

## **Reflection and Resistance: Challenges of Rationale-based Teacher Education**

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*The author draws on the voices of beginning teachers in a particular teacher education program and his own experiences as a teacher educator in several different settings to account for preservice teacher reflection and resistance to rationale-based social studies teacher education. Twelve categories represent the perspectives of beginning social studies student teachers. Some are directly related to larger explanatory frameworks offered by teacher education research. Others reflect commonplace tensions in the university classroom. These twelve categories of reflection and resistance in rationale-based teacher education may serve as starting points for thinking about more effective approaches to helping beginning teachers answer the powerful question-- what are you teaching for?*

*If the philosopher George Santayana was correct when he claimed, "Fanaticism consists of redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim," then what is it called when you never knew your aim in the first place?*

My journey into the world of teacher education began with a simple question posed to me when I was first learning to teach. In the final semester of an uninspiring undergraduate program leading to an education degree in secondary social studies, the university supervisor assigned to see me through student teaching occasioned nothing less than a transformation in my thinking about education when he asked, "What are you teaching *for*?" Prior to that semester, I had navigated a teacher education curriculum consisting of educational psychology, foundations, technology, social studies methods, various practicum experiences, and numerous classes across campus in social science and history. I had written lesson plans, unit plans, objectives, and reflective journals. I learned to operate an overhead projector, completed modules on "discovery learning" and effective lecturing, and interviewed my grandparents about their schooling experiences in the rural Midwest before the Great Depression. A new student teacher charged with 15 weeks of high school civics and economics, I was only three months from earning state imprimatur as a provisionally certified social studies teacher. And up until this point, nobody had bothered to ask me the disarming question, "What are you teaching *for*?"

Years later, after a stint in a 9<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, graduate school, and two university faculty positions, the question "what are you teaching *for*?" still dominates my thinking about

teaching and learning in social studies and serves as the intellectual anchor for my work as a teacher educator. Indeed, the question animates my teacher education practice in the classroom, as a researcher, and as someone who has had a hand in shaping two significant program reform efforts. For me, the question frames an area of inquiry that goes far beyond an accounting of the personal reasons why someone chooses teaching as a career. I pose the question to beginning teachers to encourage their reflection about the relationship between the decisions they make in the classroom and the world outside. In this sense, the question is multiple. How do broader social conditions shape your views about curriculum and instruction? Does your work support or challenge the status quo? What do students learn about how power works in their lives? Are you teaching for social justice? What vision of the good society supports your practice?

In my program, preservice teachers are challenged to answer these questions in the process of developing their rationales for teaching. The rationale is pitched as a foundation of teacher decision-making (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). The idea is to go beyond the empty rhetoric of a “teaching philosophy” and towards a practical, vital statement of the aims that direct the very real deliberation teachers engage in as they sort out questions of what is worth knowing and how best to teach it. The process of rationale-building calls for consideration of the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, a sort of thinking that is often described as “critical reflection” (van Manen, 1977). The idea here is that good teachers are always in the process of developing their rationales, as they commit themselves to continual examination of the ways in which theory and practice speak to each other in the unique context of each teaching moment. Revealing his Deweyan roots, Shaver (1977) observes, “A rationale, like an education, then, ought never be considered finished... for that would mean that the person has stopped thinking, stopped responding to and learning from experience... Rationale-building is not just a process *like* education; it *is* education” (pp. 101-102, emphasis in original). The program is meant to serve as an initial catalyst to a long-term process of rationale-building, to the deep value of exploring the *why* of teaching.

The rationale takes on a special urgency for our preservice teachers during their student teaching semester. The principal prompt for the development of the rationale comes from a university-based course—the student teaching seminar-- that has student teachers returning to campus during and after this final 12-week field experience. Such a course requirement is fairly common practice in the field. What distinguishes this course from similar courses I have

witnessed in other programs is its emphasis on rationales. Topics such as how to find a first job, classroom management, lesson plans, and school politics are a part of this course, but an attempt is made to continually bring these concerns back to the rationale.

The capstone assignment of the program, completed in the student teaching seminar, is an electronic portfolio student teachers construct around their rationales. The portfolio assignment is intentionally designed so that the final product is more than a mere collection of teaching highlights from their twelve weeks as student teachers. The portfolio places the rationale at the center and asks student teachers to explain and defend how this rationale is apparent in their achievements across six broad domains of teaching competency. To represent their accomplishments in these six domains, student teachers must return to the question—what are you teaching *for*?

Given my commitments as a teacher educator, student teachers in my seminar cannot escape thinking about this question apart from the question of what it means to teach for democracy. Student teachers are asked to consider the democratic mission of the entire school curriculum, but the idea of schools as laboratories for democracy takes on special significance in social studies, a field defined by its mission to “promote civic competence” by developing the ability of students to consider “the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 1994, p. vii). For our students, the relationship between democracy and schooling is not just an abstraction once covered early in their program in the introductory foundations course. The student teaching seminar and the electronic portfolio assignment are designed to help beginning teachers connect the aim of “civic competence” with the very real decisions they make in very real classrooms. What conception of democracy informs the decisions you make? What does your vision of democratic civic life suggest in terms of both content and method?

Not surprisingly, more than a few preservice teachers resist an approach to teacher education designed around difficult questions of purpose. A rich body of research in teacher education addresses the difficulty of rationale-based teacher education, especially when rationales are framed to include the social, political, and moral dimensions of teaching (Richardson and Placier, 2001; Ziechner and Liston, 1991). Preservice teachers are far more disposed to thinking about learning to teach in instrumentalist terms (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988). The “what” and “how” of teaching comprise a much larger portion of their thinking than

the “why” of teaching. Numerous explanations have been advanced to account for the elusive character of critical reflection in preservice teacher education. A widely held view, grounded in developmental stage theory, maintains that beginning teachers are so concerned with survival and mastering the practical demands of classroom life that questions of purpose are likely to hold little sway as they fashion their initial teaching identities (Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1989; Nias, 1989). Other approaches to the problem of critical reflection in teacher education look to the ways in which school contexts influence teacher socialization (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner and Gore, 1990). Whatever the explanation, many teacher educators have accepted the challenge of rationale-based teacher education motivated in part by the “open window” of opportunity preservice teacher education presents (Valli, 1992).

In this paper, I take a less theoretical approach to the challenge of preservice teachers and rationales. Rather than looking to the literature, I look to preservice teachers themselves. For most of the past ten years, I have labored in a climate of reflection and resistance as I work with student teachers to develop their rationales for teaching social studies. Every semester, student teachers alternatively embrace and struggle against the idea that they should be able to name the vision that orients their teaching. An important part of my response is my effort to model the sorts of reflective practice that I hope they will employ in their induction years and beyond (Loughran, 1997). This requires that I listen to what they have to say about why it is so hard to develop and articulate their rationales. Listening to student teachers represents a different approach to gaining insight to the problem. While teacher education research has provided explanations grounded in theories of stage development and context, the dialogue among student teachers grounds the issue in the present reality teacher educators face as they work with beginning educators struggling to define their teaching selves. The voice of preservice students is a missing perspective in teacher education research (Zeichner, 1999).

The perspectives of social studies student teachers are represented by the following twelve categories, derived from the answers they have provided to the following question—“What are toughest challenges/problems involved in putting together your very own real, practical rationale for teaching social studies?” These categories result from my own years of experience in rationale-based teacher education, in listening to the challenges student teachers have shared with me. I also looked to answers offered by two groups of student teachers provided in response to a specific collaborative activity in student teaching seminar during the

2003-2004 school year. Student teachers individually ranked the four most difficult problems they encountered in the process of developing and articulating their rationales. They then worked in groups of four or five to share individual responses and cull from these the group's top five answers. As a whole class, we then discussed the work of the smaller groups. The resulting categories are varied in nature. Some are directly related to larger explanatory frameworks offered by teacher education research. Others reflect commonplace tensions in the university classroom. I have made no effort to list these in any particular order (e.g. relative weight of expressed problem or frequency of expressed problem), nor is their listing as distinct categories meant to suggest that they do not overlap. The boundaries blur among many of these problems. In this sense, these problems are best thought of as strands of emphasis in the reflection, and sometimes resistance, shared by student teachers.

***1) The Problem of Articulation, Version 1.0— so many ideas, so few words.***

Of several problems centered around articulation, this version has little to do with a beginning teacher's place on a continuum of teacher development. Instead, this problem is about discursive practice. Student teachers often express difficulty in finding the right words to make a clear, concise, and organized presentation of the many and varied aspects of a comprehensive teaching rationale. Many times I have heard the claim from student teachers that they feel they do indeed possess an internalized sense of the ideas and principles that drive their decision-making, but capturing the meaning of that sense in the written word is complicated. Complications arise in framing and structuring the statement of their rationales. "What section headings provide an outline allowing me to capture all of my thinking, and how would I organize these sections?" Complications arise in connecting the right words with important ideas. "I don't want my students to just pay attention; I want them to do more, to use their minds. Is that *constructivism* or *higher order thinking* or *what* would you call that?" Writing a rationale pushes some student teachers to believe that their ability to communicate what they know to be true is limited by how well they can write. Their comfort-level in straying from what they perceive as the conventions of academic prose also influences the ease they feel in sharing their ideas with others in written form. Such problems are lessened for some by letting them know it is acceptable to write in first person, or asking them to write a draft rationale as a letter to a friend or close family member. Finally, a slight variation of this problem, what I will call Version 1.1,

derives from the confusion about how they might structure a response to some of the questions posed by the rationale assignment. For example, I tell student teachers that a rationale should help you answer the basic curriculum question of what is worth knowing. Student teachers wonder about the very form an answer to this question might take. “Should I just start writing a list of all the things I think are worth knowing? That would be huge! Or maybe I should write a statement about how I would generate such a list in the first place. I don’t know.”

## ***2) Articulation, Version 2.0—if only I were a poet.***

Another version of the articulation problem stems from the nature of the project. Many who choose teaching as a career do so for reasons that speak to deeply held values and fundamental aspects of their worldviews, including how they see themselves caring for others and leaving their mark in life. The question “what are you teaching for?” evokes an emotional response in many student teachers. Here, the problem is one of phrasing words that capture the depth of meaning involved in articulating one’s sense of purpose. Student teachers have told me of the frustration of realizing the mismatch between what they know to be true of why they teach and what appears before them when they put these ideas on paper. What comes out is two-dimensional and flat. Again, as with the problem of articulation, version 1.0, this problem is compounded by what they perceive as the detached tone of academic writing, the risk of intellectualizing the ineffable. Writing about purpose calls on a rationalistic language of linear decision-making, a language that can easily misrepresent the richly complex, layered, and context-bound quality of teaching (Buchmann, 1989). The basis of this problem is the fear that their words will not capture their essence as a teacher. “How can I express the passion in who I am as a teacher?” A rationale assignment that asks a student teacher to consider various curriculum theories is one sort of assignment. A rationale assignment that extends its reach into realms of passion, hope, and responsibility to others is quite another. Maxine Greene writes, “The poet is moved to make metaphors when, after exploring and paying imaginative attention to aspects of the phenomenal field (the world as it impinges on his/her consciousness, as it presents itself, as it appears), he/she selects out that which seems to call out to him/her, to hold potential meaning, to give off a kind of light” (2001. p12). When “the phenomenal field” is one’s purpose in teaching, how does a rationale assignment call on the genre of poetry to provide the “metaphors” that “give off a kind of light?”

**3) Articulation, Version 3.0—reflection takes time.**

A third problem of articulation acknowledges the sophistication and sheer amount of deliberation required by the rationale assignment. As one among many competing demands on one's time during the student teaching semester, developing a rationale simply takes a lot of time. The eight or more hours student teachers spend in their schools, five days a week, present immediate and urgent claims to valuable time that otherwise might be used for their reflection on purpose. In a crucible of an experience that prompts such a rapid role transition, it is worth remembering that an hour of student teaching time is weighted differently than an hour of mid-career teaching time in terms of the tax it imposes on an educator's time and energy. Furthermore, student teaching asks more of beginning teachers than clocking the required hours in schools. Our program features the student teaching seminar, reflection papers, an electronic portfolio, peer observations, at least four field instructor observations. Add to this list all that is associated with the process of seeking employment after certification, the financial stress of working without pay, and the customary obligations to self and others, and many student teachers end the semester feeling as if they could have done a better job articulating their rationale if they only had more time. Returning to an earlier theme, the various concerns that compete for the attention of student teachers (Kyriacou and Stephens, 1999) pose a challenge for teacher educators who wish to promote critical, as well as technical, reflection (Zeichner and Tabachnik, 1991; Loughran, 2002). In this context, student teachers consistently speak to the time intensive nature of rationale-based teacher education.

**4) Articulation. Version 4.0—clichés come cheap and easy.**

"Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it" is a cliché that is well familiar to anyone who has read applications for admission to social studies teacher education programs. Other catch phrases appear over and over in the essays written by prospective preservice teachers. "History teaches us about past mistakes, so we can change the future." "Social studies tells us who we are." "Geography is about understanding others." "Social studies prepares people for democracy." At the end of the program, as many of these same students search for the right language to express their visions for teaching social studies, some are tempted by the lure of the clichéd. If and when they succumb, my response is to call them on it. It is not difficult to

disturb comfortable phrases that have served students so well in the past. For example, exactly what mistakes does history teach? Is history a given, settled account of past occurrences transmitted through time and readily available for the taking? Or is history a disciplined mode of inquiry, a way of constructing knowledge? The answers to these questions have much to say about the activity of teaching history. As Bain suggests, “Seeing [history teaching] as an epistemic activity challenges teachers to merge a substantive understanding of the discipline with an equally sophisticated understanding of learning.” (2000, p. 334) More than clichés are needed to explain this merger. Similarly, social studies preservice teachers are prone to rush to the comfort-food quality afforded by “democratic citizenship” without doing the difficult work of explaining the conception of democracy or the assumptions about participation carried by their use of the phrase. Though the cliché is sometimes used as a way to avoid the difficult questions posed by the rationale assignment, I believe just as often a retreat to cliché is a natural cognitive response, a feature of the mind that allows student teachers to draw on what is available in the struggle to articulate purpose.

##### ***5) What if I’m Wrong? Version 1.0—what does the professor want to hear?***

“What if I’m Wrong” sets off a second class of problems leading to both reflection and resistance in rationale-based teacher education. Version 1.0 has two variations, version 1.1 and version 1.2. Both stem from the authority given to faculty to evaluate their students. Both signal caution on my part as a teacher educator, and both are common tensions in college classrooms. The defining feature of both is a desire to provide a rationale that the instructor wants to hear. The reward comes in the form of a higher grade, a sterling letter of recommendation, or simply validation and approval from the instructor. In version 1.1, student teachers express that the time, energy, and commitment I have devoted to deliberation and research on the purpose of social studies have led me to believe that there is a correct answer. This is an authority of expertise that I bring to the student teaching semester. “You obviously have thought a lot more about this than I have. Tell me the answer, and I will show you that I agree.” For rationale-based teacher education, giving in to this request amounts to disavowal of Dewey’s (1916) quick fix suggestion for the reform of teaching, “Were all instructors to realize that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked” (p. 176).



Even more disturbing is “What if I’m Wrong” version 1.2. Here, student teachers arrive at the same conclusion—that I believe there exists a single, best rationale for social studies. But their basis for this conclusion does not lie as much in recognition of some special expertise I bring to social studies teacher education as it does in what they perceive as my ideological and political commitments. Most student teachers I have worked with have little trouble recognizing the ideological and political nature of a rationale assignment that asks them to reflect on issues such as education for democracy, active engagement in civic life, and social justice. Of course, inquiry into more practical student teaching concerns (e.g. classroom management techniques and lesson planning) also involves ideology, but my experience suggests student teachers find the *ideology of the practical* more difficult to recognize. The *how to* of teaching is safer, somehow less controversial than the *why* of teaching. In this variation of the problem, when students worry about being wrong, they are really concerned about a potentially biased agenda, about the possibility that I will penalize those who step off my educational party line. The threat to reflective teacher education is even more serious in this version of the problem. Student teachers are not only turned off to the value of critical reflection during a pivotal moment in their development as teachers, but the resulting antipathy to the very idea of rationale-building may carry forward into their inservice years.

**6) *What if I’m Wrong? Version 2.0—the experts have settled this, right?***

Student teachers in my program do not have to look to me for the correct answers to problems posed by the rationale assignment. They can turn to literature on the foundations of social studies education for guidance. In the history of social studies research, the definition and purpose of the field have no rivals among the many contested issues that have captured the attention of scholars. Social studies has been cast as a vehicle for cultural transmission (widely considered the de facto position, see Vinson and Ross, 2001), rational deliberation (Hunt and Metcalf, 1968; Engle and Ochoa, 1988, ;Oliver and Shaver), disciplinary knowledge and methods (Wesley & Wronski, 1958; Seixas, 2001) civic competence (Newmann, Bertoucci, and Landsness, 1975), and social reconstruction (Rugg, 1939). Though I find few student teachers willing to wade through this literature, they do accept that there is at least some consensus in the field around *democratic citizenship education* (NCSS, 1994). Yet this idea only raises more problems of definition. Democratic citizenship education is an effective slogan, but slogans are

of limited use in developing a defensible rationale. Here too, the authority of expertise raises concern that a correct view of the purpose of social studies must be out there, just out of a student teacher's reach. In their attempts to articulate their own understanding of democratic citizenship education, they fear they simply will get it wrong.

**7) *What if I'm Wrong? Version 3.0—the weight of responsibility.***

In the process of developing a rationale, student teachers often come to more deeply appreciate that teaching is a moral endeavor. On some level, most understand this when they enter our program. They frequently account for their decision to become teachers in terms of their desire “to make a difference” or “to be a positive influence on others.” As the progress through the program, and especially in student teaching, their experiences in working closely with students, and a rationale assignment that asks “what *sort* of difference?,” combine to impress on them the weight of moral responsibility that all educators carry. The fear is that developing the wrong rationale might result in very real and damaging consequences in the lives of students. Shaver (1977) describes the risk:

The task of rationale-building... can have serious implications for the tranquility of one's professional life, for the examination of the beliefs in one's frame of reference and of the implications for teaching will frequently lead even the most thoughtful (or, perhaps, especially the most thoughtful) to conclude that parts of what he or she is doing as a teacher cannot be justified, and so must be changed. (p. 102)

When the weight of responsibility disturbs the “tranquility” of preservice teachers, the task of teacher education is one of support, for a lot is at stake. Developing an appreciation of the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching can serve as a catalyst for reflection, but it can just as easily signal cause for retreat. “It's easier not to think about a rationale and simply do what the school district (the state, the textbook, the tradition of history teaching), because then at least I can feel less responsible for what happens as a result.” This view serves to remind myself of the moral responsibilities inherent in my practice as a teacher educator. If nothing else, every encounter with this version of “What if I'm wrong?” sensitizes me to the serious nature of rationale-building.

**8) *The Independence Problem—what’s reality got to do with it?***

Developing a rationale centers us in the tension between the world of ideas and the world of experience. At the end of twelve weeks of student teaching, some of my students characterize the limited time they have spent teaching as an obstacle to thinking through their responses to the rationale assignment. The student teaching seminar and the rest of the teacher education program have exposed them to different theories about good teaching, student learning, and the foundations of education. The actual practices, policies, and culture of schools have exposed them to something else. Almost to a person, student teachers understand their preservice field experiences as a lesson in limits, as much as a lesson about possibilities. Should they develop their rationale from independent and free-floating ideas, as ideas, just because they make sense... as ideas? Or should they sift these ideas through the reality of practice before they more fully develop their missions as social studies teachers? For some, the independence problem highlights an artificial quality about producing a rationale as a course assignment during their preservice years. Students worry, “A rationale formed independent of the reality of schools isn’t really much of a rationale.” When students voice this concern, I find myself of two minds. On the one hand, the view is encouraging for the ways in which it may signal an embrace of the dialectical nature of rationale-building. Perhaps the rationale is troubling deeply entrenched notions about the gulf separates theory (the often perceived province of teacher education) and practice (the often perceived province of schools). On the other hand, limited experience teaching can serve to shut down reflection for the ways it suggests beginning teachers can “put off” until some future point when they have accumulated enough time in the classroom.

**9) *The “King/Queen Wears No Clothes” Problem-- I got the words, I’m just not sure what they mean.***

This particular challenge of rationale-building is the opposite of Articulation, version 1.0. In that case, preservice teachers had ideas in search of words. In this case, the issue is one of words in search of ideas. Morphing a line from a late 1970s Saturday Night Live parody performed by Garrett Morris, “Education classes been very, very good to me.” Preservice teachers have picked up quite a few words to associate with good teaching. Examples include critical thinking, culturally relevant pedagogy, worthwhile learning, constructivism, multiculturalism, values education, higher order thinking, democratic education, and active student engagement. Perhaps they used many of these words, and were rewarded for their use, in

other teacher education courses. The rules change when beginning teachers give the careful attention required by the rationale assignment, especially in the context of a portfolio assignment designed to demonstrate the rationale at work in a broad range of teaching competencies. For example, the idea of critical thinking appears in the rationales of many beginning history teachers, some of whom then select chapter tests that require no critical thinking at all as exemplars of their assessment practices. Rationale-building and the portfolio assignment helps preservice teachers realize, as Alfred Korzybski described, "The map is not the territory, the thing is not the thing named." In some sense, teacher education has provided a map, or at least markings on a map, and rationale-building poses the challenge of coming to know the territory represented by the map.

***10) The "Don't Fence Me In" problem—when parts isn't parts.***

This problem appears to result from a particular approach I use to encourage reflection on ideas about teaching and the role of teacher education in shaping them. Yet the concern is likely to apply to any assignment that breaks down a rationale into some scheme of essential elements or questions. In my teaching, I sometimes use a four-part framework to represent the mission of teacher education. I suggest to students that each of the four parts refers to a domain of teachers' knowledge in which they can expect growth as a result of their experiences in the program:

Part One    a rationale for teaching referenced to an understanding of "education for democratic citizenship"

Part Two    an understanding of what you do in schools to enact Part One

Part Three    an appreciation of the obstacles you are likely to encounter putting to practice Part Two

Part Four    ideas of how you will persist and sustain your commitment in the face of Part Three

The framework is useful as an outline for assessing student perceptions of how well the teacher education program has served them. The framework is also useful as a tool to organize thinking about the assumptions beginning teachers have developed about teaching and learning. For this reason, I ask students to respond to the four-part framework as a means to clarify their thinking about rationales. In response, a few beginning teachers have told me of the difficulty they have in thinking of their rationales in these terms. To break their rationales into parts risks limits to the

impact and meaning of the whole. The cognitive challenge relates to the *form* of the rationale assignment, to feeling that the structure of the assignment makes it hard to express their sense of purpose. Some beginning teachers have expressed a desire to describe their rationales in their own terms. Others would rather approach the task as an answer to a single question, namely “Why teach social studies?,” and proceed from there. In either case, this problem is a call for attention to the various ways teacher educators might conceptualize and present a rationale assignment.

### ***11) A Question of Value—who needs a rationale anyway?***

Though I mostly draw from my own experience to support this claim, I am reasonably confident that the “question of value” problem is the single most important predictor of resistance to rationale-building. Simply put, it is hard to buy into the difficult process of putting together a rationale when you do not believe you will benefit from doing so. In many ways the belief that beginning teachers hold about the lack of value provided by a rationale merely reflects a broader tension about the mixed value students see in the university-based portion of their teacher education programs. The literature on new teacher socialization documents preservice teachers’ descriptions of field based experiences, and student teaching, as the places where they really learned how to teach (Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

Against this broader tension, the emphasis on rationale-building in my program begins with the first course in our program and continues to the last day of the student teaching semester. A good part of my teaching energy is directed at convincing preservice teachers of the value of a rationale. For many, the student teaching semester confirms this message. For others, student teaching emboldens a critique of rationale-building. “The program says a rationale is something that helps you answer what and how to teach, but I disagree. I’ve just spent twelve weeks where I made decisions about what and how to teach, and I didn’t once turn to a rationale.” As well, the conservative climate of constraint (Cornbleth, 2001) of schools can serve as an argument against the importance of reflection on questions of one’s purpose in teaching (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984; Eisenhart, Behm, and Romagnano, 1991). Resistance to rationale-building emerges as preservice teachers see nothing to suggest that rationales are given much consideration by teachers, let alone used to inform their practice.

**12) *The “I Don’t Know” Problem—when the well runs dry.***

Risking the tautology charge, I include the “I don’t know problem,” which makes an obvious point-- beginning teachers find it difficult to articulate what they are teaching for because they simply *do not know* what they are teaching for. After all, if they did know, what need would there be for a rationale assignment in the first place? One defense for inclusion returns to the conceptualization of the rationale as both a process and an outcome. Rationale-building should never stand still. Where one stands is always a starting point, regardless of how far along teachers have come in developing their understanding of why they teach. Another sort of defense is that this list was compiled from what preservice students said was difficult about developing their sense of purpose. They said this was a problem.

Viewed differently, this particular concern is perhaps the perfect final entry to this list. In setting out these twelve problems, I have not attempted to put forward a grand theory or to suggest a generalizable typology of the challenges of rationale-based teacher education. Rather, I have drawn on the voices of beginning teachers in a particular teacher education program and my own experiences as a teacher educator in several different settings in an effort to organize relevant categories of influence on both the reflection and resistance to the critical reflection called for by a rationale. The problem of not knowing is a thread connecting all of the problems described here. Responding to these concerns has strengthened a view I held when I first entered teacher education, a view that conceptualizes teacher education as more of a critical and epistemological learning problem than a technical training problem (Beyer, Feinberg, Pagano, and Witson, 1988; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Framed in this way, the challenges of helping new teachers develop their rationales are as much my own learning problems as theirs.

As Levstik and Barton (2004) argue for the central place of education for participatory, pluralistic democracy in meaningful social studies teacher education, they also admit, “We have no magic formula for developing such purposes among teachers” (p. 260). Part of the challenge involves encouraging beginning teachers to reflect on what influences the decisions they make as social studies teachers. Such reflection is only possible when educators undertake the difficult work of naming and claiming the reasons they hold for teaching social studies in the first place. Though the very possibility of magic formulas to guide the work of teacher education is remote at best, these twelve categories of reflection and resistance in rationale-based teacher education

may serve as starting points for thinking about more effective approaches to helping students answer the powerful question-- what are you teaching *for*?

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