin, 1995). Anne shared that during the first semester under my supervision in Fall 2019, she considered my comments about her authoritarian pedagogy as simply indications of our differences as classroom teachers. Thus, Anne did not think it was necessary for her to incorporate my teaching rationale into her practice, as every teacher teaches differently. When I continued to "relentlessly convince" (Field Notes, 2/19/2020) her to consider my suggestions during the second semester, Anne started to feel her professional skills were confronted and thus began to "feel insecure and frustrated" (Interview, 5/17/2020). Subsequently, we reflected on what confidence meant to us in teacher education. From Anne's perspective, confidence meant to conceal her vulnerability in front of her students and me, maintain her teaching traditions, and have teaching materials ready at hand to help her feel prepared. However, the continuous tensions she experienced with her students and with me during the first year pushed her to ask if changing her authoritarian teaching was a sign of her uncertainty in her competence or an indication of being critically reflective and ready for professional growth. On the other hand, I had formerly believed being a confident teacher educator meant that I knew I offered sound guidance, independent from my supervisees' comments. Growing out of our conflicts during the first year, my revised idea of confidence was a willingness to discover from Anne the relationship between my teaching and her learning and to make changes to facilitate Anne's learning.

During our interview towards the end of the second year, both Anne and I recognized that the GTA development went well during the second year, with no tensions observed regarding classroom climate. We were able to teach reflectively with confidence in the sense that we critically considered our own teaching and improved recurring problems of intimidating learning atmosphere, instead of depending on unchanging, established personal norms or unexamined common sense. In retrospect, Anne shared:

In the beginning, I was not sure why you thought your way of teaching was better than mine. As a classroom teacher for almost twenty years, I was confident in my teaching performance. As such, I doubted your competence as a teacher educator because I did not find your suggestions about student-centered creditable or useful. My realization about the problems in my teaching and the usefulness of your suggestion to reflect on my own practice did not

happen until the end of the first year. During the first year, as I resisted to reject my long-held teaching philosophy, I noticed a very different learning climate in your classroom- your students appeared to enjoy learning. There were laughter and passion in your class, but there were none in mine. In addition, I found you resourceful in helping me resolve many other work-related tasks. As a result, I developed a trusting relationship with you. During the second year, I began to have confidence in your guidance as my supervisor. I tried to mirror your pedagogy and asked for my students' feedback. I felt comfortable and even confident to expose my vulnerability as a novice college instructor and became able to constantly reflect on critical incidents and consider other rationales. (Interview, 4/1/2021)

Tensions in Planning and Being Responsive as well as Telling and Growth

Integration of pedagogical technologies was a recurring challenge in Anne's teaching during the first year. Our institution adopts a course management system (CMS) to offer the community a virtual learning platform. Anne was met with challenges in setting up her course sites on CMS to complement her face-to-face teaching. Creation of presentational slides to enhance her teaching effectively was another uneasy undertaking for Anne. Moreover, during the spring semester in 2019, when the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly moved most of our classes from traditional classrooms to an emergency remote teaching environment (ERT), Anne's anxiety in integrating educational technologies into her teaching only intensified.

Teaching applications of technologies had not been a dimension of my GTA development efforts. As a result, I often did not anticipate Anne's needs nor the amount of time required of me to assist Anne in this regard. To bring Anne up to speed on the technological skills needed to implement her teaching, I frequently went over the technical aspects of teaching tasks with Anne. Examples of technical assistance include setting up diverse functions on CMS, applying effects in her presentational slides, screen-recording her teaching with an enhanced sound quality, designing online interactive assessment instruments, and trouble-shooting computer issues. In one meeting, Anne commented, "It is extremely stressful to have to be proficient in all these technologies, educational or not. Whenever the assignments you gave me involve use of technologies, I feel so scared" (Field Note, 11/13/2019). Seeing Anne's anxiety when she was tasked with technology-mediated teaching assignments and knowing that she felt intimidated by such requests, I often hesitated to ask Anne to stretch herself to meet the teaching objectives.

Moreover, our tensions also came from my conflict with the priorities between our team's work efficiency and Anne's development in self-reliance. Specifically, if I simply handed over step-by-step instruction on how to apply every single technology I thought Anne could use for her teaching, we could finish the tasks efficiently and relieve some of her pressure. On the other hand, one of my teaching goals was to encourage Anne to be self-directed by having her independently explore options in educational technology and make her own pedagogical decisions. However, when Anne had the chance to do so, the process and outcomes could be discouraging. This dilemma along with Anne's stress, the unexpected demand on me to offer technical support, and my hesitation to task her with more than she could handle inevitably led to two types of tensions between us: planning and being responsive as well as telling and growth tensions.

As the first year concluded, Anne and I collaboratively reflected on how we could grow out of these tensions so we could have a better GTA development experience going forward. Anne started the dialogue by asking what equipment and resources she needed in order to engage efficiently with educational technologies. In addressing the tensions and growth relative to technologies she experienced during the first year, Anne commented:

Integration of educational technology didn't receive much attention from me or my previous institution. When I realized its integral role in our students' learning experience here, I felt burdened by and inadequate in the use of technologies. I don't even own a good computer or a touchscreen tablet with a stylus pen that enabled me to easily grade digitalized assignments during ERT. I stressed out throughout the year. I knew you tried to help me solve my problems with technologies almost every week during and outside our scheduled meetings, and your immediate technical support definitely reduced my anxiety. However, sometimes I feel the situation is beyond help. I will continue to need you to tell me exactly what to do with technologies but I will also try to help myself by getting the right tools and reaching out for institutional help. After all, I want to be in charge of my own learning. (Reflection Report, 5/30/2020)

When the second year began, Anne shared with me excitedly that she purchased a new computer and other necessary tools over the summer and already felt confident about her online teaching assignments. During the second year, our discussions about integration of technologies had a dramatic change: I did not need to lay out technical details for Anne; she was able to solve problems independently much of the time; occasionally Anne shared discoveries she made about new online teaching tools. This changed dynamics brought me confidence in her competence in utilizing technologies to facilitate her teaching. The previous tensions were lifted. During the interview at the end of the second year, Anne summarized her technological journey with me as follows.

My first year was full of anxiety in the face of technology. Those tensions caused by a lack of my own technological skills not only were frustrating but also lowered my self-esteem. I then decided to harness my painful energy and use it for the good because I genuinely wanted to become a better college instructor. After I purchased the better equipped laptop and other tools you have suggested and explored a range of educational technologies over the summer, when the second year started, I became confident and able to view the tasks you gave me as an opportunity to learn something different using my new computer. I appreciate the tensions we had and the challenges you gave me. I don't think I would have motivated myself to learn about educational technologies had the situation not made it clear to me just how far I lagged behind. (Interview, 4/18/2021)

Discussions

This section discusses how the aforementioned tensions led to the professional growth for both Anne and me. The discussions are organized into two subsections relative to confidence and teachable moments.

Growth in Becoming a Reflective and Confident Instructor

The data showed that both Anne and I struggled with a need for confidence. Anne's aforementioned narrative suggests that she experienced uncertainty about what she could learn from me and self-doubt about her competence as a new college instructor. It also suggests that Anne started to reflect on her teaching and become open to other pedagogical possibilities after rapport was built between us. On the other hand, I struggled to develop Anne professionally in the face of her uncertainty about my leadership, and the struggles made the GTA preparation more challenging and reduced my confidence level in performing my supervisory duties. As a teacher educator, my sense of identity is partially bound to my ability to relate to novice teachers. When I needed to engage Anne using a confrontational pedagogy (Strickland, 1990), I tried to search for balance between developing a good professional relationship with Anne and accepting my responsibility to confront her with problems and possibilities. In portraying similar tensions, Schulte (2001) notes that "because I am continuously weighing the consequences of my actions on my relationships (with students), assisting others in transformation is even more stressful for me" (p.7). Pushing Anne to reflect on her existing instructional actions, see beyond the boundaries of her own practice, and then extend her understanding of teaching to consider other pedagogical possibilities was certainly a demanding task for Anne and me. Nevertheless, as Strickland (1990) reminds educators, "when conflict is not ignored or suppressed, it constitutes a discursive site in which knowledge can be produced" (P. 292), rather than merely reproduced. As such, both Anne and I took advantage of our tensions and tried to grow through them.

The investigation of our uncertainty and confidence tensions revealed that neither Anne's or my interpretations of confidence during the first year embraced the notion of openmindedness that Dewey (1993) suggested in the idea of confidence. During our second year, however, we learned to nurture confidence in and between us by integrating this missing component in our own definitions of confidence. Consequently, we were able to foster respect for diversity in pedagogies and create a safe, trusting environment for me to offer feedback and find out the effect of my teaching from Anne. In this environment, Anne grew to reflect critically on her teaching practice on a regular basis with an aim to find solutions and confidently challenge her own traditional mode of teaching and make changes based on classroom evidence. Her growth subsequently fostered my self-trust as a teacher educator.

Growth in Becoming Appreciative for Teachable Moments and Telling

The data showed both Anne and I encountered many unplanned "teachable moments" (van Manen, 1991), during which Anne's needs and concerns pertaining to her use of educational technology were identified and attended to by me as they occurred. Since such moments could not be planned in advance, Anne's need to

receive detailed teaching from me in those teachable moments often came into opposition with my plan to achieve my predetermined teaching objectives in our GTA preparation. At times, my reactions to these unplanned discussions were to quickly end them so I could proceed with my intentions for our meetings.

Nevertheless, as the planning and being responsive tensions continued to ensue, I gradually learned to appreciate these teachable moments for the following two reasons. These teachable moments were a window for me to see how I could help Anne based on her needs, and the tangible, immediate evidence (e.g., Anne became able to use certain technologies) of my usefulness in Anne's professional development also brought me a sense of self-worthiness. Appreciation for those learning moments was also observed in Anne's aforementioned narrative. Those moments suggested a direction for Anne to grow professionally, and she successfully transformed her frustration into a determination to become a self-reliant user of educational technology. We both experienced an attitudinal shift in how we view the unplanned learning opportunities and teachable moments.

While I had been conflicted between issuing directives to increase our work efficiency and providing opportunities for Anne to explore and grow into an independent college instructor at her own pace, I uncovered "telling" is not necessarily a blocker for supervisees' growth. Common concerns about "telling" in teacher education is that a telling model allows little opportunity for novice teachers to progress towards personally oriented growth (Mason, 2002). Moreover, the model overestimates the amount of knowledge that can be transmitted and underestimates what novice teachers can learn for themselves (Northfield & Gunstone, 1997). However, in this study, explicitly telling Anne what to do with technology, according to her narrative, reduced her anxiety and offered her a good foundation for self-reliant learning to flourish during the second year.

Conclusions

Self-study and reflection push teacher educators and instructors to scrutinize closely their assumptions, decisions, and actions (Loughran & Northfield, 1998) with an aim of improvement in one's teaching practice (LaBoskey, 2004). In this context, this self-study investigated tensions and growth during the two-year GTA development. The findings suggest that the notion of confidence in the perspectives of teacher educators and novice teachers respectively can influence the dynamic of teacher preparation. While tensions place teacher educators and novice teachers in uncomfortable positions, this study shows that reflections on and articulation of tensions in collaborative dialogues can help both discover aspects of their teaching that need attention and lead both to transform tensions into teachable moments. As Shandomo (2010) states, critical reflection can instigate professional growth. The strategy of telling, when used properly, can help manage tensions that stemmed from a scarcity in novice teachers' skills and then build a foundation for novice teachers to advance from. This self-study reported two primary areas of professional growth as a result of tensions: the reconceptualized notions of confidence and teachable moments. One direction for future research is to study strategies to not only manage tensions but more importantly contextualize tensions into growth opportunities. The field of teacher education needs an empirically-studied pedagogy that guides teacher educators to effectively identify and then systematically transform conflicts into learning and development for both supervisors and supervisees. This study invites readers to consider the research context and nature when they interpret the findings and results. Moreover, the narratives in the data should not be considered as objective accounts but rather the subjective interpretations of the situation of the GTA and supervisor.

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