Building Experiential Knowledge through Hypothetical Enactments: A Meta-Pedagogical Process

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Abstract:

This paper describes hypothetical enactments of parent-teacher conferences through use of role-playing and simulations. Critical dialogue is utilized as a debriefing process. These pedagogical strategies have been used with pre-service teachers enrolled in a classroom management course for creating positive learning environments. Instructional guidelines and scenario scripts are presented as a reference for implementation. Research supporting the pedagogical strategies is highlighted. Lastly, the author's reflection of the effects on students' learning based on years of observations is provided.

Key Words:

role-playing, simulation, situated cognition, parent-teacher conference.

Introduction

This paper describes the implementation of a parent-teacher conference simulation process as an effective pedagogy utilized with pre-service teachers enrolled in a required management class.

As a practitioner who happens to be a researcher, I recognize how a *teacher's way of knowing*, where practice begets practice, often provides sustainable evidence for effective pedagogical strategies (Palmer, 2000). The enactment activity was created early in my teacher education practice. It has been utilized in many courses and shared with colleagues and adjuncts continuously over the past fifteen years. It is serendipitously now recognized by researchers as signature pedagogy (Dotgera, Harris, & Hansel, 2008; Shulman, 2005). So, although informal anecdotal data on the strategy's effectiveness and impact on students' perceptions of activity authenticity has been archived in instructor's records (i.e., student reflections, testimonials, etc.), research is not the focus of these discussions. Therefore, the reader will note an absence of a tightly-woven research design and no data analysis or findings (i.e., discussion is within

a *practitioner* frame rather than a *research* focus). In this paper, no definitive claims of student learning are provided, although supportive related research regarding effective components of enactments (i.e., specific instructional benefits and skill acquisition) has been included, as well as a summary of instructor observations of their impact on students' learning.

Background

Relevancy of Need

As a teacher/educator of pre-service teachers, to best support my students' progress in the program, I often reflect on my own teacher certification training to identify experiential gaps. Rigorous field experience during student teaching gave me a sense of confidence regarding pedagogical readiness for my first teaching job. It was initial parent-teacher conferences that left me petrified, stifled, stymied and feeling totally inadequate during interactions. I had some conceptual but no experiential knowledge or skills regarding interactions with adults in sharing information about their children. This gap in preparing pre-service teachers for real-world skills is still evident today where their experiences are limited to provision of guidelines and field observations of parent-teacher conferences. Passive modes of learning provide no real experiential basis for gaining agential knowledge and honing skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Novice teachers benefit from and are better able to acquire skills through active, reality-based, meaningful learning experiences that require autonomous thinking and self-sufficiency (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Kolb, 1984).

Value of Instructional Process

In course instruction, I attempt to create and implement instructional strategies which teach concepts through techniques that can be carried forward into a novice teacher's pedagogy. In this way, the instructional activity presents dual, metacognitive and meta-pedagogical purposes through the presentation of content within a learning process that students can experience and internalize as potential pedagogical tools to be utilized in their future practice. They learn by *doing*, and *if* the learning is meaningful and relevant, *Voila!* Student engagement will increase the likelihood that valuable strategies such as role-playing, simulation and critical dialogue will be added to their budding instructional repertoire.

Instructional Goals

Two instructional goals drive the enactment activity: (a) participants learn about and acquire effective communicative and processing skills for conducting parent-teacher conferences, and (b) learners' engagement in and experience with role-playing, simulation and critical dialogue as pedagogical strategies are embraced and ultimately implemented as instructional models within their own practice.

Enactment Guidelines

Foundational Information for Enactment Participation

First, it is important to stress that to ensure authentic interactions take place, hypothetical scenario enactments should not be conducted until the learning community has time to develop a level of trust during dialogic exchanges. Trust is relevant to authentic dialogue, especially when exploring uncharted conceptual and experiential territory. Learners are likely to take learning risks if they perceive a trusting learning environment (for further discussion of trust, see Parr, 2005/2006 or Tschannen-Moran, 2004). If a comfort level within the class is not established prior to enactments, the process may fall flat or be ineffective in meeting learners' needs.

Second, enactments are open for modification to multiple topics and content areas. I have used hypothetical scenarios for exploring issues and providing pre-service teachers experience with (a) student-teacher confrontations regarding student misconduct; (b) practice in giving directions for class grouping; (c) teacher- facilitated, student-to-student conflict resolution; and (d) mini-lesson simulations. Enactments are malleable, applicable and pedagogically instrumental in meeting various instructional goals; therefore, a range of disciplines for myriad instructional purposes can implement enactments with complementary success. Beyond parent-teacher conference enactment descriptions, core information for generating enactments within any domain is provided.

For the purpose of this paper, an enactment is characterized as simultaneous implementation of role-play and simulation during the activity. The terms role-play and simulation are often used interchangeably (Crookall & Oxford, 1990), but are distinctly different for this activity. In explaining the mock parent-teacher conference enactments, the definition for role-play is understood as taking the position of *other* in a hypothetical situation. Simulation is described as acting and responding as *self* in a contrived situation. In the enactment, these players share a similar context, structure and purpose for the scenario and must utilize existing social and cognitive skills, but operate or function differently. Simulators, engaged as *teacher/self* in the enactment, are involved through personal and authentic immersion into the scenario task and interaction. Role-players, based on their own interpretation of assigned parent characteristics, can adopt a more distant, playful or flexible disposition to the hypothetical situation but must demonstrate an ability to view from outside their own perspective (i.e., cognitively and affectively). In addition to these enactment designations, other classmates operate as observing participants who ardently take notes during the activity and contribute to post-enactment reflective discussion and debriefing. The entire process is student-centered, allowing for learner control of activity direction. The instructor serves to initiate the enactment, operating as an observer during interactions; intervening only if participants reach an impasse. During post-enactment debriefing, the instructor facilitates discussion through prompting or clarifying questions. Two or three whole class enactments are initially conducted to model the formative process of the activity, followed by small group enactments to ensure students experience all participatory role designations. Additional iterations of enactments involve new volunteers and selection of different scenarios. Enactments are not assessed, but students are urged to express and cite, in course

papers, critical and self-reflective thinking experienced from any of the participatory role designations.

Crafting of Hypothetical Scenario Enactments

The practitioner emphasis of this paper is further elucidated through hypothetical scripts and scenarios of enactments that were created and developed from my own problematic experiences or issues as a public school elementary teacher, as well as, current schooling issues that pre-service teachers may face. The scenarios are delineated through two sets of contextual information: (a) student descriptions, and (b) parent/guardian/caregiver descriptions. Student descriptions provide grade level, gender, in addition to hypothetical behavioral and academic characteristics (as a reference, see Appendix A - Student Descriptions). Parent/guardian/caregiver descriptions provide additional context to the enactment through character background information: e.g., cultural background, marital status, relationship to child, work, and dispositions (as a reference, see Appendix B - Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Descriptions). Educators are encouraged to generate their own scenarios based on specific course objectives, but consideration must be made for infusing common events that actually do occur or difficult issues educators ordinarily must address. Ideally, the enactments reflect constructs previously discussed in the course; doing so helps integrate and extend complementary discussion of those topics from a different conceptual perspective.

For the author, creative pedagogy, teacher intuition and experience guided development of the enactments and process procedures. I have found that contextualizing the scenario is vital for ensuring learners experience authenticity of the enactment (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Globle, 2010; Dotgera et al., 2008). Basically, scenarios must resonate with learners for them to invest interest and engage in the activity. Furthermore, complex aspects of conferencing optimizes student learning (e.g., a bullying incident). Disruption of learners' potential naïve, *Pollyanna* view of teaching presents opportunity to generate disequilibrium in thinking patterns. This imbalance and uncertainty potentially yield the greatest gains in student learning, insight and dispositional awareness. Lastly, it is crucial to embed a challenge within the descriptions that includes salient social characteristics of the learning environment or schooling aspects that trigger affective thinking or emotional responses. Conflicting values, posed for introspection and scrutiny, are central to dynamic dialogic interactions. Opinions flux and flow freely when tough topics of the heart are soften through genuine participant exchanges.

Process Guidelines

There are three distinct phases of the activity: (1) hypothetical scenario enactment, (2) post-enactment debriefing, and (3) enactment discoveries.

Hypothetical scenario enactment. To begin the activity, students are asked to raise their hand if they have not substituted in schools, have no children, and are new to the education program. The aim is to identify students with the *least* amount of experience regarding parent-teacher conferences. Students with minimal experience allow an instructional opportunity to scaffold comprehension of skills fundamental to the

task in a progressive manner during the initial enactment and post-enactment discussion (i.e., a perfect conference enactment yields no opportunity for scrutiny or in-depth discussion). From this student pool, a volunteer is requested to take part in a simulation/role-play activity. The volunteer is told that they will operate as a simulator in a parent-teacher conference, where they are to interact as if they are a teacher. Other students are solicited to role-play as parents. The remaining students are observing participants, instructed to take notes during the simulation for post-enactment debriefing. Specifically, the observing participants will note effective actions taken by the teacher, as well as, offer suggestions for improvement. To preface the activity and potentially ease anxiety, I usually share my challenges as a first-year teacher in conducting conferences. One rationale for participating in this exercise is that it provides some basic understanding for building interactional skills. A second and perhaps more emotive rationale is that the enactment experience may deflect or diminish angst or apprehension when faced with the task during their first teaching assignment.

It is explained to the class that there are two sets of cards: One set is identified as *Student Descriptions* (Appendix A) and another set is *Parent/Guardian/Care Giver Descriptions* (Appendix B). The simulator is directed to randomly pull a *Student Description* card from the pile (cards are face down, so descriptions cannot be read). This provides a description of the student for the conference. The simulator then reads the description of the student to the whole class and is allowed to keep that card during the activity. Similarly, the role players select and read their card from the *Parent/Guardian/Care Giver Descriptions* card pile. It should be noted that diversity of descriptions provides numerous possibilities for enactments. Randomness of distribution also ensures that no two enactments present the same context. Once the context information is shared, the simulator and role-players proceed with the mock parent-teacher conference enactment. The instructor operates as an observer during the enactment. And although you will want to arrange some open space for the activity, it is suggested that you refrain from arranging the seating configuration. Part of the learning to occur is for the simulator to use their discretion in the seating design of the conference meeting.

Post-enactment debriefing. Initially, simulators and role players are queried about their *good*, *bad* and *ugly* experience or reactions (i.e., positive, negative and emotional frustration) to the enactment, and must provide explanations or rationales for actions taken. Discussion is open for all observing participants to note observations of positive attributes of the enactment and provide suggestions for a more effective conference. Questions can be asked of simulators to clarify or justify what was observed during the enactment. Facilitator finesse comes into play during this phase of the activity when primary, ancillary, or relevant points need to be interwoven into discussion or prodded through critical or challenging questions. Debriefing intercessions, as a platform for social discourse, serve several purposes for student-centered discussion: (a) constructs of effective conference interactions are identified, (b) processing of conceptual knowledge is reinforced, (c) experiential knowledge and skills (albeit vicariously) are solidified, and (d) critical reflective thinking is employed. Reflection is crucial as it promotes conceptual generalizations necessary for knowledge transference to field experiences.

After multiple whole class enactment iterations, the class is broken into small groups, provided their own set of student and parent descriptions, and are directed to conduct parent-teacher conferences so that everyone gets to experience a different role in the process (i.e., those who have played parents would then simulate as a teacher, and/or as observing participants).

Enactment discoveries. After students have an opportunity to participate in all three designated roles, they are reassembled as a whole class to discuss highlights of what has been learned through the enactments. Their notes serve as documentation of *discoveries* because they emerge organically through the enactment process and dialogic exchanges, rather than through reading an article or observing a conference at a school. The instructor facilitates the summary process for identifying key points of parent-teacher conferencing (i.e., what strategies would you implement?). Usually these discoveries include the following general paraphrased tips for conducting a parent-teacher conference:

- Arrange chairs as an inviting space
- Greet parent/guardian/caregiver appropriately
- Have student examples available
- Set a time limit for the conference
- Prepare for certain questions about the students (ability and behavior)
- Create a template for discussion
- Practice active listening
- Make eye contact
- Ask parents for input
- Keep comments objective
- Temper emotions (stay neutral and do not judge)
- Focus on learner
- Seek solutions to problems or challenges
- Summarize major points
- Note actions to be taken
- End with thanking parent/guardian/caregiver for attending conference

Interestingly, it is rare for important aspects of a parent-teacher conference to be missed through the enactment process. To validate and affirm their newfound knowledge and reinforce their learning, students are provided with practitioner articles on the topic. Basically, most of these articles outline what they just discovered!

Meta-pedagogy. Lastly, students are asked to reflect on and share their perspectives as learners engaged in role-play, simulations and the dialogic process. They share how, when and why they would use these pedagogical strategies, as well as, provide critiques on its limitation with young learners.

Implementation Pointers & Caveats

Reality or talk show phenomenon. Intense engagement has occurred with feverous exchanges of emotions between simulator and over-zealous role-players to the point of mock chair throwing episodes. Usually this is light-hearted and in-the-

moment, but some observing participants get lost or uncomfortable in the *ugliness* of the fantasy. Also, debriefing discussions can become heated through participant expressions of inflexible stances. Sometimes, this is where all participants must be brought back to reality. A quick reminder of the hypothetical nature of the enactment helps assuage tension. Additionally, it is prudent to recap that the activity is designed to *respectfully* explore the validity of diverse perspectives, thereby, increasing one's competent social interaction skills.

Ambiguity. For some conference enactments, there are no resolutions or neat closures. Commonly, there are students who struggle with the vagueness or uncertainty of these situations. It helps to reiterate to students that the activity is exploratory and process-oriented. The only other recommendation to be offered is to include additional similar course activities during the semester so that students can gain confidence in dealing with unknown outcomes.

Skittish or tentative simulator. For the initial whole class enactment you will want a simulator with little experience, but they will need to possess a hardy disposition for simulating in front of the whole class. Generally, those who volunteer understand the informal playfulness of the activity and *go with* challenges posed by aggressive role-players. If this is not the case, you may need to briefly interrupt to reassure the simulator. Also, it is not uncommon for simulators to break character and look pleadingly to the instructor for guidance, support, or reassurance, so be prepared to supply a nudging nod to proceed. Other participants, when frustrated, desire the instructor to intervene or referee. Enactments are an opportunity for pre-service teachers to gain footing regarding the tough task of conferencing, so it is best to encourage student autonomy in wrestling challenges as they arise or unravel. Allowing self-discovery of their own strengths and weaknesses during enactments promotes growth and ultimately the sense of mastery needed once in the teaching field.

Impasse. Most enactments naturally progress towards an ending or resolution, but sometimes the instructor will need to: 1) intervene during an impasse (e.g., role-player becomes consumed by their role), or 2) cue participants to wrap it up (i.e., taking longer than a *real-life* conference). If no new points will emerge by continuing the enactment, and all possible positions have been exhausted, a smooth transitional point for initiating post-enactment discussion has occurred.

Why Use Role-Play and Simulation Enactments?

Related Practitioner-Based Research

A plethora of researchers, educational theorists and practitioners, across a range of content areas and disciplines, have examined the effectiveness of interactive experiential learning strategies that utilize situated cognition (e.g., Brown et al., 1989; Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000; Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Many employ instructional models such as role-playing and simulation (e.g., Dotgera et al., 2008; Gresalfi et al., 2010; Hertel & Millis, 2002; Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2008; Mezirow, 2000; Simpson & Elias, 2011). Several practitioner-based studies validate use of simulations and role-playing to increase student learning (Barab et al., 2010; Hertel & Millis, 2002). Some researchers explore student perceptions of usefulness of the

methodology in their learning, including perceptions of authenticity (Dotgera et al., 2008). Others question how the strategies can be accurately assessed for effectiveness and learning impact (Dotgera et al., 2008), as well as whether these types of instructional strategies and techniques provide benefits beyond traditional or other approaches. Explicative discussion of related work which highlights instructional benefits and skills acquired through role-playing and simulation enactments; specifically, those which have informed my practice, is expounded in the subsequent sections. To anchor practitioner perspectives to the discussion, my own *teacher's way of knowing* comments have been added. (For additional supportive references, see Appendix C – Related Practitioner-Based Research on Simulation, Role-Play, Situated and Experiential Learning, and Student Engagement).

Role-play and simulation have been used in the medical and business disciplines for similar enactment purposes for many years with comparable impact and results regarding student learning (see Appendix C for examples). Recently in the education field, one research study explored the parent-teacher simulation construct for students' perception of authenticity and effectiveness of the activity and process (Dotgera et al., 2008). In this study, Standardized Parents (i.e., professionals carefully trained for the role) were utilized; cases were developed and presented from real-life events; participants were students enrolled in an elective course; and, the primary researcher conducted the simulation debriefing process. Findings from this study indicate promise that participants benefited from the simulations and interactional skills necessary for conducting parent-teacher conferences were heightened. I applaud this study as it provides credence for the strategy shared in this paper.

Critical dialogue. Dialogic processes are embedded within role-playing and simulations as functional communication for enactments (for additional discussion, see Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Ayman-Nolley, 1999; Barab et al., 2010; Dotgera et al., 2008; Joyce et al., 2008). Post-enactment debriefings add another layer, as critical dialogue is experienced when learners explore and analyze the complex social values and issues embedded within the scenarios. Analytical discussions provide students with a voice in expressing their thoughts, views and beliefs. Evaluative statements, through shared individual opinions, prompt a higher level of thinking (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) necessary for learning to be internalized and sustained.

Teacher's way of knowing. My experience implementing hypothetical enactments has yielded intense, reflective, and identity-defining dialogues amongst participants. Post-activity reflections confirm my observations of this impactful communicative learning activity, as students have shared time and again how their life world views were broadened and their emotions stirred through discussion. Their reflections indicated that engagement was deep, provocative, and compelling, often noting that they recognized shifting perceptions as a result of interactive dialogue.

Instructional Benefits of Enactments

Role-playing and simulation, as instructional strategies embedded in enactments, generate multiple boons in activating optimal student learning. Key elements of role-playing and simulation anchor knowledge and skills through a non-didactic, highly interactive and vibrant enactment learning process. Those key instructional elements

include: (a) sheltered experiential learning setting, (b) high student engagement, and (c) dynamic dialogic process.

Sheltered experiential learning setting. Hypothetical scenarios present realistic settings for enactments within a non-threatening environment of peers. Generally, through enactment suppositions, learners are more likely to perceive that judgment of others, as well as, liability regarding their decisions and actions during the simulation, is suspended or extinguished. Learners ease into scenario enactments as contrived contingencies for actively practicing skills with low risks to self and others. Thereby, a safe environment is provided for honing higher-level thinking skills such as application, analysis, synthesis and creativity; those crucial during enactment interactions (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Additionally, since the activity is focused on process and learning rather than assessment, learners experience another level of safety; whereby, exploring social parameters and risk-taking during interactions can occur without prejudice or academic repercussions (Simpson & Elias, 2011).

Teacher's way of knowing. As described in the previous section on the "reality or talk show phenomenon," I observed students take enactments to the limit and totally immerse themselves in the activity. This could not occur if they did not feel safe in the learning setting. I have informally hypothesized that their level of engagement parallels with depth of learning, as no participant is passive in any of the enactment roles or post-activity dialogic exchanges.

Enactments are proxy for a real setting, but cognition is situated within the real-life scenario challenge (Brown et al., 1989; Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991). If enactment scenarios are highly contextualized and keenly crafted to align with current schooling issues, learners respond to the relevancy (and perceived need) of the activity and how application and mastery of the skill supports their progress as future educators. An experiential learning setting provided through hypothetical scenarios endows learners with a perceived sense of safety in exploring skills in a sheltered environment; a relevant, authentic challenge in which to acquire knowledge and meaningful change; and, an opportunity for application of nascent knowledge and skills. Through the process, a sense of situated agency emerges where learners access confidence to make decisions and take action in unfamiliar contexts.

Teacher's way of knowing. In course assignments and papers, students repeatedly cited this activity for gaining the most real-to-life understanding of others' views and acquiring communicative skills they perceived would be needed in their practice. Most poignantly, they noted how much proficiency *still* needed to be developed. Gaining a humbling insight on one aspect of the complexity and challenge of teaching indicates to me learning growth. Naïve perspectives are thereby shed so that more mature thinking can be acquired and tapped into when making decisions and taking actions in their own classroom.

High student engagement. Enactments involving role-play and simulation are inherently interactive and engaging (i.e., physically, mentally, and emotionally) (Parr, 2005/2006). Student engagement and motivation during enactments are aroused through novelty, spontaneity, improvisational acts and playfulness of the activity (Hertel, & Millis, 2002). In fact, there is no mistake that *play* within *role play* involves fewer

constraints during interactions and a tacit acceptance of diversion from set goals as the norm; thereby, broader parameters for student engagement stimulate activity (Barab, Gresalfi, & Arici, 2009; Barab et al., 2010). Meaning-making occurs through play, where learners experience problem-solving tactics through a creative process of enacting the scenarios. Additionally, with adult learners, make-believe enactments are emancipatory; in that, there is more perceived freedom and low risk during an imaginary activity with little to no impact on reality. A sense of freedom is moreover increased as learners are encouraged to flex control of the activity during interactions, where the instructor functions as a passive observer and their role is de-emphasized. Furthermore, as in play, the focus of enactments is exploratory, formative and discovery-oriented (as a process), rather than resolution. There is an attractive whimsy in unconventional instructional strategies such as enactments, that pique student interest and draw them to creatively experiment with behaviors and actions that stretch their usual thinking patterns. Lastly, high student engagement holds promise that meaningful learning will occur and be sustained as evidence in their practice.

Teacher's way of knowing. After presenting hypothetical enactments over the years in my own practice, invariably students request for more, similar-type activities. They thrive in the *active* rather than *passive* mode provided (through all processes of the enactments). Most importantly, pre-service teacher reflections describe how they would use similar strategies to engage their own future students. Through this type of claim, internalization and transfer of a learning activity into a teaching practice is evident. The meta-pedagogical goal of the strategy has been met.

Dynamic dialogic process. Dialogues occur between simulators and role-players during the enactment and later with participating observers and the instructor during post-enactment debriefings. Communicative exchanges during enactments involve use of critical thinking as an inquiry process (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Brookfield, 1995), creative thinking (Ayman-Nolley, 1999; Simpson, & Elias, 2011), reflective thinking (Bullough & Gitlin, 1991; Schön, 1987), position-taking skills (Barab et al., 2010; Dotgera et al., 2008), and active listening (Mezirow, 2000). Also, verbal exchanges during enactments help students to process conceptual knowledge and reinforce learning of course content through collective information sharing. This dialogic vigor and rigor prompt learners to internalize issues discussed and amplify their awareness (Bullough & Gitlin, 1991). According to Mezirow (2000), discourse exchanges such as these can move participants from egotistical stances to more mature dispositions for "emphatic listening and informed constructive discourse" (p. 12). Therefore, the social dimension of the learning process augments participants' capacity to visualize alternative perspectives, viewpoints and rationales.

Furthermore, during post-enactment discussions, deeper reflective thinking can occur through critical comments shared by observers regarding effective aspects of enactment exchanges and suggestions for improvement. Others' views are most significantly featured during this time, as they mediate potential polar perspectives of the simulator and role-players (teacher and parents). Social dilemmas within the hypothetical scenarios are fodder for examining values and negotiating meaning through discussion. The instructor can steer discussion through inquiry and clarifying

questions; most specifically, building upon participants' experiences and feelings during enactments.

Teacher's way of knowing. I have observed multiple student transformations during dialogic exchanges. Students have transformed from a passive, wallflower participant to an active, engaged leader through the course of one hypothetical enactment exchange. I have observed student transformations from ego-centric perspectives, to where they openly question their own pre-existing stance. I have observed a "chatty Kathy" morph into an attentive and interested listener who would probe and prod other's thinking through timely, thoughtful and respectful questioning. Dialogic exchanges, especially those of a critical vein, become the catalyst for individual, group or socially-constructed learning and growth. I have experienced post-enactment discussions as an evolutionary process that augments learners' existing strengths and minimizes their experiential shortcomings.

Skills Acquired through Enactments

Important teaching and communicative skills are polished through the enactment process and activity. The following review identifies specific skills that are potentially acquired in this activity. Those skills include: (a) deeper comprehension (through critical, creative and reflective thinking); (b) interpersonal relations (through active, emphatic listening, and position taking and empathy); and (c) communicative competency (through dialogic exchanges during enactments and post-enactment debriefings).

Deeper comprehension. Students employ critical (Brookfield, 1995), creative (Ayman-Nolley, 1999; Simpson & Elias, 2011) and reflective thinking (Bullough, & Gitlin, 1991; Schön, 1987) during the enactment activity. Critical and reflective thinking processes are experienced during debriefings when divergent points of view are shared through an inquiry process. Creative thinking, through use of imagination, is applied during dialogic exchanges in the enactments. Elevation of thinking to higher levels inherently stimulates deeper comprehension of embedded issues in the hypothetical scenarios (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The depth of comprehension enhances learners' retention of constructs explored during enactments and dialogue. Additionally, the enactments involve both cognitive and affective domains, where participants' beliefs, values and dispositions may be shifted through the activity as well.

Teacher's way of knowing. During a hypothetical enactment, one student, who historically demonstrated the habit of burrowing into his own ideologies during class discussions, publically acknowledged validity of another's views. His subsequent reflections were richer in emotional content. His level of comprehension ratcheted up a few notches. He was more invested in the course and his own learning. As a result of his in-class epiphany, it appeared that learning was more meaningful, personal and valuable to him. He was invested in the class, the coursework, and himself.

Interpersonal relations. Interactions during the enactments, more significantly for the simulator than the role player, require participants to relate to an "other" and tap into existing social and communicative skills (Barab et al., 2010). Both simulator and role player must employ position-taking and active listening skills. Ideally, the role players *feel* how parents would feel based on the teacher simulator comments. Observing

participants also use active listening. Dialogic exchanges during the enactment and debriefings utilize language as a vehicle for development of interactional and interpersonal skills. Effective social transactions through genuine exchanges are a key to successful enactments. Through enactments, learners have the opportunity to hone interaction skills and develop social proficiencies. Additionally, learners "work together in analyzing social situations, especially interpersonal problems" and can then "resolve personal dilemmas with the assistance of the social group" (Joyce et al., 2008, p. 290).

Teacher's way of knowing. More than any other reflection point, students disclose in a post-activity paper, "I never thought of it that way before or from that perspective." When in the role of "other" they adopt alien perspectives, albeit stereotypical, that places them in that person's head. For many, this is a new and useful experience that hopefully will transfer on some level to their teaching practice.

Communicative competency. As noted above, language is the vehicle for acquiring competency in interpersonal relations. Cultivating communicative ability is central to the activity and embedded in the enactment goal (e.g., Dotgera et al., 2008; Hertel, & Millis, 2002). To be successful in the field, pre-service teachers must communicate proficiently and be able to *think on their feet* in complex, challenging situations. Hypothetical real-world scenarios, with authentic flow of conversation, present practice space for acquiring communicative prowess, efficacy and the ability to apply these skills autonomously.

Teacher's way of knowing. Over the years, I have heard from former students who claim that the parent-teacher conference activity helped them during their first solo conferences. They shared that they had a better sense of *what* to share and *how* to share it with the parents. They would also mention how they were better able to focus on the objective of the meeting rather than worry about how their *performance* as teachers was perceived by the parents. These insights and skills emerged as a result of communicative practice during the enactments and proved beneficial to these learners.

Summary

As explicated in this paper, hypothetical scenario enactments with complementary critical discussion can help learners acquire effective communicative skills necessary for parent-teacher conferences. The enactment process also presents pre-service teachers with an opportunity to experience role-playing, simulation, and critical dialogue as pedagogical techniques to be implemented within their own practice. Most notably, myriad thinking and teaching skills are acquired through this pedagogical strategy that best prepare the pre-service teachers for their own practice. Through hypothetical scenario enactments, the learners increase interpersonal skills, reflective and critical thinking, experiential comprehension of parent-teacher conferences, and gain a keener sense of the complexity of teaching.

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Appendix A – Student Characteristics

Kindergarten
Kindergarten boy - low oral proficiency and slight lisp, difficult for teacher to understand speech (which can affect assessment of student progress); attentive to teacher directions.
Kindergarten girl - exhibits frequent temper-tantrums, enjoys being read to by the teacher, hoards crayons, has come to class with bruises on her arms and legs.
Kindergarten boy - brings toys to school on a regular basis, even after directed not to or after items were temporarily removed/taken by the teacher; is high strung; likes music class.
First Grade
First grade girl - average ability, no academic weaknesses, with no behavioral issues.
First grade boy - socially active, artistic, strong vocabulary, rarely finishes assigned work in allotted class time.
First grade girl - frequently hits and bites other children, all classroom peers stay away from her except her best friend (a quiet, withdrawn boy who rides her bus and is her neighbor) , reads above grade level but holds book within inches of her face.
Second Grade
Second grade boy - makes humming noises during independent work time (other students notice), gives teacher a hug and appreciation notes almost daily, loves science experiments.
Second grade girl - labeled Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (AD/HD) with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), extremely weak spelling skills.
Second grade boy - academically sound, “large for his age,” exhibits aggressive behavior toward others, occasions of disrespect toward teacher.
Third Grade
Third grade girl - identified Gifted and Talented (GT), popular with peers, class clown, seeks to be the center of attention even during teacher-directed instruction.
Third grade boy - straight “A” student, perfectionist, easily frustrated by time constraints or perceived mistakes in assignments, often wants to redo work with minor errors.
Third grade girl - mathematical whiz; frequently yells at, mocks or cusses at her teacher; several behavioral strategies have been implemented to address her misconduct with little success.
Fourth Grade
Fourth grade boy - relishes in creating bodily noises (either naturally or deliberately fabricated), self-proclaims that he hates Social Studies, and excels in poetry writing.
Fourth grade girl - VERY quiet, tends to be a loner, voracious reader.
Fourth grade boy - charmer who capitalizes on adorable dimples when he smiles, reading at the second grade level and shuts down when asked to read, makes high definition paper airplanes (professional level).
Fifth Grade
Fifth grade girl - physically advanced in development (body odor is often apparent and other students make comments about it), average ability but fails to turn in homework, apathetic about school.
Fifth grade boy - special needs student newly placed in classroom, requires modification for visual and hearing impairments, proficient social skills and solid academic ability, academic performance appears to be affected by transition to this classroom.
Fifth grade girl - daydreamer, doodler, sometimes outspoken in class, makes excellent grades in topics which she is interested, produces minimal work in other areas.
Sixth Grade
Sixth grade boy - struggles with fractions, has difficulty making eye contact with teacher, athletic, loves mystery novels.
Sixth grade girl - draws incessantly (including on self), scowls and pouts when corrected, 12th grade reading level, asks to go to the nurse regularly.
Sixth grade boy - continually rocks back and forth in his chair, has been caught texting in class, received the highest standardized tests scores of all students at his grade level.

Appendix B – Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Descriptions

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas (of a different cultural background than simulator, simulator must identify the cultural background of parents for this scenario). These parents present a "perfect family" perspective. They are reliable, effective parents who may be somewhat naïve of their child's potential or issues of concern. This child is the focus of their world.
Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Leonard birthed this child together but are not cohabitating. The father has limited, sporadic involvement with the child, but is at this meeting. Both work and have other constraints (i.e., financial and time). They appear civil towards each other at this meeting, but NOT cordial. This student is their only child.
Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen (both exhibit language proficiency at developmental stages) are eager to help their child with any skills that need to be addressed in school. The child is their oldest and has often translated for them.
Mr. and Mrs. Hoffmeister have been married for two years. This child is not his biological child, but will be adopted by him soon. The mother is quiet and meek. The father takes charge and appears concerned but does not listen well to suggestions provided. He appears to be a know-it-all.
Mr. and Mrs. Hirosha are foster parents of this child and three others (one younger, two older children). This child has been with them for nine months. Both parents work. Mr. Hirosha swears in your presence.
Mr. and Mrs. Spataro are very busy coordinating their children's after-school activities. Mr. Spataro is a Little League coach. Mrs. Spataro is a Booster's Club sponsor. They have two other children heavily involved in sports. This child is their youngest and appears to receive the least amount of attention by them.
Ms. Jones and Ms. Mendoza are life partners raising two children together (each birthed a child that they are raising as siblings). The student in this scenario is Ms. Jones' natural child. Ms. Mendoza is a significant political leader in the community.
Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald have eight other children and are presently receiving financial aid. They have blue-color jobs, are VERY hard working and expect the same from their children. They have many questions about academics and school curriculum that support meeting their child's needs.
Ms. Kelly is a single mom who works two jobs – LOVES her child and is eager to give the child as much assistance in their progress as needed with all the constraints considered. Ms. Kelly has strong religious beliefs and expresses them during the meeting.
Mr. and Mrs. Muhammad have one other younger child (who they brought with them to this meeting and who is into EVERYTHING). The parents ignore this child's misbehavior during the meeting. The mother is the PTO President and very much involved in the student's progress. The father is an introverted "yes" man.
Mr. and Mrs. Bolsheck are both in their second marriage with one child respectively from their prior marriages. This child is theirs together. Mr. Bolsheck is belligerent and domineering. Mrs. Bolsheck appears attentive to what the teacher shares in the meeting.
Mr. Clydesdale is a single father working a full-time job and attending graduate school. This child is the center of his attention, but he appears to pay more attention to you during the course of the meeting. At one point he makes suggestive comments about getting together informally for dinner after the meeting to discuss his child's progress. If it matters, he is good looking and relatively wealthy. (The scenario is not dependent upon the simulator being of a different sex.)
Mr. and Mrs. Rashanda arrived here two months ago from their native country. Neither one speaks English. They have brought pictures from their previous home and family members who still live there. They bring you a covered dish of food.
Mrs. Walker recently separated from her husband, attends the meeting obviously inebriated and scantily dressed. She starts yelling that you have treated her child negatively and she wants the child moved out of your class. You are alone with her.
Mr. Rear is in custody of his child. The mother could not attend the meeting and he comes to the meeting without the child's stepmother. He thinks his child is "gifted" and insists that the school test his child every year (scores indicate average IQ).
Mrs. Robichaud is this student's biological grandmother and currently serves as parental guardian. She is very protective of her grandchild and asks many questions on how she can support the child academically. She makes a demand that her grandchild not be placed next to a particular student and makes negative comments about this student (e.g., bad influence, etc.). She suggests that either her grandchild or the other student be moved to another class.
Mrs. Lee attends the meeting without her husband who is on a business meeting. She is pleasant and responsive to teacher comments about her child, but halfway through the meeting her lips begin to tremble and she bursts into tears.
Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien are extremely defensive and angry. They just discovered that their child has a Hispanic teacher for some instruction (your team colleague). They feel that only bilingual children should have a teacher with a Spanish accent. They say that when they moved into the neighborhood only "white" families lived there.
Ms. Templeton appears very nervous at this meeting. She is the child's paternal aunt and currently has custody. She shares that the child is bored in your class and complains about the amount of homework you assign.
Mrs. Neely shares that she thinks you hate her child. Her child comes home every day and tells some horror story about you. In the most recent story the child said you called them "stupid."
Mr. and Mrs. Crabble both dislike the school. They share that they are only staying until the husband can get a better job and move their child to a private school. They don't understand how some of the teachers in this school even got a job. They add that even though they are paying your salary, they are not getting anything from their tax dollars.

Appendix C – Related Practitioner-Based Research on Simulation, Role-Play, Situated and Experiential Learning, and Student Engagement

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