

Purpose as Content and Pedagogy: Rationale-Development as a Core Theme of Social Studies Teacher Education

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Grounded in a belief in the transformative possibilities of social studies teacher education, I present an argument for considering the development of purpose as both content and pedagogy of social studies teacher education. As part of developing a coherent pedagogy of rationale-based social studies teacher education, I begin by exploring the influence of competing conceptions regarding the purpose of social studies teaching and learning on the work of social studies teacher educators. Next, I consider three distinct paths social studies teacher educators have taken to prepare teacher candidates for content and pedagogical decision-making as first-year teachers. While each has potential, I contend that they each miss an important first step – considering why teacher candidates want to teach social studies. Drawing on a growing body of research on rationale development, and my work as a teacher educator, I propose forging a new path. Situated in rationale-development as a core theme of social studies teacher education, and built on a conception of purpose as content and pedagogy, this path is designed to bridge the gap between rationale development and the subsequent rationale-based practices of beginning teachers.

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Competing Conceptions of Social Studies Teaching and Learning

It is commonly accepted that the underlying purpose of social studies teaching and learning is to prepare students to assume their role as democratic citizens (Nelson, 2001;

Saxe, 1991; Stanley, 2001; Vinson, 2006). Not as clear-cut, however, is agreement on how to best educate student citizens within social studies classrooms. Competing conceptions regarding the nature and purpose of democratic citizenship education abound (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1978; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Counts, 1939; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Evans, 2004; Hunt & Metcalf, 1968; Hursh & Ross, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001; Newmann, 1975; Parker, 2003; Ravitch & Finn, 1987; Stanley & Nelson, 1986; Thornton, 2004). These competing conceptions reflect a lack of consensus regarding the fundamental questions of the field and only serve to complicate the conversation concerning the education of future social studies teachers (Adler, 2001, 2008).

Teacher Decision-Making and Social Studies Teachers

In 2005, an American Educational Research Association (AERA) panel on teacher education acknowledged numerous challenges inherent in researching the influence of teacher education on the pedagogical decision-making of beginning teachers. These included the time between the completion of teacher education coursework and the beginning of professional teaching, as well as the:

confounding and intervening variables (which are themselves difficult to measure) that influence what teacher candidates are able to do and ... [the fact that] the sites where teacher candidates complete fieldwork and eventually teach are quite different from one another in terms of context, school culture, resources available, students, and communities. (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 3)

Researchers interested in untangling these complex connections operate amidst a lack of consensus regarding the most important questions framing the research agenda around how to best prepare preservice teachers to make the transition to their own classrooms. Social Studies is not immune to the influence of these muddy waters.

Research on the decision-making of social studies teachers reflects this lack of consensus and has taken three major paths. The first research path has focused on the influence teacher education programs—their specific pedagogies and orientations towards content knowledge—have on the way social studies teachers make decisions. The second research path has focused on the influence mandatory, state-sanctioned, high-stakes tests have on the way teachers make decisions. The third research path has focused on the experiences of beginning social studies teachers as they navigate through their first years as in-service teachers. Each of these paths has contributed to what we know about preparing

social studies teachers. Each path has, however, missed an opportunity to examine why prospective teachers choose to teach social studies. What specific purposes are hidden behind teachers' practices, and what impact does purpose have on their decision-making in the classroom? These questions take on greater importance given the concurrent advocacy of the value of teacher education helping preservice teachers develop purpose as a core theme of teacher education (Darling Hammond et al., 2005; Hammerness, 2006; Kosnik and Beck, 2009).

Path One – Preparing to teach content as a way of influencing teacher decision-making:

Social Studies researchers have been investigating the relationship between approaches to preparing teacher candidates to teach content and their subsequent decision-making as teachers for decades. Much of this research has focused on the teaching of history and has sought to determine the influence specific approaches to teacher education programs have on teacher decision-making. These include focusing on teachers' conceptions of history (Evans, 1989, 1990), exploring their perceptions of "best practices" (Hartzler-Miller, 2001), attempting to uncover teachers' epistemological frameworks (Slekar, 1998), improving teacher candidates' level of content knowledge (Wineburg & Wilson, 1988), and promoting the use of pedagogical content knowledge (Grant, 2003; Shulman, 1987). While much of this research influenced the process of preparing history teachers, most studies failed to account for the multiple, contextual factors that influence the decision-making of social studies teachers (Grant, 2003).

Path Two – The influence of high-stakes testing on teacher decision-making: Recently social studies researchers have focused on the influence state-mandated, high-stakes tests have on the decision-making of social studies teachers. The majority of this research takes the form of case studies designed to look at in-service teachers working in specific states. These include studies in Michigan (Segall, 2003, 2006), New York (Gradwell, 2006; Grant et al., 2002), and Virginia (van Hover, 2006; van Hover & Pierce, 2006), as well as a comparison study of teachers working in Virginia and Florida (Yeager & van Hover, 2006). The implications of these studies for teacher education programs remains very much unsettled, but these researchers raise many interesting questions regarding the need for more explicit rationales for teaching social studies. Although none of the existing research literature regarding the impact of high-stakes testing began by asking the participants to discuss their purposes for teaching social studies, there is an indication that teachers with a greater sense of

purpose can maintain teaching practices consistent with their overall goals as social studies teachers (Gradwell, 2006).

Challenging previous research, Gradwell (2006) studied one novice teacher's attempt to use ambitious teaching while facing the pressures of New York's state-mandated curriculum and high-stakes testing environment. Contrary to studies indicating that teachers felt constrained by the tests, Gradwell found that it is possible for novice teachers to teach in ways that reflect their own "notions of history and [their] concerns for students' interests and learning rather than the state tests" (p. 173). Much like Gradwell (2006), van Hover's (2006) multiple-case study of seven novice secondary history teachers revealed how new teachers, despite the influence of state-mandated testing, have some space to "employ a variety of instructional approaches and assessment approaches in their teaching" (p. 215). Given this opening, it seems reasonable to suggest that teacher education programs could be designed to enable teacher candidates to develop a rationale for purposeful practice to guide their decision-making in high-stakes testing environments.

Path Three – The decision-making of first-year teachers: A third path forged by researchers of social studies teachers has focused on the lives of beginning teachers as they transition from preservice to in-service teaching. The majority of the studies along this path are case studies examining the influence of socialization (Yon & Pass, 1994; van Hover & Yeager, 2004), the influence of personal theorizing (Chant, 2002), and the influence of high-stakes testing (van Hover, 2006) on the decision-making of first year teachers. Several studies have also investigated international comparisons regarding the decision-making of beginning social studies teachers (Barton, McCully, & Marks, 2004; Hicks, 2005).

In a case study of three second-year social studies teachers, van Hover and Yeager (2004) attempted to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges facing beginning social studies teachers. van Hover and Yeager found that "instructional approaches discussed in their methods course (e.g., primary documents, teaching historical inquiry) tended to fall by the wayside as the three teachers focused on covering the information presented in the textbook and dealing with [outside pressures]" (p. 14). Behavior management also proved a major challenge for these teachers. Closely linked with their instructional decision-making, the three teachers wanted to maintain control of their students at all times.

Regarding the challenges facing beginning teachers, van Hover and Yeager (2004) conclude that social studies teacher education programs:

need to do a better job of addressing the beliefs our students bring to our methods courses and to gain a better understanding of their epistemologies of history--in other words, using as a starting point how and why *they* want to teach history, and what *their* version of history seems to be. (emphasis in original, p. 23)

While their study and resulting claims specifically focused on the decision-making of beginning history teachers, their work raises many interesting questions and has implications for the place of purpose in the content and pedagogy of social studies teacher education as a whole. As van Hover and Yeager (2004) point out, the need exists for continued contact between programs of teacher education and their graduates, as well as a need for further research on beginning social studies teachers, “in order to more deeply examine factors that may influence their instructional and behavior management decisions” (p. 24). This deeper examination of teacher decision-making has been part of the renewed interest in positioning preservice teachers to develop the underlying purposes that will guide teaching practice.

Forging a Different Path: Rationale-development, Purpose, and Teacher Decision-making

Based on their years of experience in social studies teacher education, Barton and Levstik (2004) documented their struggle to understand why new history teachers, like the three in van Hover and Yeager’s (2004) study, would abandon the knowledge and skills gained in their teacher education program and instead focus on covering content and controlling students. Barton and Levstik (2004) focused on the explanations new teachers give for falling into the trap of content coverage and controlling students, which they see as “something murkier” (p. 253). Their experiences demonstrated that the two main goals, or purposes, guiding the practice of many new social studies teachers are acceptance and practicality (p. 254). Here, acceptance means that most teachers will follow the lead of their peers. Therefore, “if everyone else covers the curriculum and maintains quiet, orderly classrooms, devoid of controversy, then new teachers will be highly motivated to do the same” (p. 254). Practicality, like acceptance, comes as a result of reacting to the norms of the school, the state-mandated curriculum, and the expectations of the community.

Barton and Levstik (2004), like van Hover and Yeager (2004), focused their attention on history teachers. However, their push for the development of a rationale for teaching history, their work and recommendations merit consideration for all social studies teachers. Developing purpose within social studies teacher education, they argued, has the potential to prepare teacher candidates to be more successful than focusing on enabling them to develop

pedagogical content knowledge. Instead, “unless they have a clear sense of purpose, teachers’ primary actions continue to be coverage of the curriculum and control of students no matter how much they know about history, teaching, or the intersection of the two” (p. 258). While acknowledging that purpose matters, Barton and Levstik suggested that a particular form of purpose—one grounded in democracy and democratic education—is more likely to leverage reform in social studies teacher education. What remains unclear is how a democratic education focus will become part of a teacher education program’s vision, or how students will be given spaces to develop their purposes while learning to teach.

Recently, renewed interest in the power of purpose to improve social studies teaching and learning has emerged (e.g., Barton & Levstik, 2004; Dinkelman, 2009; Thornton, 2006). Much of this work builds on Barton and Levstik’s (2004) attempts to connect the teaching and learning of history with the development of participatory democratic citizens. While their writing is not explicitly focused on rationale development, Barton and Levstik recognized that without “a sense of purpose that is clearly thought out and articulated, teachers may fall prey to each new fad or harebrained instructional program or they may find themselves adopting the practices of their peers by default” (p. 255). Recent research has focused on rationale development in social studies teacher education (Conklin, 2010, Dinkelman, 2009, 2010; Hawley, 2010), the potential of field instruction to support student teachers’ attempts to put their rationales into practice (Ritter, Powell, & Hawley, 2007; Ritter, Powell, Hawley, & Blasik, in press), and connections between rationale development and the rationale-based practices of first-year teachers (Hawley, 2010). Together this research highlights the need for stronger connections between initial rationale development, the student teaching experience, and the ability of first-year teachers to put their rationales into practice.

Ritter, Powell, and Hawley (2007) conducted a qualitative, self-study of their work as field instructors working with student teachers who had developed rationales as part of their teacher education coursework. Their collaborative discussions focused on the challenges of promoting rationale-based practice with student teachers. Data analysis revealed two different approaches taken to support student teachers’ attempts to put their rationales into practice. Todd’s approach was to directly address connections between rationales and practice. Jason began with the same approach yet quickly shifted his focus to “help student teachers consider the underlying beliefs that guide the development of their rationales” (p. 352).

Both approaches, and the challenges inherent within each, revealed much about possible ways to rethink both the coursework students take before student teaching and the need for a more coherent relationship between student teacher, cooperating teacher and the

university field instructor. They conclude with a discussion of specific suggestions for their program that also speak to a larger social studies audience interested in social studies teacher education. Ritter et al. (2007) call for, “efforts to help student teachers develop better understandings of the role their rationales can play in helping shape their practices *before* student teaching begins, as opposed to building this understanding in the course of the student teaching experience” (emphasis in original, p. 353). Along with providing time in methods courses for teacher candidates to develop rationale-based lessons prior to student teaching, Ritter et al. recognized that “time spent in student teaching might be used more effectively if both student teachers and field instructors begin the experience on the ‘same page’ as far as the rationale is concerned” (p. 353).

Dinkelman’s (2009) study examined the challenges of rationale-based teacher education. Focusing on student teachers’ struggles to revisit their rationales during a student teaching seminar, Dinkelman envisioned rationale development as a process that goes “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” (p. 92). Echoing Newmann (1977), Dinkelman (2009) conceived of rationale development as a process of attending to teaching’s ethical and moral dimensions (p. 92). Dinkelman’s study generated twelve categories describing the struggles inherent in the process of rationale development. These categories provide a framework for thinking about how to simultaneously support and push student teachers to enact rationale-based practices in their classrooms.

Dinkelman’s (2009) analysis of the twelve categories, and his own attempts to improve his practice as a teacher educator, demonstrated the value of his approach to listen to his students as a way to better understand their struggles. For Dinkelman, “listening to student teachers represents a different approach to gaining insight into the problem” (p. 94). Like the work of Ritter, Powell, Hawley (2007), Dinkelman immersed his research within the lived experience of working with student teachers. Instead of simply accepting theoretical assumptions about rationale development, Dinkelman’s categories demonstrate the ways students experience the process and how teacher educators might go about strengthening such work.

Focusing on the problems and possibilities of rationale-based practice of three first-year social studies teachers, Hawley (2010) examined if, and how, rationales were part of the teachers’ content and pedagogical decision-making. This work demonstrated that rationale-based practices are possible, yet a gap exists between the teachers’ rationales and their ability

to enact the goals of their rationales during their first year. Participants struggled to enact their developing rationales as first-year teachers in part due to limited opportunities to put their rationales into practice during field experience and student teaching. Looking across the findings, it is clear that one way to address the gap is to create greater coherence within the student teaching semester.

To make this more of a reality, Hawley (2010) called on teacher educators to create opportunities for student teachers to work with cooperating teachers who at the very least have an understanding of the challenges of rationale-based practice. Building on the work of Ritter, Powell, & Hawley (2007) and Dinkelman (2009), Hawley (2010) demonstrated that the student teaching semester is a key site for teacher candidates to focus on rationale-based teaching and learning. Developing strong connections could enable teacher candidates to graduate with a clear sense of how to connect their purpose and practice with engaging, worthwhile social studies teaching and learning.

Purpose as Content and Pedagogy of Social Studies Teacher Education

Reading teacher education as a text, Segall (2002) challenged teacher educators to (re)consider the influence the discursive practices of teacher education. Segall recognized how “it is not student teachers’ inability to imagine otherwise that restricts the possibility of educational change but teacher education’s inability to provide them ‘otherwise’ experiences that break with the traditional, the expected, the obvious, and the taken-for-granted” (p. 167). His analysis also sought to deconstruct the constant attention on the potential for teacher educators to influence and potentially change teacher candidates’ beliefs. According to Segall:

it is perhaps the wrong question (or at least one that doesn’t take us further in meaningful directions). It is not *whether* or not teacher education changes prospective views about teaching and learning, but rather, how and in what ways it does so. For whether teacher education affirms or challenges the understandings student teachers come with, it nevertheless always impacts them, often affirming those we most hope to challenge (and vice versa) (emphasis in original, p. 168)

Taking Segall’s (2002) critique and questioning seriously I argue for an approach to reframing social studies teacher education programs around purpose as both content and pedagogy. Designed to bridge the gap between teacher education coursework and the first year of professional practice, these recommendations challenge the taken-for-granted in

teacher education, and simultaneously seek to provide otherwise experiences for teacher candidates built on the transformative potential of rationale-based teacher education.

In this section I present several ways to facilitate the rationale development process within teacher education programs and to bridge the gap between learning to teach and enacting rationale-based practices as a beginning teacher. The ideas discussed are: 1) developing methods courses that explicitly model the process of designing engaging lessons capable of promoting the powerful ideas outlined in teacher candidates' rationales; 2) placing student teachers with cooperating teachers and field supervisors who are familiar with the process of rationale development and who are also attempting to put a rationale into practice; and 3) modeling by professors, instructors, and graduate students of their own struggles to put their rationales into practice. Together these recommendations are presented as possible ways of developing a coherent pedagogy of rationale-based practice to bridge the gap between rationale development and the practices of first-year teachers.

Developing Purpose in Methods Courses

Of all the competing philosophies that shape teacher education in social studies, two seem to stand out: the desire of teacher educators to impart knowledge about the social implications of schooling in a democracy, and their students' concurrent desire to receive "practical" wisdom about the nature of teaching that they can use to create day-to-day lesson plans (Powell & Hawley, 2010).

There is nothing new in acknowledging that social studies teacher candidates, like their peers in other disciplines, enter methods courses with a desire to learn how to best engage their students. Often, however, their interest in engagement takes a back seat to the fear that they will never know enough, that they will lack the ability to control their students, and that there will not be enough time to cover the content as outlined in the state curriculum guidelines. These are legitimate fears and methods professors should be aware of these tensions. However, only addressing content coverage, classroom management, and unit planning does a disservice to both our teacher candidates and the students they will teach. Social Studies teacher education programs must do much more. Integrating purpose through social studies methods courses is the first step down the path whereby first-year social studies teachers can actively engage their students in meaningful, worthwhile learning.

So what does developing purpose look like? Much of the writing on developing purpose in social studies begins with the development of a rationale (Conklin, 2010; Dinkelman, 2009, 2010; Hawley, 2010; Ritter, Powell, and Hawley, 2007). Here students are

asked to consider what they are teaching social studies for and how the content they plan on teaching has the potential to position their students to develop into active, participatory, democratic citizens. Dinkelman's (2010) work on the struggle with rationale development is helpful and does much to help teacher educators prepare for the types of tensions they may face when pushing their students to articulate a sense of why they want to teach social studies. While it may be the case that developing a rationale is in itself a semester-long, and hopefully beyond, project, methods courses can also include assignments that push teacher candidates to enact and further develop their thinking about how to connect purpose with their practice.

As part of connecting purpose with thinking about planning, pedagogy, and student learning, methods courses should provide students with opportunities to have what Segall (2002) calls "otherwise' experiences" (p. 167). To begin to think otherwise teacher educators could ask students to explore competing conceptions of what it means to educate democratic citizens. Recent literature on conceptions of citizenship influenced by considerations of gender, sexual orientation, class, and multiculturalism are pushing the boundaries of what could be in social studies classrooms. Many of our teacher candidates have never had an opportunity to confront their beliefs about these issues. Presenting them with the chance to consider in what ways their initial purposes open up, or more likely, shut down certain conceptions of citizenship has the potential to expand the ways they think about unit and lesson planning. Without opportunities to make these connections in terms of their own purposes and their thinking about unit and lesson planning, teacher candidates may enter student teaching without any idea of how to bring their developing rationale to life with their students.

Enacting Purpose in the Student Teaching Experience

The need is not for programs to devise unitary philosophies, but for programs – in conjunction with schools – to create multiple opportunities for the newly arrived to practice in meaningful ways. As it stands, the structure of teacher education works to disrupt the fledgling confidence of the newly developing teacher (Britzman, 2003, pp. 213-214).

Describing the powerful influence of the student teaching experience, Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) noted how, "experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences as a powerful—sometimes the single most powerful—element of teacher preparation" (p. 2). Given the seemingly lasting influence of student teaching on the practice

of first-year teachers, it seems logical that teacher education should seek out models of rationale-based practice in this important experience.

Teacher education programs interested in developing purpose as content and pedagogy need to structure in opportunities to create links between methods course and the expectations of cooperating teachers and university supervisors. The goal is to develop collaborative resonance (Cochran-Smith, 1991). Creating close links between social studies teacher educators, field instructors, and cooperating teachers is not an easy process. If collaborative resonance were easy to achieve, it would be more prevalent. Finding enough cooperating teachers who are qualified to work with student teachers and who have also articulated their own rationale for teaching social studies is quite a daunting task. Other issues are involved that go beyond simply finding enough qualified cooperating teachers who are also attempting to put their rationale into practice. Collaborative resonance requires steps to nurture and sustain the newly developing relationships between social studies teacher education programs and cooperating teachers. As Clift and Brady (2005) discuss, when both parties are working toward the same goals, they “often succeeded in providing a collaborative, supportive context for learning to engage in practice that differed from typical school settings” (p. 330).

However, the potential exists for such close collaboration to backfire if support is not provided to cooperating teachers who may be asked to re-examine their own practices. Clift and Brady (2005) recognize that involving cooperating teachers in the process of collaborative resonance has “the potential for encouraging collaborative reflective practice – or for harming the fragile partnership between educators not accustomed to public self-examination or professional debate surrounding practice” (p. 330). The potential for tension between social studies teacher education programs and cooperating teachers is real. Care must be taken to build relationships with schools and teachers who are willing to support the development of student teachers that are learning to put their rationales into practice. Despite these very real obstacles, social studies teacher education programs dedicated to rationale development must find a way to structure student teaching as a time where the ideas of initial rationales become part of both planning and teaching.

Teacher Educators Developing Their Purpose and Modelling Rationale-Based Practice

Even in settled moments it is not easy to return to one’s philosophical starting points. And yet, this kind of inquiry can be a source of immense intellectual satisfaction and personal growth. On the one hand, it can trigger fresh, revitalized thinking for programs, policies, and

practices. On the other hand, it can spin out new and stronger threads for the fabric of one's work as a teacher educator. The effort to philosophize makes it possible to articulate why teacher education is worthwhile. ... Such inquiry makes it possible to consider alternative outlooks, an experience that in itself can have significant consequences for educational thought and action (Hansen, 2008, p. 5).

If purpose is to become a core theme of social studies teacher education programs, teacher educators must formally articulate their own rationales. Ultimately this is a matter of doing what we ask our students to do. If we are going to ask them to develop, defend, and constantly refine their purpose as part of creating engaging learning experiences, teacher educators must also work to openly model their own rationale-based practices as teacher educators. As Loughran (2006) highlighted, "teacher educators need to ensure that the purpose in their teaching is clear and explicit for themselves and their students and to encourage questioning about purpose to be common place in teaching and learning about teaching" (p. 91).

Writing about the perceived disconnect between professional knowledge and professional practice regarding teacher education programs, Loughran (2006) recognized that "most typically, formal knowledge is thought to be the domain of the universities (world of theory) and practical knowledge is considered to be the domain of school and teachers (world of practice)" (p. 44). As a result, many teacher candidates perceive their teacher education program as designed around the idea that "theory is taught at university so that the knowledge might then be practiced in schools" (p. 44).

Loughran's (2006) solution to the perceived disconnect between theory and practice within teacher education programs calls on teacher educators to create situations where the relationship between professional knowledge and professional practice is examined as part of the process of learning to teach. To do so, Loughran challenged "teacher educators to carefully consider the nature of their own knowledge of teaching and to begin to clarify the role that it does, and should, play in their own conceptualization and practice in teaching about teaching" (p. 46). Loughran's work has powerful implications for social studies teacher educators interested in promoting rationale-based practice. Through the practice of openly modeling their own rationale-based practices, educating teachers might enable teacher candidates to begin their first year in the classroom with a greater sense of how to make the ideas of their rationale part of their practice (Loughran, 1996).

Dinkelman (2009) understood "the challenges of helping new teachers develop their rationales are as much my own learning problem as theirs" (p. 104). His work demonstrates

the need for social studies teacher educators to develop and model their own rationales for their work. Structuring programs around a coherent pedagogy of teacher education, while a powerful first step, cannot be seen as a solution. Instead, teacher educators must exhibit a willingness to ask of themselves what they are asking of their students. Modeling the process of rationale development and rationale-based teacher education has the potential to bring to life for teacher candidates the potential of rationale-based practice to promote engaging, worthwhile learning in social studies classrooms.

Conclusions

Taken together, these suggestions speak to the development of a coherent pedagogical approach toward rationale development within social studies teacher education programs. A clear gap existed between the ideas of the participants' rationales and their inability to create lesson plans to develop those ideas with their students. Addressing this gap has to become a top priority for teacher educators interested in making rationale-based practice a reality in social studies classrooms. Developing methods courses with the explicit purpose of linking purpose, methods, and planning is a good starting point. The next step, creating opportunities for student teachers to work with cooperating teachers who are also attempting to put a rationale into practice, has the potential to further strengthen both the confidence and the practice of first-year teachers. Finally, teacher educators must begin to openly model their own rationale-based practices. By creating a coherent pedagogy of rationale-based practice, where purpose functions as content and pedagogy, social studies teacher educators can position social studies teachers for success in their teaching career, even from the start.

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