Teaching across Cultures: Building Pedagogical Relationships in Diverse Contexts captures the tensions and the transformational potentials of teaching across multiple cultural contexts. The book evolved from cumulative self-studies that examined one teacher educator’s teaching practice, the cultural impact on that practice, and how she facilitated transformative teaching and learning. While every act of teaching occurs across cultures such as institutional culture, invisible cultures, classroom cultures, among others, educators who teach in cross-cultural settings have to navigate the unique complexities of cross-cultural teaching. Successful teaching in cross-cultural contexts can be facilitated through responsive pedagogy, building relationships, and teaching in the third space. These transformational approaches not only help to identify and close the perpetual gaps in teaching and learning, but they also position effective teaching within a pedagogical common ground that values student voices, facilitates pedagogical flexibility, and uses diversity as a teaching tool. In a world of ubiquitous and interactive learning environments, both the physical and virtual spaces play a vital role in teaching and teacher-student relationships. The book points to the necessity of teacher educators’ learning through diverse professional networks, and more importantly, through self-study. It is only through this introspective examination of one’s teaching and students’ learning as well as taking an ontological attitude toward teaching, can educators achieve success in diverse contexts.
Teaching across Cultures
Teaching across Cultures

Building Pedagogical Relationships in Diverse Contexts

Chinwe H. Ikpeze

St John Fisher College, Rochester, NY, USA
This book is dedicated to my husband, Mr. Okey Ikpeze, and our four wonderful children: Obidi, Chuka, Adaobi, and Chiamaka.

Your unflinching love, support, and encouragement were a huge source of inspiration. You are my biggest cheerleaders and the reason my life is meaningful. Thank you for believing in me. I want to also thank Barbara Zinker, a dear family friend, for her enthusiasm and support.
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This book would not be possible without my graduate students especially those who generously agreed to participate in the studies that led to this book. Many of you were wonderful students, very friendly, open, and passionate about teaching and about your teacher. Your love and admiration were palpable. To this group, I cannot thank you enough. You made my life worthwhile; you believed in me and reminded me that I made the right professional choice. You also were eager to make me happy, which I very much appreciated. You taught me not to make assumptions and not to generalize about students—a very important lesson for me.

There is yet another group. This group consists of students who challenged me, behaved in ways that I could not understand, and made classroom interaction unpredictable. Still, I owe you no less appreciation than the first group because I became a better and more reflective teacher educator because of you; it was my quest to understand your needs and get an insight into your behaviors, attitudes, and learning challenges that I was inspired to engage in a self-study. My knowledge of teacher education may have remained static if not for you. It was a privilege to be your teacher, and I am grateful for the opportunity.
INTRODUCTION

We live in an era in which higher education has become increasingly international: millions of students leave their home countries to study each year, faculty are increasingly mobile and academic research is not bound by national borders. Consequently, college classrooms are becoming increasingly internationalized in terms of both teachers and students. Due to the increase in international students, educational exchange programs, and study-abroad programs, among others, cross-cultural classrooms are seen and experienced everywhere. Besides, globalization and the global flows of culture, technology, trade, and industry as well as the global competitive economic market, and other forms of international cooperation have created a situation where cultural forms move, change, and are reused, and identities are also becoming increasingly hybrid. Crossing cultural borders can prompt changes in how people think and act, allowing new cultural norms to emerge. As people from multiple cultures and communities interact, cultural conflict arising from different beliefs or practices becomes inevitable. This necessitates that educators learn how to navigate teaching in such contexts.

As the society becomes increasingly diverse, so is the faculty body in many higher institutions and schools of education. Educational, social, and economic developments across the globe necessitate rethinking some of the cultures, epistemologies, and pedagogies that inform the preparation of teachers. In the United States, the literature on teacher education is almost saturated with accounts of pre-service teachers navigating culturally responsive teaching in urban multicultural and multilingual classrooms, the challenges that they faced, and how teacher education can better prepare them to face the realities of teaching in a pluralistic society. If we flip the coin, we get the other side of the story—how foreign-born faculty of color teach prospective teachers who happen to be predominantly white, middle-class students; how these faculty navigate and negotiate their learning environments, new cultures, in addition to learning to be good teachers of teachers. This group of educators encounters similar challenges as their white middle-class counterparts who teach in multicultural and multilingual classrooms, or other educators who teach in contexts where they are cultural outsiders. Like their white counterparts in K-12 settings, they also have had limited experience with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although the contexts of teaching in K-12 and college settings are different, those who teach as cultural outsiders tend to face similar issues around cultural navigation, identity perception and relationship issues. For African-born educators, the challenge of teaching as racial minorities could not be less daunting. Massive ignorance about Africa and its diverse population, and the perception of Africa as poor and backward, results in deficit perceptions of African-born educators. Unless we understand these dynamics, our knowledge-base for teaching in a pluralistic society is skewed.
Besides the issue of examining the experiences of a diverse population, moving teacher education forward requires that educators should constantly reflect on what they do and continuously refine the pedagogy of teacher education. Examining teacher educators’ learning and the growth of the candidates in their programs and the relation between the two is critical especially now that schools of education are grappling with the issue of accountability and program effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2010; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2013). Studying what goes on between teacher educators and prospective teachers through self-study and participating in different professional networks might accord teacher educators the opportunity to engage in personal, professional, and program renewals; and in so doing, refine their teaching visions and check consistency between practice and espoused beliefs. In addition, self-study highlights teacher educators’ voices and identities. Studying one’s practice also helps teacher educators to come to terms with the contradictory realities of teaching and how to manage the tensions and dilemmas inherent in teaching and learning. A gap currently exists concerning teacher educators’ account of their interaction with students in cross-cultural settings.

The book *Teaching across Cultures: Building Relationships in Diverse Contexts* fills this knowledge gap in that it succinctly chronicles an account of one teacher educator’s teaching within a cross-cultural context. The book examines the tensions, uncertainties, as well as the possibilities for effective teaching across multiple cultural contexts, and posits that effective teaching can be achieved in such contexts by engaging in continuous learning through self-study and through professional networks, implementing responsive teaching, building relationships, and teaching in the third space. Each chapter of the book examined a different aspect of this topic.

*Chapter 1*: This chapter examines teaching as a cultural artifact, the centrality of culture in teaching, and the need to refocus teacher education around cultural teaching and learning. Definitions of culture and approaches to culture over the years are highlighted. In addition, several cultural assumptions are examined. The chapter concludes by making a case for teacher educators to help prospective teachers acquire cultural and intercultural competence, and understand how culture shapes thinking and teaching.

*Chapter 2*: This chapter centers on self-study, which involves studying self and others. The use of self-study as a conceptual framework for teacher educators to study their practice is discussed. The chapter offers some definitions of self-study and the various steps taken by the author in her self-study research. The interplay of self-study and transformation are examined. The chapter also highlights the gaps in teaching and learning, which are discussed later in the book.

*Chapter 3*: This chapter on methods of data collection discusses the use of self-study as a methodological tool. Self-study as a methodology defines the focus of a study and not the way it is carried out; instead, self-study draws on data sources that are appropriate for examining issues, problems, or dilemmas that are of concern to teacher educators. The chapter discusses the context of the studies used for this book, the participants and various data collection techniques and analysis.
Chapter 4: This chapter examines the tensions in teaching across cultures and focuses on the question: What are the tensions that teacher educators face especially those teaching as cultural outsiders? The chapter discusses these tensions and the cultures and situations that produce the tensions. The author argues that cultures are created through human activity and such actions that those in power take at any given time.

Chapter 5: This chapter examines culturally responsive teaching and the need for responsive pedagogy in teacher education. The chapter details the actions taken by the author to implement responsive teaching. The author argues that educators should move toward responsive pedagogy and rethink the concept of culturally responsive teaching due to its problematic nature.

Chapter 6: How can educators build relationships with their students in order to enhance effective teaching and learning? This chapter discusses the strategies for effective pedagogical relationships in physical and virtual spaces. It details the moment-by-moment interaction of the author and prospective teachers, the challenges in classroom interactions and how effective relationships can be used to manage such situations.

Chapter 7: What is third space and does it matter in teaching and learning? This chapter delves into the concept of third space and its theoretical and practical applications in teaching and teacher education practices. The chapter discusses the significance of third space as a space for cultural negotiation, of possibilities, and the critical coming together of opposing viewpoints.

Chapter 8: This chapter answers the question, “What do social and professional networks have to do with teacher educator knowledge and the ability to teach across cultures?” The chapter not only answers this question, but it also goes further to explain the influence of such networks in teacher educators’ social and emotional development.

Chapter 9: This chapter brings all the chapters together, discusses their interconnection, and explores their implications for teaching and teacher education.

The road to becoming an effective teacher educator may look deceptively easy and straightforward, yet; it is a complex work that involves navigating the curriculum, pedagogy, and research. Teaching in its entirety is a complex, ill-structured domain, with wide variability across contexts and situations. The double-faced contradictory realities of teaching teachers, demand much more intellectual investment than we currently admit. Understanding a teacher educator’s work in its complexity rests in understanding the moment-by-moment decisions and interactions with students, and how those interactions are impacted by the various cultures in which the work of teachers takes place.
When I started my career as a teacher educator, my graduate teacher education students looked astonishingly similar to me. They were young, almost all were women, mostly blonde and many just completed their undergraduate degrees and had proceeded to graduate studies almost immediately. Occasionally, I would be assigned a group comprising one or two students from other racial groups, and that is when I actually felt that I had a diverse class. But, most groups were not racially diverse; hence, my initial assumption of homogeneity. I later realized that my assumptions were not quite correct.

When these prospective teachers introduced themselves, the tendency was toward ethnic identification: “I’m Irish, Italian, Russian, Jewish, Greek American, or adopted from Bolivia or Belarus” etc. When they wrote their autobiographies, I could see the unique cultural identification associated with these identities. A Greek American once told me she was expected to marry a Greek American or at least marry in a Greek Orthodox Church. I read things like, “I come from a big Italian family. I have over 40 first cousins scattered around the U.S.” There were tales of big families and those of very small closely-knit families of three or four. These prospective teachers expressed a range of voices and behavior patterns. Some were extroverts, very friendly and looked forward to meeting people from different backgrounds; others were introverted and reserved. When they discussed their religious affiliations, there was a wide diversity. Some were Catholics, others were practicing or non-practicing Christians of other denominations and a few were atheists. Some had traveled abroad with their families on vacation; others participated in study-abroad programs, but many have never left the United States. Some were from homes where parents were divorced.

The more I interacted with them, the more I learned how diverse they really were. There are many levels and degrees of diversity (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). East (2006) identified two types of diversity: diversity with the “big D” and the one with a “small d.” The big Diversity includes ethnicity, race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, (dis) ability, learning styles, and socioeconomic status, among others while the small diversity includes the personal behavior variations that have an impact on the local daily interactions of the classroom. These identities and diversities are reflective of cultural diversity. In essence, we all have both culture and cultural diversity; hence, everybody is multicultural (Erickson, 2010). These prospective teachers came from diverse family backgrounds, had experienced
multiple institutional cultures from K-12 to college; they had imbibed some professional culture of teachers such as how to think, behave, and act as teachers. In addition, they were saturated with media images, popular culture texts and had extensive peer networks through Facebook, Twitter and other networking tools. Although they were racially homogenous, they were to a large extent culturally diverse with hybrid identities. Cultural diversity exists at an intrapersonal level as well as at an interpersonal level.

Cultural diversity within an individual manifests as an individual difference, which filters into the person’s worldview. At the group level, we have “within-group” or “intergroup” differences. Two or more students from the same racial group constitute within group cultural diversity, even though there could be some cultural similarities. If the prospective teachers come from two or more racial groups, then we have between group cultural diversity. Still, there is another dimension of this class that is very critical. Consider that I, the teacher, an accented foreign-born faculty of color, am invariably a linguistic and cultural outsider. This brings another important dynamic to the classroom. Throughout our interactions in this multicultural classroom, the students and I engage in culture learning—understanding the meaning of culture and how our cultural backgrounds impact our worldviews and our pedagogies. This chapter examines the relationship between culture and teaching, and posits that every act of teaching occurs across cultures and differences and teaching is a cultural artifact.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

One of the biggest challenges in teacher education is getting prospective teachers to understand the meaning of culture and its role in teaching and learning. When Ladson-Billings (2006) identified the problem with teacher education as that of “poverty of culture,” she was lamenting the constant misuse and misunderstanding of culture by most of her pre-service teachers. These students, she noted, had very limited knowledge about culture, yet they used it authoritatively as a catchall phrase to explain everything. Culture is used as a proxy for race, to explain deviant behaviors, and it is often confused with socioeconomic status. This problem is more widespread than we imagine.

One of the most significant things about culture is that it becomes so much a part of ourselves that we lose awareness of how it shapes our perceptions and organizes our lives (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003; Nuthall, 2005). Indeed, our daily activities are “an indirect expression of submerged cultural understandings (or hidden assumptions) that permeate every dimension of our beliefs and attitudes” (Spindler, 1999, p. 468). It is not surprising then that the largely white, middle-class and monolingual students, who make up prospective teachers, do not see themselves as cultural beings (Ladson-Billings, 2006), yet, they are being prepared to teach culturally (Rueda & Stillman, 2012). This is problematic because teachers have to see themselves as cultural beings in order to teach culturally. It is important that the
concept of culture, as it relates to teaching is more accessible to prospective teachers as early as possible in their careers.

Prospective teachers need to understand that all teaching and learning are cultural and that “cultural factors are an important factor for all learners independent of any labels or subgroups into which they may be categorized” (Rueda & Stillman, 2012, p. 250). Helping prospective teachers understand the meaning of culture and their place in a multicultural world should be the concern of all teacher educators.

Culture is one of the most discussed but probably least understood concepts within education and social sciences; it’s meaning, however, has remained elusive. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explicate various shades of meaning associated with the word culture. Instead, a few definitions will suffice. Culture can generally be described as “learned behavior that has been normalized and regularized” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 109), or the “implicit and explicit characteristics of a person or group of people” (Milner, 2010, p. 2), developed through their histories, sociocultural backgrounds, experiences, dispositions, skills, and ways of understanding. These characteristics are informed by race, ethnicity, language, symbols, customs, heritage etc. This definition recognizes that culture could be visible or invisible (Erickson, 2010). The visible aspects of culture include language, clothing, food, religion, and aesthetic conventions etc. while the invisible aspects include attitudes, perceptions, values, worldviews, rules of relationships, and modes of thinking and communicating, among others. A definition by Dahlke (1958) pertains more to classrooms. He noted that culture has three aspects:

A culture is instrumental: from it people select the techniques of doing things, the means to reach an objective. A culture is regulative: the actions of persons and the use of the instruments are subject to rules and regulations, the dos and don’ts of living. They specify what should be done or must be done. A culture is directive: from it individuals derive their ultimate as well as immediate values, their interpretation of life, and the goals for which they strive. Cultural behavior is action based upon a complex of evaluations, i.e., as to what is good or bad, proper or improper, efficient or inefficient, adequate or inadequate, beautiful or trivial, valuable or valueless, free or compulsory. Cultural reality is thus a value reality. (p. 5; cited in Gallego, Cole, & the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 2001)

This definition dwells more on the explicit aspect of culture—the rules, regulations, dos and don’ts. The significance of this perspective is that it suggests that teachers and students’ behaviors and beliefs are largely influenced by some cultural considerations. At any time in the learning process, students are involved in three distinct and interlocking cultural contexts: (1) the visible cultural context of the teacher-managed activity routines and rules, (2) the largely hidden but powerful cultural context of peer relationships and interactions. This peer culture extends across any setting in which students interact with each other and internalize the
values and rules about roles and status that are appropriate to their age group, and (3) the personal cultural context of beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge that individual students bring into the classroom from their family and neighborhood backgrounds (Nuthall, 2005).

Nuthall believed that for teachers to understand students’ participation in classroom activities, and the consequent shaping of their minds, they need an understanding of these three separate cultures and the ways in which students simultaneously affect, and are affected by these cultures.

CULTURE AND TEACHING

Education is a process of acculturation. Culture provides the template for all human activities, interactions and understanding. Culture influences how teachers and students think, believe and behave; therefore, it is imperative for educators to understand culture’s role in the design, implementation, as well as its effect on curriculum and instruction for students and for themselves (Erickson, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Spindler & Spindler, 1994). Erickson (2010) argued:

In a sense, everything in education relates to culture—to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention. Culture is in us and all around us just as the air we breathe. In its scope and distribution, it is personal, familial, communal, institutional, societal, and global … As we learn and use culture in daily life, it becomes habitual. Yet, we do not think about the structure and characteristics of culture as we use it, just as we do not think reflectively about any familiar tool in the midst of its use. (p. 35)

Culture is a “primary human toolkit” (Erickson, 2010, p. 35) that shapes and is shaped by the numerous interactions, teaching, and learning that happen throughout our life span. Culture is implicated in our everyday actions like the type of outfits we wear, the food we eat, the associations we have, and our values, religion, and beliefs. Teachers rely on their cultural references when they teach. Their pedagogical approach is “shaped culturally by how teachers learned as students; how they teach and convey information to their own biological children, and what they emphasize in the curriculum over other information” (Milner, 2010, p. 4). Few teachers realize the impact of culture on their teaching practice and how cultural considerations give rise to the curriculum of teacher education and K-12 education. The curriculum is an embodiment of culture because it reflects what the society values and the skills and dispositions the society wants to see in its children and future leaders. Culture is not always assimilated or reproduced but can shift and change as societal needs changes. In addition, culture represents a “place where deeply held meanings and values are produced, internalized, identified with, and fought over” (Giroux, 2010, p. 64). This means that cultural change does not always represent a smooth transition from one cultural form to another, but such changes may be accompanied by resistance,
TEACHING AS A CULTURAL ARTIFACT

contestation, or the recreation of new cultural forms, if the actors in the system no longer value the culture that they find themselves in. Teachers, for example, can resist the teaching cultures in which they work and the policies and regulations that infringe on their professionalism.

Teaching cultures are embedded within work-related beliefs and knowledge, teachers’ shared beliefs about appropriate ways of acting on the job, rewarding aspects of teaching, and teachers’ practical theories or pedagogical content knowledge (Feiman-Nenser & Floden, 1986). While cultural spaces provide possibilities for transformation, they can also become impediments to group or individual progress.

PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE

In the past decades, culture has come to the forefront of educational studies and has become much more expanded with different theoretical perspectives and several layers of meaning associated with it. Conceptions of culture over time include culture as a deficit, culture as a difference, culture as a social reproduction, and culture as a hybrid practice.

Culture as a Deficit: The early use of culture as a construct in educational research focused on the idea of cultural deficit. The deficit approaches aimed to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities, and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices (Paris, 2012). This pathological view of culture, otherwise known as deficit theories (Valencia, 1997) posits that particular groups of students (e.g., American Indians, African Americans, and other students of color), failed in schools because they were culturally deprived, deficient, or disadvantaged. This view of culture, grounded in the culture of poverty hypothesis (Harrington, 1997), maintained that many minority groups remained persistently poor because of cultural pathologies and defects, passed down from parents to children (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003). The aim of the deficit approach was to minimize or eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices that these students brought from their homes, and replace them with superior mainstream practices. One of the major areas of emphasis of the cultural deficit theory is on language use in the classroom setting, of which the Black English or Ebonics was one such focus. Criticism of this perspective led to the emergence of the “difference” approach.

Culture as Difference: The theory of cultural difference went further to explain inter-group similarities and differences. This theory posits that among groups that possess similar historical, social and economic conditions, there is cultural similarity; but cultural differences are expected when these conditions are different (Eisenhart, 2001). Therefore, if members of groups that have cultural differences meet, their cultural difference will likely cause misunderstanding and miscommunication. In an educational setting, this is interpreted to mean that group differences in culture (ways of behaving, thinking, valuing, and feeling) acquired through socialization in the family, school, and community, could be a springboard for later school
success or failure. This approach viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of students and communities of color, as equal to, but different from the ways demanded and legitimated in school teaching and learning. The goal of the difference approach was to bridge the gap between mainstream and minority language and literacy practices. Research that supports the need to build on or extend the abilities that children bring to the classroom (Heath, 1983), cultural modeling (Lee, 2007), funds of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Gutierrez, 2008) align with this perspective. In cultural modeling, out-of-school literacy practices and routines are linked to school literacy practices, to support academic learning while funds of knowledge refer to culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills that facilitate household and individual functioning and well-being (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Scholars who support the culture as difference perspective advocate for what has been described as resource or asset pedagogies. They argue that learning is enhanced when teachers use the cultural resources—language, speech styles, community resources, ideas, and technologies from students’ homes and from popular culture. The approach to culture as difference has been politically, theoretically, and practically powerful in that some popular approaches to teaching, such as the culturally relevant pedagogy, were developed partly to address the issue of cultural difference.

**Culture as Social Reproduction:** Another theory that explains cultural dynamics is the social reproduction theory (Apple, 1979; Kucer, 2014). This theory posits that schools are sites for learning one’s culture and one’s place in a class society. Somehow, schools end up reproducing the culture and socioeconomic status of the students under their care. It is believed, for example, that schools for middle-upper class kids provide better and challenging curricula that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These ensure that the students excel in measures of academic proficiency and enjoy upward mobility that helps to maintain their class in the society; whereas, schools in high-poverty neighborhoods invest more in behavior modification, following rules, and covering simplified or scripted curricula materials. They end up producing children with poor academic performance, with consequences for school dropout and a lower chance for upward mobility. Kucer (2014) likened social reproduction as acts from a play in which all participants’ roles are assigned by the larger culture and economic marketplace. The schools, from the way they are designed, are there to maintain the status quo, and protect the privileges and perceived entitlements of those who already benefit the most. This is accomplished by the knowledge they choose to include or exclude in the curriculum, the norms and values they convey to students, and the “social interactions and practices that they utilize to sort out students for future career” (Cho, 2010, p. 185). Culture, from this perspective, is both enabling and disabling, and has reproductive or transformative possibilities.

**Culture as Hybrid Practices:** Apart from the three perspectives above, there is also a postmodern view of culture, which conceives culture as fluid and dynamic. From this perspective, culture is an ongoing process; it is learned, created, or
re-created as the need arises (Rueda & Stillman, 2012). Culture changes according to changing times and as people struggle to understand the world around them and as they identify themselves in relation to others. Intense globalization—the massive movement of people and the spread of English as a global language—has facilitated some form of cultural homogenization. The extent of this homogenization is highly debatable or even refuted; what is more acceptable is that the global transcultural flows (Pennycook, 2007) through films, pop culture, media images, cable news networks, fast food chains, technological innovations, and so on, have led to “translocalization, appropriation, transculturation and hybridization” (p. 97). It is no longer tenable for an individual to claim to be monocultural because multiculturalism, multilingualism, diversity, and difference have become part of everyday identities in a globalized world. Globalization has precipitated transcultural flows and movement across boundaries, and these cultural forms are remixed, blended, and hybridized with implications for identity construction. While this perspective applies to everybody, it is more apparent among people living on the margin, such as immigrants, biracial children, and others with in-between identities.

In a study that examined the construction of cultural identity of a Filipino immigrant family in Canada, Li (2000) found that the individuals among the six family members (a grandmother, two parents, and three children) did not share the same cultural identity. Instead, significant diversity existed among the family members across the generations. The grandmother spoke only Tagalog, the Philippine national language, and maintained most of her Filipino culture. She stayed at home all day and hardly mixed with other people. The parents of the three children, Edward and Roberta Holman, were raised and educated in the Philippines before migrating to Canada. They had to learn how to achieve a balance in the two cultures, and in their parenting, so that their children would acquire both Filipino and Canadian values. While their grandmother spoke only Tagalog, Edward, and Roberta, juggled Tagalog and English. Their children, Jessie, Jasmine, and Salsha spoke only English and rarely spoke Tagalog. The children perceived themselves as Canadians both culturally and linguistically.

The literate lives of the Holman family indicated that their Filipino culture and language were important to their identities, and in building cultural continuity. Yet, their cultural identities remained a site of struggle. The parents of the children maintained hybrid cultural identities, as Filipino-Canadians, while the children’s hybridity reflected more Canadian than Filipino. The parents and their children had different cultural identities even though they lived in one household. This family epitomizes millions of other immigrant families all over the world. Yet, despite the immigration factor, more than ever before, people are thinking, acting, and behaving in ways that denote hybrid cultural identities. Popular culture has become a worldwide phenomenon, and more people, ideas, products, and technologies are moving and interacting around the globe. With a hybrid identity, people may become more emotional over an aspect of their identity—for instance, solidarity based on religion may supersede that of nationality. In that case, the individual aligns more
CHAPTER 1

with people from all over the world with similar religious beliefs, rather than those that share the same nationality. Solidarity based on class or gender may supersede that of race/ethnic alliances. It is not uncommon to find people whose culture reflects more of their social class. For example, a family of millionaires may just reason like, and associate with other millionaires while relegating their race/ethnicity to the background. Identities are not only inherently hybrid, but they are also fluid and dynamic, and can change at any time, depending on how the individual perceives the relative advantage/disadvantage of identifying with certain groups at any particular time. The implication of this for teaching is that teachers must realize that no matter how homogenous a group of students might look, within-group variation is always possible, because individuals differ among one another and within themselves because of their association with different cultural, socioeconomic, and family groups and their unique social circumstances. Cultural discourse is not only diverse and complex; it is also imbued with a lot of assumptions. In the next section, these cultural assumptions will be discussed.

CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

Certain assumptions about culture have created impediments to using culture as a frame for teaching and learning in teacher education:

• Culture is still essentialized. Within teacher education, there is still a nagging lack of introspection and a holistic view of culture. Culture is tacitly regarded as what others do—non-mainstream students, such as English language learners (ELLs), minorities, and people of color. The view of teachers as cultural beings who need to teach culturally has not quite permeated the thinking of prospective teachers.

• The “multi” of multiculturalism seems to connote only non-western, non-European cultures (Adler, 2011). This creates a binary between “us” (U.S., American) and “others” (foreign, non-mainstream American).

• Within-group differences are ignored or minimized when discussing cultural groups (Rueda & Stillman, 2012).

• Issues around culture are treated as static. Minority students, for example, need to acquire the power language for upward mobility; they need to be multilingual and multicultural. Although this assertion is true, it negates the changing world, the changing demographics and politics, and the fact that culture is dynamic and fluid. In the current polity, economy, and educational landscape, upward mobility is no longer solely dependent on acquiring American-dominant language, but is increasingly dependent on being multicultural and multilingual. For example, proficiency in English and Spanish is better than English-only proficiency, because the former can accord more opportunities (Paris & Alim, 2014).

• Cultural discourse tends to be mostly at the micro level (local/national), while the macro level global perspectives with their hybridized practices are still not given attention (Paris & Alim, 2014; Pennycook, 2007). Also in need of attention are
the critical perspectives on culture and teacher education, as well as the need to examine both visible and invisible cultures.

**CULTURAL POLITICS AND EDUCATION**

From a postmodern perspective, culture is a privileged site for resistance and emancipatory politics (Cho, 2010). Cultural politics generally involves contestation over defining official knowledge and “visions of the family, the government, identity, and the economy [that] are to be realized in our institutions and in our daily life” (Apple, 1996, p. 21). There are many dimensions of cultural politics, for example popular culture against mass/elite/institutional culture, civil society against the state, or the debate over what constitutes the right cultural knowledge for teachers. Erickson (2010) argued that the way we treat the issue of cultural difference can politicize or depoliticize it. When culture is treated as a boundary issue, it simply acknowledges some kind of cultural difference, which is characteristics of all human societies, traditional or modern. But when culture is treated as a border issue, it means that some features of cultural difference are politicized and used as grounds for differing rights, privileges, or favoritism.

Literacy, for example is linked to the issue of power, and it is cultural politics that “promotes democratic and emancipatory change” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. viii) and should be interpreted widely as the ability to engage in a variety of forms of problem-posing and dialectical analyses of self and society. Pedagogy is implicated in the cultural politics of education, because the way teachers teach can support certain perspectives of culture. For example, a teacher who teaches from the view of cultural difference theory will work to include her students’ linguistic and cultural resources as assets for the curriculum, and create classroom cultures where children can succeed academically while retaining their cultural identities. In view of the significance of culture in teacher education, it is important for prospective teachers to acquire both cultural and intercultural competence.

**TOWARD (INTER) CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION**

We live in a pluralistic society; therefore, the more variety and differences in the others we are exposed to, the more perspective we will gain on ourselves (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). It is only through our interactions with others and through our efforts to establish common meanings with each other that we become more aware of our differences. This experience helps us notice what before we have taken for granted. Crossing cultural borders can prompt changes in how people think and act, allowing new cultural norms to emerge. In addition, culture can be dialectical (Nietto, 1999) in that certain beliefs or practices within social community can conflict. It is the responsibility of teacher educators in every institution to share the vision of preparing teachers to be culturally responsive (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Given that culture influences how teachers and students think and behave, both teachers and
teacher educators need to be culturally conscious and competent (Teel & Obidah, 2008), as well as learn how to “transform diversity into a pedagogical asset” (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 699).

Cultural competence means “mastering complex awareness of, and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills, that taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 5). Cultural competence is needed to better understand and deal with both within-group and between-group differences. Aspects of cultural competence for prospective teachers include multicultural experiences or multiple ethnic experiences, which include a global perspective of people and cultures around the world, in order to validate cultural norms of students different from them and to make informed pedagogical decisions (Chicola, 2007; Gay, 2010). The role of teacher educators involved in cross-cultural teaching is twofold: (1) to better understand prospective teachers’ cultural knowledge, and how culture impacts their learning behaviors; and (2) to help prospective teachers learn to negotiate cultural understanding and use that knowledge to teach their own students. Banks (2005, 2007) created a framework to help prospective teachers and teacher educators expand their cross-cultural understanding based on four levels of cultural knowledge: (1) personal knowledge, awareness of one’s own cultural beliefs and practices; (2) popular knowledge, awareness of the dominant culture; (3) school knowledge, awareness of institutional decisions, such as choice of textbooks; and (4) transformative knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, and culturally responsive interaction. While all levels of cultural knowledge are necessary, the transformative knowledge is very important as it allows teachers to critically examine and expand their conceptions (e.g., color-blindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, deficit conceptions and expectations) and to interrogate their assumptions about how their practices can be transformed to benefit all P-12 students (Milner, 2010).

Prospective teachers and teacher educators need the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that help them to teach across cultures and differences and to position their students to become successful citizens of the globalized world. MacPherson (2010) found that teachers who engaged in cross-cultural teaching negotiated intercultural decision making that involved reflection and responding to students’ needs. They engaged in social and emotional learning, negotiated new professional identities and power with their students. They also made their classrooms a safe place for students, and they showed willingness to collaborate with students, parents, and community members as cultural resources and experts.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Helping prospective teachers to understand the meaning of culture and its influence in teaching should be foremost in teacher education. Prospective teachers must see themselves as cultural beings. As they begin to recognize the cultural underpinnings of their own beliefs, attitudes, and practices, they may become more open to the power of culture to shape the learning and experiences of the students they will
teach. It is critical for educators to understand the socializing power of the culture of teaching. Invariably, different perspectives on culture may shape one’s thinking as a teacher. Culture is fluid and dynamic. Culture may be visible or invisible, but it imposes beliefs about appropriate ways of acting, believing and behaving. By helping teacher candidates understand the meaning of culture and various cultural perspectives that inform teaching, we will better prepare them to teach culturally and avoid the often-misguided assumptions about culture in teacher education. Prospective teachers need both cultural and intercultural competencies in order to navigate the diverse multicultural and multilingual classrooms they will encounter as teachers. Teacher educators need to emphasize cultural learning in teacher education by integrating it across all courses. In addition, hybridity, as a defining characteristic of culture in a globalized world, should be emphasized. Teaching serves as an artifact of culture change. We start with students, their cultural knowledge, and our cultural knowledge. Then, the teacher might begin to undermine or challenge the things that are given through a socializing process that helps prospective teachers to begin to use a new cultural lens to see the world. Every act of teaching involves teaching across cultures and differences, from institutional culture, classroom cultures, and the digital culture, to visible or invisible cultures. Teaching is a cultural artifact because it is a product of human activity that enables us reproduce, modify or change culture at any given time.
CHAPTER 2

SELF-STUDY

Studying Self and Others

INTRODUCTION

When I began my journey as a teacher educator, I had many ideas about how to teach prospective literacy teachers based on my experience of teaching high school English and a short college teaching experience. As a high school teacher, I developed a repertoire of successful pedagogical approaches, activities, and knowledge of what works in the classroom. While I had relevant experience based on my prior teaching positions, I did not have much experience or knowledge about the role of teacher educators. While teacher education is complex work that involves curriculum, pedagogy, and research, new teacher educators receive little or no professional development support or mentoring in most teacher education programs (Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen, & Figg, 2011; Korthagen, Loughran, & Lunenberg, 2005; Zeichner, 2005), yet they are expected to become experts at what they do within a short period of time. In that situation, new teacher educators rely on the distant memories of how they were taught by their own professors. It is believed that teacher educators are engaged in a difficult practice that is easily perceived as easy and of low status (Labaree, 2005).

New teacher educators face challenging situations because they not only work to re-orient themselves toward becoming successful teacher educators, but they also work to understand the cultural and political context of their new environment. In a study of 26 new teacher educators, Murray and Male (2005) described their initial feelings:

The transition from the first order setting of school teaching into the second order setting of HE [higher education]-based teacher education was constructed by the majority of the interviewees as a distant and stressful career change, characterized by high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Recurring feelings about the early years of HE work were of being “de-skilled,” of “struggle,” and of “masquerading.” These feelings were particularly acute during the first year. Learning to become a teacher educator was seen as a slow, uncertain process, requiring the acquisition of new professional knowledge and understanding. (2005, pp. 129–130)

These new teacher educators all had prior teaching experience as high school or elementary school teachers before transitioning to teacher education; yet, that did
CHAPTER 2

not make their transition less difficult. They needed to acquire new knowledge and understanding of teacher education, even though they had extensive knowledge and experience in K-12 school teaching. Another major issue was that new teacher educators do not recognize the complexities associated with their work, or that the knowledge they bring is insufficient for their new role. The result is that the knowledge base for teacher education has been static, tacit, and weakly conceptualized (Berry & Scheele, 2007). Another problem was what Dyson (2010) described as the lack of an integrated and embedded inclusion of personal development. This personal development, a process of getting “to know yourself as you are” (p. 8), is the process of self-study.

SELF-STUDY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Self-study has become popular with teacher educators because it places teaching and learning about teaching at the center of the research endeavor (Loughran, 2014). Self-study is a necessary pedagogical/researcher stance that can improve teaching and learning in teacher education learning contexts (Hamilton, 1998; Loughram & Russell, 2002). Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) defined self-study as “the study of one’s self, one’s actions, one’s ideas, as well as the “not self.” It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political. It draws on one’s life, but it is more than that. Self-study involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered” (p. 236). It is an “intentional and systematic inquiry into one’s own practice and yields knowledge about practice” (Dinkelman, 2003, pp. 8–9). When Hamilton described self-study as the study of oneself and “not self,” she was referring to the role of others in self-study. We cannot study ourselves without a study of others, because it is what others observe, write, or say about us that legitimizes our view of ourselves. Self-study is a journey that helps educators develop a new worldview rather than “a me view” (Dyson, 2010). Self-study, therefore, involves an inclusive study of self, social/others, ecosystem, and systemic change (Dyson, 2010). It recognizes the role of “self” in a multi-layered world. While the self is a part of the study, the focus is on the nexus of self, practice, and context (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Self-study values professional learning and aims to develop and better articulate knowledge of practice that promotes self-criticism and self-awareness of our work as teachers (Loughran, 2007). It is a recursive process of doing, thinking about what was done, making adjustments and doing again (Clark, Erickson, Collins, & Phelan, 2005). Bullocks’ (2009) research indicated that his learning about being a teacher educator through self-study impacted his knowledge and development as a teacher educator. As a result, he was able to analyze carefully the teaching and learning experiences in his classroom: (1) identify and re-interpret experiences, and (2) create and sustain a context of productive learning for himself and those students of teaching that he taught.

With self-study, teacher educators positioned as “other” can develop their professional understanding: clarify what they bring to the role, and how what they
bring to teacher education may influence their actions and interactions with others in the teaching/learning process. Self-study enables teacher educators to recognize, articulate, and (re) construct the pedagogy of teacher education, which serves as a springboard for growth and change. The pedagogy of teacher education has two complementary aspects of knowledge and practice: teaching about teaching and learning about teaching (Loughran, 2014). Loughran explained:

Teaching about teaching comprise—a serious focus on pedagogy, conceptualizing teaching as being problematic, making the tacit nature of practice explicit (for oneself and others—especially students of teaching), developing a shared language of teaching and learning, and the ability to articulate principles of practice… Learning about teaching is concerned with the knowledge and practices related to the ways in which students of teaching come to learn from, and then develop as a consequence of their teacher education experiences. (p. 275)

Quality self-study interrogates the pedagogy of teacher education by examining the problematic nature of teaching within cultural contexts and going beyond conceptualizing practice as being technical to thoughtfully engaging in practice in ways that elucidate deep thinking, reasoning, and informed decision making that underpins effective pedagogical practices. In addition, self-study examines teaching-learning relationships: how prospective teachers come to learn about teaching, and how the experiences that teacher educators provide lead to the development of prospective teachers’ knowledge of teaching.

This chapter articulates the motivation for my self-study project, my research questions and the conceptual framework. The first step toward understanding self is uncovering assumptions.

UNCOVERING MY ASSUMPTIONS

LaBoskey (1997) asserted that “educators need to be thoughtful about their work; they must question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, avoid judgments, recognize complexity, and be primarily concerned about the needs of their students” (p. 161). It is logical then, that teacher education should “begin with who the beginning teacher is—or rather who you imagine yourself to be as a teacher” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 12). This should assist the teacher educator to engage in the active exploration of the private or “implicit theories” he/she brings to teaching. In line with this advice, I believe that understating my beliefs, visions, or who I imagine myself to be as a teacher educator, should be the starting point of my self-study. I began tracing through my education-related life history (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001) by uncovering various taken-for-granted beliefs about teaching and learning that guided my learning as a teacher educator. It is well known that teachers’ beliefs, theories, and knowledge play a powerful role in their teaching behavior.
My initial assumption about my students was that they were culturally homogenous. Given some measure of privileged upbringing, I assumed, they would not find learning difficult and the textbooks and readings would not be challenging to them. I assumed they would be highly motivated to achieve, just as I was as a student. I assumed they would all be good writers and would love writing. Writing was my biggest asset as a student; so, I had assumed that my students would be the same, especially given that they were mostly graduate students. I also assumed that some of them might resent the fact that I speak with an accent. I thought it would be risky to discuss my background, values, and culture, because given the image of Africa that is often portrayed in the mass media, the prospective teachers may devalue my knowledge and ability and exhibit tokenistic tendencies—presume that I was incompetent, inadequate, and/or not knowledgeable enough to be their teacher, especially within the field of language and literacy.

Furthermore, there was a tacit assumption that prospective teachers at the graduate level can easily engage in self-directed learning with little guidance. When I was a student, my professors called themselves lecturers. The implication was that they lectured but did not teach. Lecturers practiced teaching as telling; they dispensed information to students but explanations were very minimal. Lecturing enabled professors to convey important information that they deemed essential for students’ learning. Students took notes during lecture, engaged in independent research on the topic, and fashioned out how to organize their writing and presentations. The lecture method does have some strengths and weaknesses. One major weakness of the lecture method is that it is a one-way process that encourages passivity; students are hardly involved in discussions or hands-on activities. The good thing about it, at least from my experience, is that because my own professors expected me to be an independent learner capable of negotiating my learning challenges, I was forced to take control of my learning. This, I believe made me a better student. My expectation from my professors was simple; I expected them to show up for classes, and lecture or give some basic information about a given topic. I knew I had to do the bulk of the work involved in learning. As a result, I developed critical thinking and independent learning skills and was willing to take a risk as a learner. As a teacher educator, I assumed that I would do some lecturing, but I would get students more involved in active learning and construction of their own knowledge. I also wanted to challenge them to go beyond their comfort zones to research and think critically about their learning and growth as teachers in the making. As we shall see later in this book, some of these assumptions were wrong. Self-study enabled me to reframe my practice to align with the cultural realities of the context of teacher education within a private liberal arts college and the prospective teachers’ expectation of what it means to be a teacher in the making. Part of this process involved a retrospective identification of differences.
IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCES

Teaching and learning happen in a “gap” between teachers and students (Biesta, 2004). This gap might be exacerbated in a cross-cultural context because of differences in racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as cultural knowledge—the learned behaviors, beliefs, and ways of relating to people and the environment that members of a cultural group acquire through normal processes of enculturation (Spradley, 1972, cited in King, 2004). The differences between prospective teachers and I existed at various levels, from societal and institutional levels to school and classroom levels. My Nigerian schooling experience conveyed to me that teacher-student relationships are hierarchical; teachers dominate the educational process and students tend to conform to direction and guidance of their teachers. Like the Chinese educational system (Li & Yun Di, 2013), the Nigerian system that I experienced as a student was generally characterized by power distance. The teacher was the sole authority figure and students simply obeyed or followed directions. Teachers were highly respected and hardly challenged, contradicted, or criticized publicly by students, and the teacher’s authority was not questioned. The curriculum was more or less teacher-centered and there was little or no room for students to negotiate the curriculum with teachers. Students did not contest their grades, but the system allowed them to retake exams once, if they failed. The respect that teachers enjoyed within the Nigerian educational context was a cultural thing, in that, within the wider society, there was a general respect for age, wisdom, and hierarchy. However, the American educational system emphasizes a closer relationship between teachers and students especially in smaller colleges and universities. Students wield power at all levels of education, and professors are expected to share authority with students.

Another major cultural difference emerged from navigating the invisible cultures that resulted in some misunderstanding and miscommunication. Aspects of invisible cultures include attitudes, perceptions, values, worldviews, rules of relationships, modes of thinking, and communication styles. Not only were invisible cultures challenging to deal with, they also caused some relationship problems. It appeared that the prospective teachers and I had different cultural models and expectations of teacher-student relationships. Differences in socialization resulted in different ways of looking at the world, and what one considered acceptable or unacceptable behavior. For example, graduate students addressed me by my first name. Initially, I considered it rude because in the culture that I grew up, it was regarded as an insult to call anybody senior to you by his or her first name. However, when I got used to it, I started to view it positively because it helped to foster relationships. Another difference is that most African communities consider avoiding eye contact a sign of deference while in the U.S. culture, the gesture is regarded as shifty (Florence, 2010). Up until now, I find it difficult to look straight into anybody’s eye, especially
if that person is senior to me by age or position. I still remember one senior colleague who noticed this during a one-on-one meeting and said to me, “Chinwe, look at me, look straight into my eyes.” With invisible cultures, small incidents or little miscues can heighten an immigrant teacher’s sense of alienation. An incident may feel right but not the reaction of participants. Familiar structures of meaning are violated with one person apparently unaware of causing displeasure to the other.

In addition, my educational and cultural backgrounds differed from that of my students, and influenced my expectations for academic performance and students’ behavior. My own professors adhered to strict academic standards. Make-up work, incompletes, and bonus points were not part of the bargain. Grades were final and not subject to appeal. Students could not eat in class or crack unnecessary jokes. However, in my new context, an institutionalized culture of student empowerment means that students not only feel entitled to these privileges, they were also bold and sometimes assertive. The result was that I interpreted some of their actions or utterances as rude and disrespectful, while they also misunderstood my intentions.

Some of my students once insinuated that I looked down on them because I used the phrase “you people” instead of “you guys.”

Apart from culture, linguistic differences also created tensions. Language plays a central role in cultural definitions and practices. It is a tool used both by insiders and outsiders to exclude, include, or marginalize. In my first few years of teaching, familiar words and behaviors suddenly acquired new meanings, resulting in misunderstanding. I spoke and wrote British English, colored with an African accent. Certain usages and spellings were different from that of American English, and it took a little while to transition to American English spellings and pronunciation.

Accents, no less than English proficiency, distinguish cultural insiders from outsiders in the U.S. As an accented speaker, I realized that I came into the classroom with a deficit. An interview participant in one of my numerous studies was honest enough to tell me that when she heard me speak on the first day of class, her first reaction was, “How can someone with an accent teach me about my language?” But by the end of the semester, according to her, she saw that I was well qualified to be her professor, and she completed the course happy and satisfied. The biggest problem with being a Black-accented teacher is that somehow, there is a presumption of intellectual inferiority until one proves otherwise. The fact is that if students view their teacher as a cultural, racial or linguistic “Other,” they act out in resistance to them; relationship building between the two takes considerable time and energy. In addition, students’ expectations from such professors are very high, while their tolerance level for them is very low, with no room for error. From my interactions with students, it was apparent that I was expected to be a perfect teacher and any miscue, no matter how minor, attracted unusual criticism or action, such as low rating in the course evaluation. I remember an incident when I could not open a link to a website that I wanted to use in class. This link worked in my office before I left
for class but for some unknown reason, which I attributed to technological mishap, the link did not open in class. I bypassed it and used another website for the same purpose, which worked well. When I got my student course evaluation that semester, I was shocked to see that some students referred to this website incident in their course evaluation, while answering the question, “Was the instructor prepared for class?” They claimed that the instructor was not prepared for class and cited the fact that I could not open a link to a website for a virtual field trip, even though I was able to use another website for the same purpose. This was an incident that happened within a minute in a lesson, among many lessons in a semester. Yet, the students remembered it clearly and used it as a reason for a low rating of my teaching. This is just one example of many such behaviors from students.

Identifying the differences between my students and I was one of my first steps toward understanding self, with a view to ascertaining how they impacted me as a teacher educator and how I could navigate the challenge and close the gaps. Culture is fluid and dynamic and changes according to changing times. There is no perfect system or perfect culture. It is left for the actors within any educational system to identify aspects of their culture that mitigate students’ learning and teacher-student relationships. Based on the reflections on my assumptions and cultural differences, I began to initiate my self-study by asking some questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What happens when a teacher educator researches her own teaching, and how does researching one’s practice influence a teacher educator’s understanding of herself, prospective teachers, and teacher education?

How can I better understand prospective teachers who have different sociocultural experience and worldviews from me? What assumptions do I make about these teachers?

How can I help prospective teachers acquire cultural knowledge?

How do I improve my teaching practice to make it responsive to their needs?

How can I think differently about what I am doing?

How can I build effective relationship with prospective teachers?

What role, if any, do my race, gender, and prior experiences play in my pedagogy and students’ perception of my teaching effectiveness? How can these be used positively in my teaching?

How can I use the new knowledge gained from the experience of teaching prospective teachers to reframe my pedagogy and curriculum, and hopefully, transform these teachers epistemologically, culturally, socially, and pedagogically?
My goal as a literacy teacher educator is to help my teacher candidates understand literacy as a dynamic social, cultural, linguistic, technological and political practice that depends to an extent on the epistemological and pedagogical competence of teachers for its continued evolution and transformation. To achieve this, I try to immerse the prospective teachers in learning environments and activities that help them experience literacy teaching and learning through constructive processes that facilitate a better understanding of the various dimensions of literacy within a dynamically changing world of the 21st century. My belief about literacy teacher preparation is that it should be grounded in preparing highly qualified teachers who can help their students achieve and transform the educational system for the betterment of the society. Quality teacher education should produce teachers who are knowledgeable professionals, flexible, responsive, and thoughtfully adaptive. Thoughtfully adaptive teachers not only acquire procedural knowledge, which involves how to teach; but more importantly, they acquire conditional knowledge, or knowledge of when and why to apply or adjust their particular instruction within the complexity of classroom situation. Thoughtfully adaptive teachers understand the theoretical, practical, technological, and epistemological dimensions of teaching and learning in a diverse and digital world (Fairbanks, Duffy, Faircloth, Ye He, Levin, Rohr, & Stein, 2010). I believe that teacher education in the 21st century should move toward progressive forms of pedagogy that support constructivist approaches to teaching, critical perspectives, technological competency, authentic learning, and assessment, as well as the establishment of communities of learners whose voices must be heard. The constructivist view of learning recognizes that learners, on the basis of their experiences, values, and attitudes actively construct knowledge through social interaction and shared experiences with others. Prospective teachers need cognitive flexibility to enable them implement diverse instructional approaches, think outside the box, and flexibly make informed decisions that work at any given circumstance.

Based on my beliefs, effective literacy teacher education should do the following:

• Facilitate a course environment and course activities that demonstrate to prospective literacy teachers that teaching is a complex, ill-structured domain with a high level of variability across situations and contexts. By immersing prospective teachers in activities that stimulate critical thinking and real-world problem solving, in which they struggle with meaning making and encounter cognitive conflict, they can begin to appreciate the time and effort required for teaching in real-life classrooms.

• Help prospective teachers develop an integrated knowledge of literacy, technology and pedagogy. This knowledge must acknowledge that teaching involves multiple and conflicting ideals and expectations. In addition, they need to understand that no single method or theory can adequately explain the complexity of literacy
teaching and learning and its impact on student outcomes. Particular method or methods, theory or theories and activities can work or fail, depending on particular contexts, situations, and school or classroom cultures. Making things work involves going out of one’s comfort zone, taking risks, and changing theories, methods, and materials when standard practices fail to suffice.

• Facilitate prospective teachers’ sense of self and understanding that teachers are lifelong learners, and they should constantly engage in personal and professional renewal through professional socialization at various levels, including local networks, organized learning communities, and mentoring.

• Foster prospective literacy teachers’ ability to develop their own vision of literacy teaching, not based on their own pedagogical preferences but on the prospective teachers’ ability to develop their own psychological strength to pursue, adapt, and modify instructions to achieve complex forms of literacy (Duffy, 2002).

The next section discusses the purposes of self-study.

WHY TEACHER EDUCATORS ENGAGE IN SELF-STUDY

Self-study is an approach to researching the teacher education practice that is driven largely by the concerns of teaching and the need to examine knowledge about practice at both a theoretical and practical level (Perrow, 2013). Teacher educators engage in self-study for a variety of reasons; these reasons include an effort to solve some learning problems (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Many educators face tensions in their jobs, which may present as a teaching, learning, or assessment issue. Whatever might be the case, there could be several motivations for self-study, but they all begin from inside the practice context as real concerns, issues, or dilemmas (Berry, 2007). Kosnik, Beck, Freese, and Samaras (2006) categorized the purposes for self-study into three: (1) personal renewal, (2) professional renewal, and (3) program renewal. In addition, self-study has been used to provide additional evidence for faculty course evaluation.

Personal and Professional Renewal

The most important reason for engaging in self-study is the improvement of self. Many teacher educators who engage in self-study do so in order to investigate the transition into their new role and their developing identities as teacher educators (McAnulty & Cuenca, 2014). Some educators use self-study to explore and better understand who they are as teachers for the sake of self-knowing, in order to reform their professional identity. Teacher educators have also used self-study to articulate their philosophy of practice and check consistency between their practice and their beliefs and to uncover possible discrepancies between espoused beliefs and the realities of practice (Crowe & Berry, 2007). Yet, other educators may be motivated by a personal need to ensure that one’s teaching practice is congruent with
prospective teachers’ developing practice or the realities of the classroom (Peercy, 2014; Perrow, 2013).

Another aspect of personal and professional renewal involves using self-study to develop a model of critical reflection and other forms of reflective practices and teacher thinking (Crowe & Berry, 2007; Lyons, 2010; Lyons, Halton, & Freidus, 2013), which they can use as a model for their students. Crowe and Berry (2007) collaborated to examine the ways in which each of them acted to facilitate prospective teachers’ learning to think like teachers instead of like students, the reasons why they acted the way that they did, and the challenges associated with their efforts. Although the teachers came from different countries and institutions, their conversations led them to understand that they faced similar problems as teacher educators in the process of teaching about learning to think.

Teacher educators sometimes work to ascertain the influence of a particular approach or task on prospective teachers’ learning about teaching, such as the use of individualized grading contracts (Brubaker, 2010), diversity (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2006), core practice (Peercy, 2014), collaborative learning (Berry & Scheele, 2007; Crowe & Berry, 2007), and technology integration (Ikpeze, 2009), among others. My self-study of technology integration (Ikpeze, 2009a) enabled me to go through an iterative process of inquiry, reflection, and refinement, and to negotiate existing constraints within a course structure to create conditions necessary for technology integration. Being able to critically reflect on why, how, and when to integrate technology helped me to use technology as both cognitive, management, and motivational tools. Through this study and reflection on my actions, I worked to transform my knowledge, skills, pedagogy, and my students’ competencies in using technology for instruction.

The development of knowledge about practice through researching experience brings together the theory-practice divide, which for years, has been a dividing wall in teacher education. Much of the knowledge produced about teacher education, and education in general, comes in form of theory, which is mostly generalizations, or propositions that are applicable to a wide range of situations; they are usually formulated in abstract terms (Korthagen & Kessels, 1996). This type of knowledge is known as episteme (Korthagen & Kessels, 1996). While knowledge produced in this way is intended for teachers and teacher educators to use, it has proven to have limited impact on teachers because it does not recognize or respond to the difficulties associated with individual needs, concerns and practices. This is because such knowledge is usually devoid of the particulars of individual situations that are most relevant to the work of teaching. Teachers and teacher educators want and need more practical knowledge than what has traditionally been made available through empirically driven research. An important aspect of practical knowledge that is connected to the practice of self-study is self-knowledge. Acquiring practical knowledge involves the study of self and the notion of “putting the ‘I’ in the center of research” (Meniff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996, p. 17). Knowledge as phronesis as opposed to episteme is practical knowledge gained from experience through
systematic reflection on real situations with its accompanying thoughts that facilitates greater self-awareness and new articulation of practice. It is situation-specific and focuses on strengthening one’s awareness of the characteristics of the situation and finding a helpful course of action through it. Understanding the difference between episteme and phronesis and the interaction between both kinds of knowledge is critical to the understanding of learning to teach others effectively. Phronesis not only offers a means of conceptualizing the knowledge developed through experience, but it also involves selecting epistemic knowledge that links particular contexts and situations to further make sense of an experience rather than imposing epistemic knowledge as the starting point. According to Berry (2007), teacher educators who engage in self-study may be viewed as responding to knowledge as phronesis. This knowledge is developed as teacher educators try to make their knowledge available, practical, and useful in their teaching about teaching.

Program Renewal

Program evaluation and renewal is one of the ways that teacher educators assess what works and what needs to improve in their teacher education programs. Therefore, teacher educators have used self-study to question the status quo of education programs and their role within teacher education pedagogy (Loughran, 2006). A good example of self-study for program renewal includes some studies that examined school-university partnerships (Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011; Ikpeze, Broikou, Hildrenbrand, & Gladstone-Brown, 2012). These studies were aimed at understanding the nature and challenges of the professional development schools, and how to use their partnerships to improve students’ learning.

Provide Additional Supporting Evidence for Teaching Effectiveness

There is a general consensus that students’ course evaluations, which are widely used in American colleges and universities to assess faculty teaching effectiveness for the purposes of tenure and promotions do not always represent an accurate account of student learning (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Dixson & Dingus, 2010; Manrique, 2002; Fitzgerald, Farstad, & Deemer, 2002; Shuell, 1992). These studies reiterate that there are so many factors other than teaching ability that can influence how students rate faculty that can result in negative evaluations. Researchers have noted that student evaluations more often than not, measure teaching as telling or teaching as merely delivery of information. Self-study might present an alternative way to demonstrate evidence of teaching effectiveness by documenting teaching practices that educators believe are very useful in promoting the kinds of knowledge and pedagogy that would be most helpful in facilitating prospective teachers’ learning about teaching. Fitzgerald, Farstad and Deemer (2002) experienced apathy and low student evaluation that could have jeopardized their chances for tenure and promotion, but they were able to demonstrate their teaching effectiveness using their documented
self-study of their teaching and student learning. Luckily, they teach at an institution that values faculty voice and is supportive of faculty efforts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Transformational Theory

Effective self-study is a transformational experience because it enables an educator to create new insights through reflection and praxis. The transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1997, 2000), therefore, offers a framework with which to understand the changes and adaptations that we undergo as we teach across cultures and differences. The transformational theory is andragogical, and it emerged from Mezirow’s (1978) qualitative study of women returning to a community college to study after an extended period of being away from formal educational settings. The study found that the learning experiences of these women made them to become critically aware of their personal, historical, and cultural contexts, which ultimately changed their assumptions and frames of reference, resulting in perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000). “Meaning perspectives” include sets of meaning schemes that we often unconsciously employ as we interpret our world and also interpret ourselves acting in that world. They are structures with cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions that bind our thoughts, emotions, acts, and relationships in meaningful ways (Hodge, 2014) and shape our praxis (action and reflection in the world). A failure to grapple with the new realities in our lives can be a sign that an existing meaning perspective is limited in some way, a possibility that can lead to disorientation and self-questioning as we try to come to terms with the challenging experience. In the process, the taken-for-granted assumptions that constitute our meaning perspectives may be forced into awareness where they can become subject to critical appraisal. Cranton (2007), cited in Dyson (2010), defined transformational learning as “a process by which individuals engage in critical reflection that results in a deep shift in perspective toward a more open, permeable, and better justified way of seeing themselves and the world around them” (p. 110). Transformation involves heightened awareness of how social, contextual, and cultural factors impact our beliefs and worldviews, a critical self-analysis of these factors, and an understanding of how they have shaped our beliefs and feelings. A complete transformative cycle involves completely changing our schemas, reconstructing them, adding new schemas or constructing new ones. It is a process that can be difficult as we struggle to achieve competence in new ways of being in the world and with implications for identity construction.

The transformational theory has been applied to a variety of disciplines and has also undergone changes as critics and researchers continue to expand and refine the concept (Hodge, 2014; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2009; Mälkki, 2010; Palmer, Zajonc, & Scribner, 2010). Palmer et al. (2010) suggested that transformative learning encourages sustained, intense, experiential, and engaged learning, which
helps to facilitate deeper changes that are required for a new way of making meaning. They explained:

Transformational learning rests on an enriched view of human beings, one that affirms our multidimensional nature and fundamental malleability. The methods, by which we challenge our students, open them to change, will vary, but to be successful, they should include cross-cultural studies in which worldviews radically different from their own are encountered and appreciated. (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 107)

The view of transformational learning espoused by Palmer et al., especially as it concerns cross-cultural perspectives, corroborates that of the Partnership for the 21st Century Skills (P21)(2012). The P21 for teachers includes using 21st Century Skills to understand and address global issues: learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue and understanding other nations and cultures.

The transformational process in a cross-cultural context can also be explained through the lens of the complexity theory (Zellermayer & Margolin, 2005). Complexity theory is relevant in the examination of human life struggles, the interaction between knowledge, identity, and participation in communities of practice. It acknowledges the nature of human organizations as complex and adaptive with a number of agents adapting to each other, and seeking to improve their practice and that of the system in which they are part of. In cross-cultural teaching situations, we often find ourselves in a new culture where we need to adapt to the ways of doing, learning, or teaching. During the process, our earlier socialization, beliefs, values, perceptions and rules of the groups to which we belong (family, community, class, and society) are immediately called to question. In order to be a competent member of the new environment, we need to adapt, change, and integrate the values of our new social space and transform our thinking about epistemology, ontology, pedagogy, and so on. This applies to both teacher educators and pre-service teachers in cross-culture teaching contexts. Other theoretical constructs that are also critical in the discussion of transformational learning include the sociocultural theory and constructivism. The other key learning elements include a questioning stance, critical reflections, relationship building, and pedagogy of engagement. Transformational theory emphasizes learner empowerment, while the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator who fosters students’ reflective practice and engagement with learning. Cranton (1994) suggested that the educator should be a participant and partner in the work of helping students discover, recover, and uncover layers of meanings and assumptions embedded in experiences and “plays the role a provocateur, one who challenges, stimulates, and provokes critical thinking” (1994, p. 128). Transformational learning can bring about transformism (Dyson, 2010) in which teacher educators and prospective teachers embrace a state of being transformed.
A variety of self-studies conducted by different researchers in divergent geographical, political, and educational contexts have demonstrated the transformative nature of self-study (Lyons, Halton, & Freidus, 2013; Makaiau & Freese, 2013). These studies made the researchers to rethink their practices as they challenged their assumptions and beliefs, explored the challenging and problematic aspects of their practice, and uncovered multiple interpretations of experiences that led to multiple ways of knowing and reshaping of practice. Reflection is a centerpiece of teaching and teacher education (Schön, 1983) because at all levels of education, teachers not only reflect on their practices (i.e., critical reflection) but also think through the assumptions that they have about themselves, their students, the curricula, and the world around them (i.e., critical self-reflection) (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2009). Self-study is a reflective process. Teacher educators engage in self-study because they are concerned about their teaching and their students’ learning. They recognize some tensions and dilemmas and work to investigate ways to deal with these tensions and other impediments in the teaching-learning process. They examine their taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews and engage in critical self-reflection and analysis of their pedagogies and classroom-learning environment with the aim of making relevant changes to achieve teaching effectiveness. Quality self-study involves reflective inquiry, and “reflective inquiry implicitly involves self-study” (Lyons, Halton, & Freidus, 2013, p. 165). Reflective inquiry is “an intentional act of mind, engaging a person alone or in collaboration with others in interrogating a puzzling situation or subject of teaching or learning to construct an understanding of its meaning that will shape action” (p. 165). Like self-study, reflective inquiry enables an examination of self and its influence on one’s teaching practice. Self-study is a transforming experience because teacher educators, who engage in self-study, position themselves as change agents who work to understand the significance of their own life as teachers and provide opportunities for prospective teachers to learn and grow. In the process, they model good practice (Kosnik, 2007), build relationships with students (Russell & Loughran, 2007), and monitor their own progress in learning (Berry, 2007).

**Self-Study as a Cultural Transformation**

Erickson (2010) observed that culture shapes and is shaped by practically all teaching and learning that occur in our daily interactions with students in all educational settings and as we deal with different learning environments. In addition, we deal with cultural issues and choices at every moment in our educational lives. Teacher educators begin their practice with their own cultural knowledge. In self-study, they make these cultural assumptions explicit and question them. As they come to terms with their cultural knowledge, they also engage in new ways of enculturation, either aligning themselves with existing cultures or working to modify or change institutional
culture, classroom cultures, the cultures of teaching, and students’ cultures. During this process, the cultural self is re-invented, reconstructed, or co-constructed with others. Teacher educators may work to help students become more critical consumers of texts or engage in counter-hegemonic teaching to disrupt cultural hegemony, as they help students engage and critique issues of race, class, privilege, and sexism (Makaiau & Freese, 2013; Vavrus, 2006). Through their study, Makaiau and Freese helped to challenge their students’ socially constructed assumptions about race, culture, and ethnicity, which led to new understandings about the complexity of their multicultural identities. Erickson observed that teachers can facilitate and reframe second-culture learning for students from nonmainstream backgrounds by reframing cultural boarders as cultural boundaries and depoliticizing the concept of difference. As teacher educators engage in self-study, they reflect on the multiple voices and cultures in the classroom, including the visible and invisible cultures, which lead to cultural transformation. Transformation can also be facilitated as teacher educators identify the gaps in teaching and learning and work to build relationships.

MINDING THE GAPS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching is basically a form of relationship, and relationship building should be the fundamental goal of every teaching-learning endeavor (Biesta, 2004; Birgham, & Sidorkin, 2004; Margonis, 2004). When we teach across cultures and differences, it is important to recognize what Biesta (2004) described as the “gap” between teachers and students that might be exacerbated in a cross-cultural context. Drawing from communication theories, Biesta (2004) argued that learning takes place, not just based on the activities of the teacher or that of the learner but in the interaction of the two. In other words, learning takes place in the “gap” between the teacher and the student (p. 13). This gap is exacerbated in cross-cultural teaching by sociocultural factors, such as life experiences, cultural, racial, linguistic, or socioeconomic differences (Hargeaves, 2001). Russell (2009) explained that this gap is between what we think we are doing, and what our students perceive us to be doing, as well as the gap between what teachers have always done, and what teachers would like to do. However we look at it, the fact is that there is a perpetual gap between teachers and students that needs to be addressed for a successful teaching-learning situation. This gap plays a crucial role in that it makes the transfer of meaning a transformative process. The performative theory of communication allows us to better understand the nature of the gap and places meaning in the process of communication. Bhabha (1994) referred to this gap as the space of enunciation or Third Space. Biesta (2004) argued that the ultimate aim of education is to narrow, bridge or closes this in-between gap, which exists between the activities of the educator and that of the student. Third Space is a transformative gap, yet, as Biesta explained, it cannot be totally controlled by any of the partners in the interaction, that is either teachers or students; this makes it a challenging relational space that provides both “a risk and an opportunity” (p. 22). The risk lies in the unpredictability of the space; hence, of
educational relationships in general while the opportunities include that of agency, relationship building, and a better understanding of teachers and students. In teaching across cultures and differences, this risk is amplified as we try to understand who the students really are, their dispositions, values, ways of being and communicating, as well as understanding the larger institutional and school cultures. Initially, this might be a big challenge, but as educators navigate the terrain of Third Space, they also encounter huge opportunities to make a difference in the lives of diverse students. Navigating this space requires taking an ontological attitude to teaching by identifying the parameters of what is possible and those aspects of the teaching-learning situation to which we must adapt (Margonis, 2004). Understanding pedagogical relationships ontologically allows educators to carefully design learning environments that value effective communication through participation, co-construction, and transformation. This is because designing a powerful pedagogy involves a combination of ontological decisions concerning the nature of our pedagogical relationships with students, and ethical decisions regarding course objectives and judgments over whether those objectives can be achieved through some particular teaching strategies.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Self-study enables teacher educators and other practitioners to examine their practice through systematic exploration of self and others in order to effect changes in practice. Quality self-study enables practitioners to examine their beliefs, assumptions, and the sociocultural context of learning. Through the examination of beliefs and assumptions, research questions are generated that enable the researcher to engage in a cyclic learning process that involves reflection, taking action, assessing the impact of the action on pedagogy, and students’ learning, and then doing again. Teacher educators engage in self-study for a variety of reasons, which include bridging the theory-practice divide, articulating a philosophy of teaching, assessing course outcomes or particular approaches to teaching, modeling reflection and reframing practice.

Self-study is a transformational process. Transformation enables us to grapple with the new realities in our lives and to question and challenge our experiences. In the process, the taken-for-granted assumptions are forced into awareness where they can become subject to critical appraisal. Self-study enables cultural transformation and the ability to teach across cultures and differences. Transformational learning encompasses the sociocultural, critical, and constructive orientations, and it values relationship building. The transformative cycle involves critical self-reflection that enables us to completely change or reconstruct our experiences and begin to see the world in new ways. Self-study not only involves critical reflection but also reflective inquiry. Self-study is also a form of cultural transformation because it interrogates our cultural knowledge, teaching cultures and existing classroom cultures with the aim of creating second cultures that promote teaching and learning.