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Self-Study, Ideology, and Teacher's Self-Knowledge in Guiding Curriculum Decisions

Abstract

What a teacher believes and envisions as an educator has a profound influence on teaching and learning. This paper explores the importance of self-study and teacher's ideology as a methodology to systematically assess the evolutionary nature of teacher's ideology and its importance in envisioning teaching and learning in K-12 education. Ideology is used in this paper to analyze how self-reflective practices and self-study are part of ideological formations in teachers and how a systematic analysis of teacher's ideology is the lens through which we are able to unpack and critically analyze the impact that ideology has on curriculum and instruction in classroom settings. The paper presents a methodology teacher can use to deconstruct and assess their ideology to improve their instruction and support students' learning in the classroom. van Dijk (1998) multidisciplinary approach to the study of ideologies via discursive formation will be used as an analytical lens in this paper

Keywords

Self-study; Teacher's Ideology; Student Learning; Discourse Analysis

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Teacher's Ideology

The motivation to write this paper stems from my scholarship in self-study in teacher education and from the questions that emerged in my scholarship. The analysis of published research and my own experience as a self-reflective scholar led me to ponder on what it means to develop research in self-study. The main question I have been asking is: What does self-study research yields in terms of teacher's self-knowledge? What form and content does self-knowledge take once we have data in our hands? These questions developed over time and focused my attention to the ideological formations qualitative data or language used to illuminate an experience present to the self-reflective practitioner (Berry & Kosnik, 2010). These ideological formations are the pot of gold a self-reflective practitioner should take to refine his/her knowledge in teacher's education practices and design and develop a clear and specific methodological framework to create a virtuous cycle of learning to improve curriculum and instruction (Garbett & Ovens, 2012).

This paper proposes a methodological framework to systematically analyze teacher's ideology in self-study in teacher education. The importance of a methodology is because ideology is the prime factor that drives teacher's decisions on how to deliver curriculum and instruction in K-12 classrooms (Kortjass, 2019). In order to do so, we need to look at discursive formations in self-study in teacher education and have a methodological framework that captures the ideological complexities in teachers (Kortjass, 2019). I will propose a methodological framework based on van Dijk's (1998) multidisciplinary approach to the study of ideologies. In particular, the discursive approach van Dijk (1998) proposes in his major work on ideology. I believe that this strand of research on ideology is significant to propose a clear and systematic methodology for the study of teacher's self-study in K-12 classrooms. In turn, as van Dijk (1998) claims we need to look at the discursive and social dimensions of beliefs to unpack the complexity of teacher's ideology and to see how such knowledge has the potential to improve teacher's curriculum and instruction in K-12 schools.

Self-Study in Teacher's Education. A Literature Review

The self-study of teachers in teacher education presents a very wide landscape of theories, methods, and approaches to qualitatively assess teacher's effectiveness in curriculum and instruction. The interdisciplinary approaches used are meant to give researchers amplitude in designing studies that allow for significant findings to advance knowledge in how teachers can be more effective in teaching and learning (White, 2020).

Berry and Kosnik (2010) discusses findings on self-study in teacher education from various studies. The studies addressed focus on developing teaching principles to guide teacher educators in their practices. These studies highlighted the difficulties experienced by teacher educators when addressing pedagogical norms. The authors examine ways by which researchers/teachers manage congruence in their work through social justice and social consciousness (Berry & Russel, 2013; Russell & Berry, 2016, Russell & Berry, 2011). Moses et al. (2017) classified teachers based on their commitment to remain in the profession. They explained that many teachers who admire teaching come into the profession for various motives. Some of which include altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic motives. Findings from this study shows

that complexities are involved in teacher education and context matters in terms of culture and socio-economic development.

What is important here is to look at methodological frameworks that allow teacher-researchers to capture the essence of the teaching and learning process embedded in values, beliefs, culture of teaching and teacher's trajectories in socio-economic status, race, and gender. Dinkelman (2003) presented an argument for self-study of teacher education practices as a means and ends to reflective teaching. The study developed a five-part rationale to explain this argument. First, normative conception of teaching where reflection is the center, that is thinking, problem solving, educational growth, and teaching that combines the reflection processes. Second, Self-study is a potential for knowledge production if the focus is to produce teachers who are professional reflecting in their practices. Moreover, self-study is an opportunity to model reflective practice, given that students learn from role model, teachers should consider how their practice models reflective thinking. Finally, self-study applies to practitioner-based research and the use of it may generate pragmatic change.

What is important in Dinkelman's model (2003) is that self-study in teacher education is seen as a systematic approach to look at data that can present a coherent approach to support teacher's instructional effectiveness within a more inclusive and coherent methodological framework. It also points out that reflective thinking is not just a process that happens within the teacher educator but is part of a complex system emerging from sociocultural and sociohistorical processes in the formation of professional educators Dinkelman, (2003).

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) conducted a systematic review of self-study assessing various factors, conditions, and influences in the learning environment that impact teacher educator's practice. Results from the review showed a broad and varied research methods used in self-study; majority of these studies are qualitative in nature. Most studies confirmed collaborative interaction as a need in self-study. Social interaction avoids drawback of egoism and promote diverse perspectives in professional practice set ups to challenge assumptions, biases, and to reveal inconsistencies in teacher education practices. Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) also explained that self-study is based on trustworthiness, because it starts from one's personal experiences that become part of the important lore, the narratives that inform and enrich the field of self-study in teacher education, the discourses that nurture curriculum and instruction in the teaching profession.

Hordvik (2020) conducted a qualitative self-study research to examine their practices in training pre-service teachers to think critically about their own practice as teachers. The authors pointed out the importance of developing a teacher's education pedagogy that involves the knowledge and learning abilities of teachers to influence one another. Given the complexities involved in developing teacher education pedagogy, the study found it cumbersome to identify research works that explains the consistent connection between teaching and learning. This self-study examined a three-year undergraduate physical education teacher program in Norway. Twenty-one preservice teachers participated in the study, and it was found that teacher education program produced higher expectations in the teaching learning environment and focus on changing teacher centered practice.

Hordvik (2020) claim that teacher's education programs should be based on understanding the relationship between human, material, and non-tangible elements. Moreover, accepting the complex nature of teacher education means educators are aware that they must deal with uncertainty, ambiguity, and the complexity of their practice to develop a more effective

pedagogy in teaching and learning. Thus, teacher educators are encouraged to assess the dynamics of their practice while engaging with their complex environment.

Critical Discourse Analysis as Framework to Analyze Teacher Ideology

The choice to use critical discourse analysis for this paper and to consequentially review the core literature is due to the fact that critical discourse analysis is significant for unpacking the ideological formations in teachers' discourses in education (Roger, 2004). The reason for such statement stems from the very nature of critical discourse analysis. According to Roger (2004) critical discourse analysis is able to look at the complex dynamics of language and complex educational issues that exert a significant influence in teacher's discourses and ideological formations.

The complexity is found at the intersection of the sociopolitical and socioeconomical dimension of K-12 education in the US (Luke, 2004). In turn, language analysis and ideological discourses in teacher's education not only intersect but also and more importantly overlap to present education not as an isolated institution but as part of social and political movements that shape how teachers shape and are shaped by curriculum and instruction (Gutierrez, 2008). Critical discourse analysis does not merely analyze language and its discursive ideological formation. Critical discourse analysis is a problem-oriented approach that strives to provide analytical models to propose framework teachers can use to change their approach to curriculum and instruction beneficial for all learners (Lewis, 2007).

Critical discourse analysis is the blueprint of a systematic critique of ideological formations in educational systems. If we postulate that language is the repository of ideological systems in educational systems, we see critical discourse analysis as a social and cultural paradigm that is committed to address problems of practices and systems of inequality that affects ideological systems of meaning in curriculum and instruction (Collins, 2009). Ideology is always found in language systems that are never neutral. As Bakhtin (1994) claims, language is ideological and immersed in the historical and sociopolitical nature of social systems. What this means is that when we look at ideology in education, we must confront the complexity of language not only at the structural level but also at the pragmatic level or by analyzing how language captures the ideological formations in the past, present, and possible futures.

If Bakhtin (1994) is right, critical discourse analysis represent the framework to unpack the social, historical, and political nature of ideologies embedded in language (Feng, 2009). Critical discourse analysis is thus connected to a theory of the social world and a theory of language that is coherent in looking how ideological formations in education affect curriculum and instruction in the classroom. Critical discourse analysis in this paper is based on van Dijk's (2001) socio-cognitive approach. This specific approach claims that texts mediate between individuals and society. This is core for looking at ideological formations in educational settings as complex texts where language acts as a mediated process between cognition and the perception and response to ideological systems that influence the way teachers interpret and apply curriculum in the classroom.

What van Dijk (2001) socio-cognitive approach proposes within a framework of critical discourse analysis is that when looking at ideological formations in educational settings, we need to consider ideological structures and social relations of power embedded in discourse where ideological formations in educational settings are embedded in knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, values of the language users. In turn, the study of ideological formations in educational

settings is situated between “society/culture/situation, cognition and discourse/language.” (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018).

Critical discourse analysis within the socio-cognitive approach allows educators to see their ideological matrix and begin a systematic self-reflection on who they are as educators and where to intervene to correct ideological cacophonies to be more effective in supporting students’ learning (Locke, 2004). By systemically analyzing systems of rules, principles, and values in one’s ideological system of pedagogies and practices, educators find new models of effective teaching, they take the road never taken to open new paths by disrupting the take for granted approach to teaching and learning (Wodak, 2001). Critical discourse analysis is a framework that allows teacher to scrutinize their ideological formations by “opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflexive in one’s research, and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest” (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018 p. 12).

The literature review analyzed demonstrates that the field of self-study in teacher education presents a gap in the area of teacher’s ideology. It does not address one important component of studying the self in teacher education: ideological formations and ideological systems that allow teachers to make critical decisions on how to design their instruction and pedagogy to support students’ learning. The interdisciplinary field of ideology is a rich but untapped terrain in self-study in teacher education. It represents the next step if we want to begin to envision the self-study in teacher education as a coherent methodological framework where the analysis of qualitative data is studied from within the system of ideas embedded in sociopolitical, sociohistorical, and socioeconomic conditions where pedagogical practices take place.

Van Dijk’s (1998) work on ideology, as I discussed earlier in this literature review, looking at its formation in discursive practice is key to begin to think to a more coherent model in studying the pedagogical practices in teacher education. van Dijk’s (1998) claims ideologies allow us to delve into the complex relationships between individuals and social practices and how language plays a significant role in reproducing ideologies in discourse. It is the very study of these two important variables that will constitute the foundations of the framework for the study of teacher’s ideology in self-study in teacher education. It is the first step to position ideology at the center of self-study in teacher education to propose a coherent methodological framework in studying the complex pedagogical practices in curriculum and instruction.

Ideology as Methodological Framework

The self-reflective process in self-study in teacher education is based on the premise that the self-reflective practitioner delves into his/her own practice and by critically assessing his/her status is able to grow as an intellectual and a professional educator (Philip, 2015). If this premise is correct, self-reflective practice is part of a broader and more complex system of ideas and beliefs that promote the ability of the self-reflective practitioner to reflect on one’s own action to engage in a process of continuous learning. This broader and more complex system of ideas and beliefs belong to the realm of ideology due to the fact that ideas, beliefs, and actions are embedded in the sociocultural and sociohistorical conditions where the self-reflective practitioner lives and operates as a professional in his/her own field of study and research.

I will propose a methodological framework based on ideology within discursive formations because I believe that studying the self in teacher education is a qualitative endeavor

that is found in the data language provides to look at the coherent processes that guide professional educators in their pedagogical decisions (Merryfield, 2009). In doing so, I attempt to open a critical conversation on how such a methodological framework has the potential to enrich the field of self-study in teacher education and capture richer qualitative data to be used to improve our pedagogical practices as professional educators.

Setting the Stage for the Study of Ideology

It is important to define ideology at the outset in order to lay out the perimeter of the methodological framework I am going to present in this paper and to focus only on the intersectionality of ideology and discourse in studying how a system of ideas drives teachers in curriculum and instruction decision-making to support students' learning in the classroom. This is core to the self-study of teachers. Talking about ideology in general terms is not enough to help teachers to see their own teaching as driven by who they are with their cultural, social, racial, and personal trajectories (Haberlin, 2018).

Ideology is defined here by borrowing from van Dijk's (1998) scholarship as a system of interrelated beliefs, values, and ideas that give form, content, and dimension to an individual or a community via discursive practices. Ideology is reproduced in an individual or a community by social interaction and discourses. Discourses are the language system that allow individuals or a community to acquire, construct, and change ideological formations through time and space.

This definition of ideology is important because it allows for a microanalysis of ideology to find the locus where beliefs, values, and ideas are produced, disseminated, and replicated in the individual or a community. In the case of teachers and the educational community, this becomes paramount to have the opportunity to analyze how ideologies influence curriculum and instructional decisions and how these decisions percolate down to students in the classroom on an everyday basis.

The Discursive Dimension of Ideology

The discursive dimension of ideology is the first and most important component in the methodological framework on the study of teacher's ideology in self-study in teacher education. It is the most important component because it allows us to ask a crucial question within our framework: How does ideology come about in teachers and teaching? This is a core methodological question since as educational researchers we aim to collect significant qualitative data that can answer questions on how teacher's ideology influence and drives teachers in making decisions on curriculum and instruction (van Dijk, 1998).

The discursive dimension of ideology allows us to look very closely how teachers apply their ideologies in micro situations like classrooms and schools and how these ideologies change overtime due to a systematic and continuous interactions with the culture shared in classrooms and schools via discursive processes (Garbett & Ovens 2012). It is at this junction that we can see how discursive practices are systematically laid out in the language teachers use to address curriculum and instruction. As Garbett and Ovens (2012) point out discursive practices in forms of narratives (language) are the data we need to systematically analyze and assess the beliefs and assumptions of teachers in their ways of thinking about being a teacher educator and how ideologies have the power to give form, content and meaning to pedagogical practices with a specific focus on teaching practices in the classroom.

Discursive Processes

The use of discursive processes in communities and educational settings is of crucial importance in the study of pedagogical practices in the self-study in teacher education (Gregory & Burbage, 2017). Discursive processes allow teachers and researchers to systematically and reflectively analyze the ideological beliefs shared by a community of educators and how this is reflected in curriculum and instruction. Two components of discursive processes are relevant for our methodological framework: (a) Teachers' funds of knowledge; (b) teachers' cultural trajectories. These two methodological components, as I will discuss later, intersect, and constitute the blueprint of ideological formations via discursive processes in teacher's curriculum and instruction (Gregory & Burbage, 2017).

Teachers' Funds of Knowledge.

The importance of teacher's funds of knowledge relates to the fact that researchers need to know and analyze teachers' experiences and understandings of the curriculum and how this affects instruction in the classroom. Hammersley (2005) claims that teaching practice must be investigated not only by looking at research evidence but also and more importantly to what teachers bring to the table in terms of their knowledge, experience, and in depth understanding of teaching and learning. This is an important statement that deserves attention in the context of this paper. The importance of Hammersley's (2005) claim is that the knowledge, experience, and in depth understanding of teaching and learning is acquired via communicative events in and out of schools shaping the ideological formation of teachers in relation to teaching and learning.

Van Dijk (1998) states that communicative events as complex discursive practices allow individuals to acquire, assess, and refine ideas attending different media and events. The communicative events represent, according to van Dijk (1998), the main event from where ideological formations take place. In the field of education, teachers acquire an ideological stance by attending official and unofficial events that shape the way they see teaching and learning in the classroom. The official events such as professional developments and unofficial ones such as everyday conversations with other colleagues or friends influence how teachers see themselves as professional educators supporting students' learning.

The communicative event as process for ideological formation deserves attention in teacher's education research because of the profound implications it has in shaping teaching and learning in a classroom. The knowledge embedded in teacher's ideology is what allows researchers to see what shapes teaching and learning and how ideology leads to acquire and use knowledge in pedagogical practices. Allas (2020, p.169) points out that "Teacher knowledge is considered one of the key aspects that guide everyday teaching activities and enables teachers to act in ever-changing teaching situations." This is significant in the analysis of ideological formations to unpack teacher's decisions on curriculum and instruction. Allas (2020) contend that research should look at teacher's practical knowledge in terms of pedagogy, subject, curriculum, and learners. But also, at the educational context, goals, and values (Allas, 2020).

The above analysis leads us to see how ideology is crucial to capture the pedagogical formation of teachers and being able to help teachers to self-reflect on their professional identity by a more systematic and in-depth process. The opportunity to give teachers the ability to

conduct a more rigorous self-study of their own practices looking into their ideological formations has the potential to yield significant qualitative data to support teachers in designing more effective instruction in the classroom (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). The intersection of life history, personal experience, and professional formation is what a self-study of ideological formation should focus upon. This is because intersectionality allows research to see the significant moments when new ideas become part of teacher's ideology and influence curriculum and instruction (Meijer, 2010). In other words, research needs to put teachers at the center of ideological processes. The researchers must attend the communicative events that are part of the ideological formation of teachers' ideology and observe how these influence curriculum and instruction in classroom settings (Allas et al., 2012).

Teachers' Cultural Trajectories

Teacher's cultural trajectories, their life histories and their becoming as professional educators are part of complex ideological processes embedded in their discourses, communicative events, and language in and outside of school (Hedges, 2012). The overarching question here is how teacher's cultural trajectories influence the formation of ideologies that influence teaching and learning. Another important component of ideological processes in teachers is to look at their cultural trajectories with a critical lens that has the potential to capture the core of their cultural trajectories that percolated down to their ideological complexes in teaching and learning (Pulkinen, 2018). To do so, we need to identify the core elements of cultural trajectories that influence the formation of ideologies and pedagogy in teachers. Two core elements come into play in our analysis: (a) teacher's educational influences and (b) teacher's personal beliefs and values.

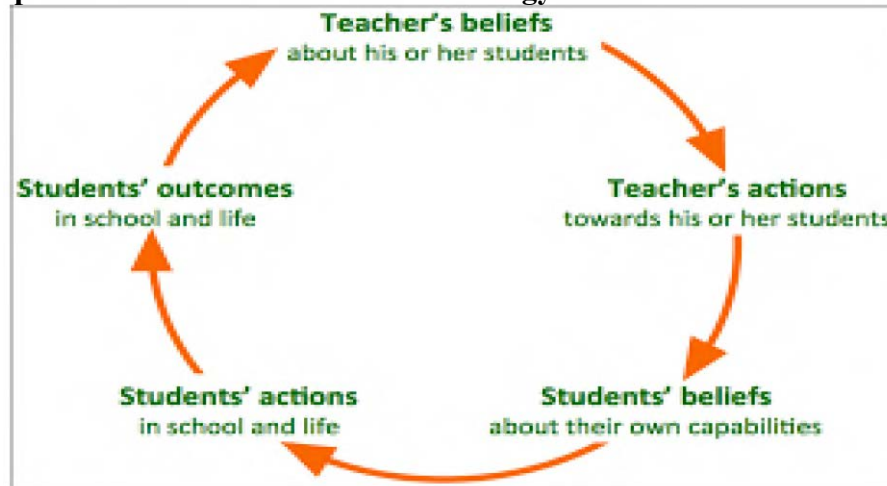
Teachers' educational influences come from the educational programs and curriculum they attend. They play a major role in how teachers will see and interpret the curriculum and later instruction in a classroom setting (Aubrey, 2003). This official knowledge is what gives teachers the foundational knowledge they need to become professional educators to support students in schools. Also, the ideological underpinnings of such official knowledge are what gives form and content to their pedagogies as professional educators (Apple, 1979).

As Apple (2020, p.1) argues "Schools control meaning... they preserve and distribute what is perceived to be 'legitimate knowledge'—the knowledge that 'we all must have,' schools confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups." This is true on the one hand. However, if we want to have a broader and more inclusive view of ideological processes in teachers' curriculum and instruction, we need to also look at teachers' personal beliefs and values to present a systematic view of cultural trajectories that influence the way teachers interpret the curriculum and design and develop instructional processes. In doing so, we have the potential to collect and analyze more significant data on how ideologies influence teachers' curriculum and instruction.

Teachers do not enter the teaching profession as blank slates. They come equipped with life experiences, beliefs about who they want to be as educators, cultural influences from their communities and the like (Black & Halliwell, 2000). These cultural traits intersect with the official knowledge (Apple, 2019) and potentially influence the way teachers interpret curriculum and instruction and students' learning in schools. The question that still lingers here is how do they do that? How do teachers professional and personal trajectories change the way curriculum and instruction is delivered in schools? These questions are the zenith of research in self-study in

teacher's ideological influence in curriculum and instruction to collect qualitative data that will shed new light on teacher's effectiveness in teaching students core knowledge in schools (Figure 1, Wright, 2017).

Conceptual Framework of Teacher's Ideology in Curriculum and Instruction



Conclusion

This paper aimed to present a model for studying teacher's ideology within a qualitative framework of self-study in teacher education. The purpose here is to invite other qualitative researchers interested in studying ideology and teacher's effectiveness in supporting students in schools to shift the methodological lens by considering not only the official knowledge acquired in teacher's preparation programs but also and more importantly the unofficial knowledge i.e., the personal narratives that contain the core elements of teachers' ideological formation embedded in their experiences in their communities. By studying these trajectories found in their communicative discursive events, researchers can capture rich qualitative data to become aware and understand how these complex ideological systems influence curriculum and instruction (Cordingley, 2008).

The model presented here is an initial attempt to stimulate an academic conversation around this critical issue in teacher's professional development. It is core for research in education because curriculum and instruction are at the core of any educational agenda to provide quality teachers and instruction in schools to students who belong to different cultural and linguistic background and with exceptionalities. It is what research in self-study in teacher education should focus on to improve teaching by delving into the complex system of ideas-ideological formations-that allow teachers to make informed decision on effective teaching (González, 2005a).

Ideologies as systems of beliefs, values, and worldviews contain significant data for educational researchers to unpack the processes that take place in classroom settings, how teachers translate the tenets of curriculum into actual classroom practices (Tobin, 2007). It is a territory that needs to be explored more and with more effective frameworks to analyze qualitative data related to teaching and supporting students' learning. It is the ideological discursive processes, the communicative actions (van Dijk, 1998) that should constitute the main

framework to begin to unpack the complexity of teacher's ideology found at the intersection of culture, language, ethnicity, personal experience, and professional knowledge.

Qualitative research and researchers need to direct their focus and attention on how discourse and communicative events shape the form and content of ideology in teacher education. In order to do so, researchers must apply and refine the tools of self-study in teacher's education to elicit relevant and important qualitative data on how ideologies emerge from discourses, how they evolve, change over time and shape how curriculum and instruction is applied in the classroom (Tobin, 2007). A road to take to find new paths in teacher education preparation programs and support pre-service and in-service teachers to be ready to support students in K-12 education.

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