

The Impact of Pedagogical Dissonance and Associated Resilience within a Foreign Sociocultural Context of Teaching Abroad

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Abstract—Through the lenses of dissonance theory, resilience theory, and educational best practices, this study provides a thematic analysis of pedagogical experiences of teacher candidates within a South African school to examine what the researcher has termed pedagogical dissonance, pedagogical resilience, sociocultural dissonance, and sociocultural resilience. A thematic analysis of teacher candidates' journals generated evidence of resilience to overcome dissonance within five categories related to pedagogy and a foreign sociocultural setting.

Index Terms—Pedagogical dissonance, pedagogical resilience, sociocultural dissonance, sociocultural resilience, teaching abroad.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the 2014-15 and 2016-17 academic years, eight teacher candidates from a regional, Midwest institution of higher education were placed at a pre-primary through Grade 7 preparatory school (YWPS), a small, rural school that serves both black and white children in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Teacher candidate placements spanned between twelve and sixteen weeks, and fall semester 2014 marked the first time that placement occurred at this site. While the overall study sought to address how well-prepared in content and pedagogy teacher candidates were for an international student teaching experience and what factors contribute to the successful cultural adaptation of teacher candidates to a host culture, the purpose of this paper is to provide a thematic analysis of recorded pedagogical experiences of teacher candidates within a South African sociocultural context. The analysis revealed pedagogical dissonance, sociocultural dissonance, pedagogical resilience, and sociocultural resilience, which were terms coined by the researcher to describe phenomena experienced by teacher candidates. The examination of pedagogical dissonance and resilience within a sociocultural context helped address pedagogical and sociocultural preparedness implications.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dissonance theory, resilience theory, and pedagogical best practices were the lenses through which teacher candidate journal comments were reviewed. Dissonance theory refers to the psychological tension that occurs when an individual

holds competing thoughts to result in belief or behavior modification. Nearly seventy years ago, [1] proposed a theory of cognitive dissonance. At the heart of this theory was the idea that inconsistencies occur within one's cognition, which is defined as any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior. Cognitive dissonance is psychologically uncomfortable, so reduction of dissonance is a basic process found in humans. According to [2], dissonance theory evolved to a more ego-based view in which an individual's inconsistency seems to lie between a positive view of self and the cognition that she or he has done something wrong. Cultural dissonance, which is the uncomfortable sense of discord or conflict that one experiences when placed in a changed cultural environment, exists within the scope of dissonance theory. [3] addressed the challenges of cultural dissonance associated with new teachers. Cultural dissonance can occur as new teachers experience exchanges between fellow teachers, parents, students, and curriculum. Dissonance theory (cognitive and cultural) provided the theoretical framework through which the researcher analyzed teacher candidate journal entries. The dissonance theory lens guided the researcher in establishing new forms of dissonance; that is, pedagogical and sociocultural dissonance.

Resilience theory defines the psychological process developed in response to intense life stressors that facilitates healthy functioning [4]. According to [5], the place of resilience theory in cross-cultural writings is unclear, but notions of strength and resilience do emerge in cross-cultural literature. The author utilized factors associated with resilience to identify new terms associated with resilience; that is, pedagogical and sociocultural resilience.

The author utilized accepted best practices within pedagogy to fully understand the reasons for dissonance associated with student teaching abroad. Examples of best practices include: differentiated instruction [6]; culturally responsive teaching as a core multicultural principle [7]; utilization of backward by design planning [8]; and the utilization of appropriate assessment practices to master outcomes [9]. As [10] noted, "The best teaching practices are those that consider all learners in a classroom setting and pay close attention to differences inherent to academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity" (p. 241).

III. METHODS, TECHNIQUES, AND MODES OF INQUIRY

Case study methodology served as the means of gathering data since [11] noted that case studies have a distinct

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advantage over other methods when one wants to answer: 1) a “how” or “why” question; 2) a contemporary set of events; and 3) over which the investigator has little or no control. Case studies are empirical inquiries that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

Researchers sought answers to both a “how” and “why” question, and the principal investigator experienced a contemporary, authentic setting over the course of three trips to YWPS.

TABLE I: PEDAGOGICAL DISSONANCE SAMPLES

Pedagogical Dissonance Examples	
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can also tell that the strategies used to teach here are very different...most lessons consist of the teacher writing on the board and the students copying what she has written into their work books, or of the students completing a worksheet in their books. There is very little engagement or interactive instruction. (09/10/14) TC1 Another big difference we’ve noticed is pacing—as a school policy, teachers are required to move at the speed of the most proficient student. (09/16/14) TC1 I hardly ever see collaborative work among students. (09/18/14) TC3 I have noticed the students who struggle more when I am doing the teaching. It’s so hard because I feel like I could spend the entire time I am teaching with a particular student because he really needs that extra help, but I know I can’t do that. I guide him and redirect him as much as I can. It’s difficult because based on my knowledge of special education; this student should be receiving some services. (10/09/14) TC2 The lack of computers, internet, SmartBoards, document cameras, and so forth limit our pedagogy and activities we can do in the classroom. (09/10/14) TC 3 The special education practices are one of the toughest things about teaching here in South Africa. When asking about IEPs or 504 Plans, the teachers and principal had no idea what those were. I was informed that students with special needs are sent to separate schools, or it is the parents’ responsibility to find and pay for services and supports. This practice is unlawful in the states and honestly heartbreaking to hear/see. I feel as though in a lot of aspects, South Africa is similar to America 50 years ago. (09/10/14) TC3 Following brief whole-group instruction by Miss N., she assigned three worksheets for the students to complete independently. It was clear that over half the class did not understand. In America, I would have brought my struggling students to a U-shape table and provided further explanation. Additionally, three worksheets in a lot, especially when the concept is brand new and many students do not understand. (09/23/14) TC3
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of resources is still challenging, particularly the lack of books. I’ve noticed is that in the US there is really a stronger focus on literacy in the classroom. Not just in explicit literacy instruction, but typically when students finish work early or something they are encouraged to read, and many classes even have designated reading time. Here, the only reading students do in class is in their reading group, which really takes maybe 10 minutes, tops. I really doubt that many of these students read much at home either, which is sad, and you’ve seen the library, which is truly pitiful. (10/09/14) TC 1 Friday was inter-house athletics day, so they had a sort of a track meet at the school between the two houses. The three of us were the time keepers for all the races, so it was fun to be involved in that, but that was another whole day of academics gone. This coming Friday we’re hosting a cricket tournament, so I don’t think we’ll be doing academics then either! (11/09/14) TC 1 They use a completely different curriculum (9/22/14) TC 2 Because YWPS is a private school, meeting standards is not a requirement. The school and teachers can use their own curriculum. When I was doing my practicum back in the states, standards and outcomes were a necessity. (09/10/14) TC 3 The school (academic) day is so short compared to U.S. schools. Furthermore, when the students are preparing for upcoming extracurriculars, such as concerts and assemblies, it leaves VERY little instructional and academic time. Although concerts are important in American schools as well, the focus on them here completely surpasses academics some days. (10/26/14) TC 3
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The culture and the behavior management is very different here, (9/22/14) TC 2 I am getting more and more frustrated with the lack of behavioral management (10/01/14) TC 2 Coming into this student teaching placement, I was hoping to use a positive behavior intervention strategy (PBIS). However, after this first week, I realize that will not be possible nor functional. One cannot transition from lesson to lesson or day to day between teachers who use completely opposite approaches. I am still brainstorming behavior strategies to use while I am teaching the class, especially full-time. (09/14/14) TC 3 The longer I’m here at Yellowwoods, the more I realize how much our education systems differ. One of the most difficult changes is the behavior management, or lack thereof. The blurting out and constant talking by students is something that I don’t think I could ever get used to. Yesterday while Miss N. was teaching, I myself, almost had an anxiety attack...the students were just shouting out and talking nonstop the whole time during instruction. I find this super frustrating even when I’m not the one teaching. (09/23/14) TC 3 The classrooms are very different here than in the classrooms back in America. I felt a tad uncomfortable this week a few times. Unlike back home, the teachers are very loose here when it comes to letting children out of their sight. At my job back home, it is and will forever be never okay to be out of ration or have children out of your sight.(1/18/15) TC4
Educational System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the biggest differences is in special education. 504 plans and IEPs pretty much don’t exist here as far as we can figure out. (9/10/14) TC 1 An international student teaching placement certainly comes with its own set of challenges. The edTPA is designed around the American school system with 504 plans and IEPs and services for ELL students and students with learning disabilities and technology and resources and all of that, and completing it here without any of those things has been challenging and I think has really tested all of us. We’ve also had to deal with unreliable internet (and it always goes out on the day that you were really counting on being able to get a lot of work done!), lack of resources and technology (I had to mention it again because that has been a HUGE obstacle for us), learning a strange new culture and learning a new and different educational system, we’ve had to adjust to different pedagogical styles, and even though YWPS is an English speaking school, there has even been a bit of a language barrier at times because the English spoken here is different than the English that we all know.

	<p>(11/09/14) TC 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I must say planning lessons in America is much easier when you actually have resources and internet, interactive whiteboards, and document cameras in the classrooms. (10/29/14) TC 3 • I have not heard anyone address the term academic standards. This is quite different to me since I feel that is one of the most frequently used terms from teaching staff in the U.S. currently. (1/14/15) TC5
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another HUGE difference between schools in the US and schools here is the almost complete lack of technology in the classroom here...there are no computers for student use in the classroom (each class has 30 minutes of computer skills class a week in the school computer lab), there are no smart boards, no projectors or doc cams, basically nothing. As a result, technology is rarely incorporated into lessons. (09/10/14) TC 1 • We also have been trained to incorporate technology in every lesson though, which we obviously won't be able to do here, so it will be interesting. (09/16/14) TC 1 • The technology is a huge change. In the YWPS classrooms there is literally no technology. For instance, if the power were to be out, the only change would be the lack of lights and the clock. (09/10/14) TC 3

TABLE II: PEDAGOGICAL RESILIENCE SAMPLES

Examples of Pedagogical Resilience	
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They use a completely different curriculum, but I feel I am able to adapt and use the skills I've been taught to properly teach the students in my class. I have had the opportunity to use my lesson planning skills and creativity to create engaging lessons for the class. (9/22/14, TC 2) • Yes, the class can be very difficult at times, BUT this group of boys just won't respond to the type of instruction they are receiving or have received in the past. However, by making simple changes to your instruction and behavior expectations, they are a completely different class. (10/12/14) TC 3 • I do desire to pull away from "teaching through worksheets" a little bit more throughout my student teaching experience. (1/16/15) TC5 • Being that my development in Grade R (K in the US) has grown at a slow rate, I was at first discouraged. I found that I began to think that my learning has mostly been through my own reflection of how I would make certain lessons more beneficial to the students' growth. Recently, I realized another purpose for me in the classroom. Even though I feel like I have been almost "over-trained" for the academics at YWPS, I realized there is some good in this. My cooperating teacher is open to my suggestions and willing to try new things. Not only am I here to learn from her, but she is also learning from me. How cool is that! Learning takes place at all stages in life and she is willing to learn from me as well. This way, we can create the best possible environment for the students! (1/30/15) TC 4 • It may be just me, but I feel that teaching methods will be altered by the type of students in the classroom. I was now working with a different type of student. Honestly, I found this to be a difficult adaptation. I have personally irritated myself as I struggle to figure out what they proper ways to challenge and then support these students to most accurate level. There are different standards the students are set to achieve, they have different needs, and they will need to be assisted in different ways. (3/34/15) TC 5
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel very prepared in content for this student teaching experience. The culture and the behavior management are very different here, but content is similar. (9/22/14) TC 2
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even after 5 days of me teaching, the students still struggled a bit to listen to me. However, I learned to put my foot down and make sure they were paying attention. This is something that I have to continue to work on as a new teacher. I felt that as the week went on and I talked with the students more, they gained more respect for me as a person and as a teacher. I am learning new things about myself every day when I am teaching. It's a good feeling! (10/31/14) TC 2 • The week has been excellent. Miss N. was gone until Friday, so I was the solo teaching all day. On Monday, I introduced the behavior clip chart to students. I was a little skeptical how the students would respond to this new behavior management program. However, the students love it! Their behaviors have dramatically improved, and the students are actually very excited about it. I've had multiple students showing other students at Yellowwoods our chart. Additionally, every afternoon the students are so proud to bring home diaries with positive notes written. I couldn't be more pleased with how well the behavior clip chart is working. Miss N. will return on Friday, and I am desperately hoping she continues to use this behavior management plan. (10/08/14) TC 3 • In large part because of the new behavior management plan, the lessons have also been going very well. Distractions have decreased and student engagement has increased. I am really looking forward to full-time teaching ☺ (10/08/14) TC 3
Educational System	<p>I've also learned to be very flexible with my teaching. Sometimes electricity works, sometimes it doesn't. I have had to change lesson plans on the fly, adjust times, and make adaptations to my surroundings and the materials that I have. I can't say it hasn't been challenging, but I think I did a good job at making things work with what I have. I would suggest that you let prospective student teachers who are coming here know that they must be able to manage working and teaching with little to no materials or have them bring their own materials if needed. Materials can be found here, but you have to pay for them. I wish I would've known to bring (or buy upon arrival) simple materials such as markers, crayons, tape, glue, and scissors. It would have helped me out a lot! (11/04/14) TC 2</p>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am slowly becoming accustomed to this lack of social media that overwhelmed my life in the states. (09/21/14) TC 3 • The lack of technology sure forces one to be creative! (09/25/14) TC 3

Case studies rely upon multiple sources of evidence. [12] believed interviews to be the most common data source in case studies, and while observations are important, she cautioned researchers due to the subjectivity of the source. [13] cited the role of interpreter as the most important job of the case study researcher. Data sources for this study included surveys, interviews, journaling, field notes, video recordings, and non-participant observation for purposes of

triangulation. All teacher candidates were observed for multiple days. Teacher candidates kept journals on a weekly basis. Pre- and post-surveys were given to teacher candidates, and both students and cooperating teachers completed post-student teaching surveys. Significant data were collected as the result of multiple data sources, and care was taken to be mindful of the means to establish trustworthiness as explained by [14].

Thematic analysis of text occurred through open coding, as explained by [15]. The coding process resulted in ten categories. For example, one discovered category was entitled “racial observations,” which tied to the finding by [16] that South Africa is emerging from an identity-based conflict and trying to transform into a new society, with new values that stand in stark contrast with the old, and by the work of [17], who noted that although Apartheid ended officially in 1994, racist beliefs and practices remain. Video review and coding followed established guidelines by [18]. Survey results provided descriptive data.

IV. DATA SOURCES

Additional data sources for the overall research project included surveys, interviews, and thematic analyses of videos and the principal investigator’s field notes as a non-participant observer. The principal investigator recorded approximately fifteen hours of video that focused on teacher candidate interactions with students and their adjustment to South African culture and 153 pages of field notes over the course of five weeks of direct observation of the eight teacher candidates. In addition, the Appraisal of International Teaching Capacity survey for teachers and students that was developed by the researchers and the Adult Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale [19] were administered.

The focus of this paper is limited to the categories related to pedagogy that were determined through a thematic analysis of teacher candidate journals. Eight teacher candidates uploaded weekly journals over the course of student teaching placement, which spanned twelve to sixteen weeks, at YWPS. The aggregated journaling resulted in approximately 40,000 words. Categories derived from thematic analysis of the journals that are related to pedagogy are as follows: instruction; curriculum; classroom management; educational system; and technology.

V. RESULTS/SUBSTANTIATED CONCLUSIONS

The researcher concluded that the students experienced both pedagogical dissonance and resilience as the result of encountering an educational setting with values and practices that ran counter to those learned in their teacher preparation program. The vestiges of Apartheid and associated racist beliefs, practices, and verbiage added significant sociocultural stress for the student teachers as they tried to make sense of sociocultural values that were often anathema to their own. In addition, the tension to follow expectations of YWPS instead of best practices created dissonance since the teacher candidates wanted to implement practices learned in their teacher preparation, but they did not initially feel much latitude to do so. The training teacher candidates received in pedagogical best practices over the course of three and one-half years of courses and embedded field experiences served as the impetus for them to overcome the dearth of pedagogical best practices at YWPS. While thematic analysis makes clear that the teacher candidates experienced dissonance by feeling compelled to follow the pedagogical norms at YWPS, it is equally clear that teacher candidates

were resilient in working around set norms.

As the placements progressed, teacher candidates found ways to tacitly acknowledge a leftover system of separation and digest sociocultural dissonance without embracing racism and to incorporate best practices on a limited basis, which not only decreased pedagogical dissonance, but embodied resilience. Within a sociocultural context one student teacher questioned what the right thing to do since race plays a large role in the culture. She concluded that a racist incident caused her to be reflective in a whole new light, and she supposed all she could do was to encourage positive behavior and respectful actions and words. In regard to pedagogy, one teacher candidate incorporated manipulatives whenever possible, which increased student engagement. Two teacher candidates noted their desire to decrease dependence on worksheets, which they achieved with some success by designing more creative activities within lesson plans. One teacher candidate was frustrated with the absence of a solid behavioral management plan, but once the candidate had the opportunity to assume duties for the full instructional day, she implemented a behavior clip chart with success. Teacher candidates worked around the absence of Internet in the classroom by downloading information during times the Internet worked. The teacher candidates saved information and pictures to their laptops, and then they integrated the technology when preparing and delivering lessons. A sampling of excerpts related to pedagogical dissonance and resilience are located in Tables I and II, respectively.

VI. SCHOLARLY SIGNIFICANCE

It must be understood that an educational system designed to serve all students well is reliant upon teacher preparation programs, and a significant component of teacher preparation programs involves clinical experiences. The most effective teacher preparation programs provide an opportunity for sustained and extensive time afield. [20] noted that teacher candidates should have the opportunity to analyze, apply, and reflect upon the connection between both subject matter and the students whom they teach, and it is during clinical experiences that students should be expected to apply pedagogical concepts, evaluate effectiveness of applied concepts and practices, and reflect upon the results. The analysis, application, and reflection help prospective teachers to innovate and improvise to meet the needs of specific classroom contexts.

In addition to quality clinical experiences for teacher candidates, it must be understood that in an increasingly diverse and global society, there is a need for culturally competent teachers. Teacher preparation programs can bolster the cultural competence capacity of teachers that the researchers approached this study. Two decades ago, [21] made clear the importance of cultural competence within the teaching profession by noting “culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161). A decade later, [22] added that “There can be little doubt that issues of diversity form the crux of what may be one of the biggest challenges yet to face those of us whose business it is to educate teachers” (p. 105). Earlier this year, [23] stressed,

“American classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. Educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to value the diversity among students will contribute to an educational system designed to serve all students well” (para. 1).

In consideration of both the importance of teacher preparation programs that contain clinical experiences that allow for reflection, analysis, and application, and in consideration of the importance of the successful adjustment of teacher candidates to a new cultural setting, this research provides new terms, pedagogical and sociocultural dissonance and pedagogical and sociocultural resilience, to the limited quantity of research on student teaching experiences abroad. Within the framework of dissonance and resilience theories, teacher preparation programs could utilize this study as a template for gaining valuable insight to improve teacher preparation programs. The basic theoretical framework and methodological approach of this study could be emulated by other teacher preparation programs both internationally and domestically, if there were interest in obtaining program improvement feedback from placement in diverse settings.

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