



**“You could usually tell”:
Discovering Preservice Teachers’
Evaluative Thinking through
Reflective Practice**

Leigh M. Tolley, Ph.D. & Toby Daspit, Ph.D.

Department of Educational Curriculum
and Instruction, College of Education



UNIVERSITY of
LOUISIANA
L A F A Y E T T E

Defining Evaluative Thinking

Examining Its Role in Education

- Principles of evaluative thinking:
 - the need to be clear, intentional, accountable, specific, and systematic;
 - focusing and prioritizing, and making assumptions and criteria and standards for judgment explicit;
 - using data-based statements of fact and limiting generalizations and causal explanations to what data support in order to draw appropriate conclusions; and
 - the need for cultural sensitivity and cultural competence
- (Patton, 2018)

Defining Evaluative Thinking

Connections to Reflective Teacher Practice

- Teachers analyze and use the results of their informal and formal assessment data to guide instructional decision-making; these choices are a form of evaluative thinking (Nelson & Eddy, 2008)
- Good teachers are, by nature, reflective learners that can use this reflexivity to understand themselves and their practices (Kelleher, 2003)
- Teachers that are able to critically examine their practice and increase their understanding of themselves and others are better able to engage in transformative learning (Beavers, 2009)

Defining Evaluative Thinking

Connections to Reflective Teacher Practice

- Ongoing reflective practice that is supported organizationally can help to increase teachers' perceptions of their efficacy and mastery (Kennedy & Smith, 2013)
- Teachers' sharing of their practical knowledge and how they reflect on their practice can be used to:
 - explain what may/may not work in a given instructional context (Tolley, 2019)
 - benefit the training of new teachers and guide them toward becoming reflective practitioners (Griffiths, 2000; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001)

The Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP)

A Collaborative Context

- Academic service learning partnership between Vermilionville, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (UL Lafayette), and the Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS)
- First iteration: Fall 2012
- Elementary and secondary students and their teachers from high-needs schools

The Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP)

A Collaborative Context

- Preservice elementary and secondary school teachers in social studies and English/language arts (ELA) methods courses
- Development and implementation of, and reflection on, immersive cross-curricular lessons
- As of April 2019, over 400 preservice teachers and over 2,500 students have been involved

The Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP)

A Collaborative Context

- Since Fall 2017, the secondary social studies and ELA preservice methods courses have worked together across, between, and within their respective content areas
- Other ongoing studies:
 - preservice teachers' self-efficacy and VEEP participation
 - secondary VEEP interdisciplinary collaboration
 - evaluation capacity building with the faculty and staff engaged in VEEP

Preservice Teacher Participants

How many individuals have been involved in this cross-disciplinary collaboration?

Semester	Number of Preservice Secondary Teachers		
	ELA	Social Studies	Total
Fall 2017	17	13	30
Spring 2018	3	2	5
Fall 2018	9	19	28
Spring 2019	6	3	9
Fall 2019	15	17	32
TOTAL	50	54	104

Methods: VEEP Day Survey

What were your experiences?

- 11-item open-ended survey, administered by Vermilionville staff and completed at the conclusion of VEEP Day
- Sample items:
 - Reflecting on your lesson, what would you have done differently today?
 - Do you feel more confident about your teaching abilities after the program?
 - Do you have any suggestions about how the program can run more smoothly?
 - How do you think this will help you once you're in a classroom environment?

Methods: Document Analysis

How well were you able to collaborate?

- Analysis by the UL Lafayette faculty of completed self and group reports/ratings of project contributions
- Individual reflections addressing:
 - What went well?
 - What were you able to improve in the teaching of the lesson multiple times?
 - What would you change in the future?

Methods: Focus Groups

Sharing Opinions about the Experience

- Focus groups are conducted the next class meeting after VEEP Day to discuss:
 - Decision-making processes during planning and implementation
 - Collaboration with their peers in their own course and with the other methods course
 - Reflection on the VEEP Day experience as a whole
 - Suggestions for improving the program and its collaborative aspects in the future

The Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP)

Study Inspiration

*“[If] I knew I could sit down and still monitor [the students], then I did it. And if I knew I couldn’t, then I would walk around and I would check on people, and then go back, and get back up again. But, most — it just depended on the group. And **you could usually tell** by the way they were talking or not talking, for redirecting, if I didn’t know what they were talking about, if they weren’t talking about the assignment” (Focus group, March 5, 2018)*

Research Questions

How can you “usually tell”?

1. How does the use of reflective practice in the content methods courses impact preservice secondary ELA and social studies teachers’ evaluative thinking?
2. How do these preservice teachers describe and/or demonstrate their evaluative thinking?
3. How might reflective practice and evaluative thinking impact these preservice teachers’ instructional practices, both currently and in their future careers?

Emergent Themes

Preliminary Findings from Four Focus Groups

- Awareness of and need for change/flexibility
- Establishing and adhering to expectations
- Responding to students/implementation data
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Cultural responsiveness
- Evaluative processes
 - Evaluation/needs assessment in planning
 - Formative evaluation/reflection in practice
 - Reflection as summative evaluation
- Application to future teaching practices

Emergent Themes

Preliminary Findings from Four Focus Groups

- **Awareness of and need for change/flexibility**
- Establishing and adhering to expectations
- Responding to students/implementation data
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Cultural responsiveness
- Evaluative processes
 - Evaluation/needs assessment in planning
 - Formative evaluation/reflection in practice
 - Reflection as summative evaluation
- Application to future teaching practices

Emergent Themes

Awareness of and need for change/flexibility

“you go in knowing that there is going to be an experience that you are going to have to adapt and make certain changes, but there were changes that needed to be made during the day and the instruction that I had not thought of before”

(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

“the next small group, I knew I had to do something. I changed it, and then they loved it. So I think that’s when it was, like, all right, you have to be prepared for any situation. And it’s like, whenever you’re not, it’s going to throw you for a loop so quick, and you’re like, ‘Man, what do I do?’”

(Focus group, March 5, 2018)

“I thought if I had a very detailed lesson plan that my day was going to go well, and it took me like 10 minutes of my first lesson to realize that it doesn't matter how detailed your lesson plan is. Sometimes you just have to be willing to, like, roll with the punches”

(Focus group, March 11, 2019)

Emergent Themes

Preliminary Findings from Four Focus Groups

- Awareness of and need for change/flexibility
- **Establishing and adhering to expectations**
- Responding to students/implementation data
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Cultural responsiveness
- Evaluative processes
 - Evaluation/needs assessment in planning
 - Formative evaluation/reflection in practice
 - Reflection as summative evaluation
- Application to future teaching practices

Emergent Themes

Establishing and adhering to expectations

“The main goal of VEEP Day was the collaboration of history or social studies and English, [so those were] the overall goals of this day”
(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

“it was really important to state the expectations and rules and what was going to happen that day because we were responsible, not our mentor teacher: it was us. So that’s why I personally felt growth in that, because I was given the responsibility”
(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

“just setting those expectations, you could tell that [by] setting that groundwork [...] students heard and listened”
(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

“having the confidence to say, ‘Okay,’ you know, ‘managing is not that hard once I know what is expected of me, and what I’m expecting of the students’”
(Focus group, March 5, 2018)

Emergent Themes

Preliminary Findings from Four Focus Groups

- Awareness of and need for change/flexibility
- Establishing and adhering to expectations
- **Responding to students/implementation data**
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Cultural responsiveness
- Evaluative processes
 - Evaluation/needs assessment in planning
 - Formative evaluation/reflection in practice
 - Reflection as summative evaluation
- Application to future teaching practices

Emergent Themes

Responding to students/implementation data

“with my groups [of students], a lot of them started to ask more questions about [the lesson], and they were listening and understanding; not all of them, some of them were still listening and learning without asking questions. You could gauge how much they were learning by the questions they were asking”

(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

“I think the students' responses were also very, very helpful on how we taught the lesson. [There] were times where we got the same question from different groups. So we would say, okay, let's think of the way how we can better answer that question, or let's just go ahead and save this [for the] next time we teach it”

(Focus group, November 13, 2018)

Emergent Themes

Responding to students/implementation data

“before, differentiation was kind of this abstract idea. Like, I knew how to respond to it on paper, but then whenever I was applying it for the lesson and meeting kids who really did need that differentiated instruction, it kind of put things into perspective for me, and made me more comfortable about making those on-the-spot adjustments”

(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

“I know I do have to remember that every single student is different and unique, and I have to remember that I'm going to have to better read those students and I'm not going to get all of them; [...] I can try as much as I can. I want when I'm a teacher to get all my students engaged then and to love my class”

(Focus group, March 11, 2019)

Emergent Themes

Responding to students/implementation data

“[the students] had to pick any place in the world to go — I wanted to be open-minded for them. So, I decided whenever that little girl asked me, ‘Can I go to Wakanda?’, I said, ‘You can go anywhere you want. It can even be fictional.’ At first, I wasn’t thinking fictional, I was just thinking let’s go — where are you going to go? But I feel like whenever I said, ‘Yeah, Wakanda,’ I literally saw like 10 kids’ eyes just light up. Because [...] you’re hitting a diversity thing that you didn’t even know you were hitting”

(Focus group, March 5, 2018)

“we were able to expand on the history, [...] we spent a lot of our planning figuring out how exactly we were going to tie these different cultures together to create this one culture that most of our students were familiar with”

(Focus group, November 13, 2018)

Emergent Themes

Preliminary Findings from Four Focus Groups

- Awareness of and need for change/flexibility
- Establishing and adhering to expectations
- Responding to students/implementation data
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Cultural responsiveness
- **Evaluative processes**
 - Evaluation/needs assessment in planning
 - Formative evaluation/reflection in practice
 - Reflection as summative evaluation
- Application to future teaching practices

Emergent Themes

Evaluative processes

“It was a lot of thinking about what instructional strategies are going to be appropriate for time management or classroom management for the space itself and things like that” (Focus group, November 13, 2018)

“I think what was also really good was that with reflecting, it helped us practice the art of reflecting right after [each lesson], and you have such a short amount of time to think about everything that went wrong, everything that you need to fix, and then put it into place in that five-minute little break while you're also greeting students at the door. So we're also saying how many [new students], ‘How's it going?’, ‘Hey, what's up?’ And you're thinking in your head, ‘Okay, I need to do this, this, this, like, getting to practice [as a teacher]’” (Focus group, November 13, 2018)

Emergent Themes

Evaluative processes

“Say you know what you need to do, you know, but what works, what doesn't work? What works for her may not work for me. What works for them may be great for them, but I need to find somewhere in between. [...] it always helps to reflect to figure out [what you are doing] or taking what someone else is doing and adapting it to your own style”

(Focus group, March 11, 2019)

“it just reiterates the fact that you have to go back and look at your lessons and see what works, what does not work, and what did you do, in order to make your other — your future lessons better”

(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

Emergent Themes

Evaluative processes

“we got to reflect beyond just that five minutes. [...] in a five minute period you're thinking, you're reflecting in the sense of ‘How might I modify this?’ But afterwards, you’re reflecting more in the sense of ‘What would I do different?’ Instead of modifying you're now thinking, ‘Okay, I modified this so much, and it's still not working. So what about it didn't work and what can I do instead?’ And I think that's where that became really helpful, was to realize, like, even after modifying it four different times, it still might not be good. And it's just a chance for you to realize you need to move on to something else, a different strategy, and to try something else”

(Focus group, November 13, 2018)

Emergent Themes

Preliminary Findings from Four Focus Groups

- Awareness of and need for change/flexibility
- Establishing and adhering to expectations
- Responding to students/implementation data
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Cultural responsiveness
- Evaluative processes
 - Evaluation/needs assessment in planning
 - Formative evaluation/reflection in practice
 - Reflection as summative evaluation
- **Application to future teaching practices**

Emergent Themes

Application to future teaching practices

“I feel a lot more confident in [planning and delivering lessons] because we were the ones who had to recognize what could be better and make the changes ourselves rather than relying on someone else to tell us what we could change”

(Focus group, November 13, 2018)

“one of the things that Vermilionville had and VEEP Day taught me is [...] how do I adjust the instruction for a group of students at [names of local high schools], so looking at and trying to figure out [students’] backgrounds and how you would adjust the instruction [for them] was my area of improvement. I felt before it was a lot of theoretical [information], I don’t know what to do, I’m not that comfortable with it, but once you get into it, it is not that bad. I can do that. Whatever, adjust it the way you need to. It’s not that big of a deal”

(Focus group, December 5, 2017)

Broader Implications

How does this contribute to educational evaluation?

- Preliminary findings align with the principles of evaluative thinking (Patton, 2018)
- Preservice teachers likely have the capacity to engage in evaluative thinking as they are learning their profession, especially when they are able to design, implement, and reflect on lessons that require multiple iterations
- K-12 teacher preparation programs can be more proactive in discussing and supporting evaluative thinking through reflective practice

Broader Implications

How does this contribute to educational evaluation?

- Teacher candidates can use evaluative thinking to more effectively develop their pedagogy
- Educational evaluators can draw upon both experienced and nascent teacher knowledge through an evaluative thinking lens to inform both teacher preparation and teacher education
- Evaluators, teachers, and teacher candidates can collaborate to use a shared language to explore, examine, and reflect on their practices in myriad educational contexts

Selected References

- Beavers, A. (2009). Teachers as learners: Implications of adult education for professional development. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 6(7), 25-30.
- Griffiths, V. (2000). The reflective dimension in teacher education. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33(5), 539-555.
- Kelleher, J. (2003). A model for assessment-driven professional development. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(10), 751-756.
- Kennedy, S. Y., & Smith, J. B. (2013). The relationship between school collective reflective practice and teacher psychological efficacy sources. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 29, 132-143.
- Nelson, M., & Eddy, R. M. (2008). Evaluative thinking and action in the classroom. In T. Berry & R. M. Eddy (Eds.), *Consequences of No Child Left Behind for educational evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation*, 117, 37-46.
- Patton, M. Q. (2018). A historical perspective on the evolution of evaluative thinking. In A. T. Vo & T. Archibald (Eds.), *Evaluative Thinking. New Directions for Evaluation*, 158, 11-28.
- Tolley, L. M. (2019). Valuing teachers' evaluative thinking: The role of teacher knowledge and practice in formative assessment. *Research Issues in Contemporary Education*, 4(1), 21-34.
- Verloop, N., Van Driel, J., & Meijer, P. (2001). Teacher knowledge and the knowledge base of teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 35(5), 441-461.



UNIVERSITY *of*
LOUISIANA
L A F A Y E T T E[®]

Thank You for Attending Today's Presentation

Please contact Dr. Leigh M. Tolley with questions or comments:

ltolley@louisiana.edu / 337-482-1475