Making It Real: Promoting Novice Teachers' Critical Perspectives on Educational Issues through Structured Debates

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Abstract

There is a sense of ambivalence with regard to the place of the knowledge of the foundations of education in the makeup of an effective teacher. The reason for the marginalization of the field comes from the debate on the scope of educational foundations is too abstract to provide guidance to the everyday concerns of practitioners. In this interpretive and self-exploratory study, the author triangulated (a) literature on the place of educational foundations of education in teacher education, (b) a description of a critical issues course that used structured debates to promote novice teachers' critical perspectives on educational issues, and (c) an interpretive analysis of 21 preservice teachers' reflections on implemented debates. The questions were: (a) What is the place of the study of the foundations of education in the preparation of teachers for the 21st century, and (b) did the use of structured debates provoke novice teachers' critical perspectives on educational issues? The findings of the study showed that the use of structured debate elicited critical insight into the meaning and nature of educational issues from most of the participating novice teachers. The conclusion from the study supported the idea that the ability to exercise critical perspectives on educational policy and practice issues is a quintessential element that separates self-renewing and ever-maturing educators from teaching technicians.

Introduction

A review of the literature on the legitimacy of the study of social and philosophical foundations of education presents an unflattering picture of its place and possibility of survival in the knowledge base of teacher education (Bredo, 2002; Carbone, Jr., 1991; Burbules, 2002). The predominance of competency-based outcomes in the present educational climate has served to further decimate the perceived effectiveness of educational foundations. The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, with its emphasis on accountability based on high-stakes standardized tests, has helped to promote a phenomenon that Gunzenhauser (2003) described as *default* philosophy of education. This is a one-track mandate for the commonplaces of the teaching and learning process that situates performance on tests as the be-all and end-all of the entire enterprise.

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Amidst this state of perceived lack of engagement with the study of the foundations of education in the preparation of teachers is the persistent notion that the decisions that teachers make about events in the everyday realities of classroom life are not always guided by *episteme*—created procedural knowledge of teaching—valued in teacher education programs. Invariably, teachers' actions are driven by what Korthagen and Kessels (1999) termed *phronesis*, that is, perceptual knowledge of teaching created by the teacher. Korthagen and Kessels used the term *gestalts* to describe the unity of feelings, values, beliefs, and meanings that go on inside the teacher. The quick and concrete actions that teachers take in some teaching situations are rooted in *gestalts*. A similar notion was expressed by Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) who described philosophy of education as a critical element in a teacher's personal practical knowledge. A balanced teacher education programming, therefore, must entail an integrative framework that connects *episteme* with *phronesis*.

The present study posits that the subject matter of educational foundations, with its emphasis on educational beliefs and prevailing societal values that impact educational policies and practice, presents a unique opportunity for preservice teachers to hold up their unexamined *gestalts* of teaching, learning, and the educational context to continuous scrutiny and reflection. The attainment of this objective is contingent upon the implementation of student-centered teaching approaches that facilitate thoughtful analysis of the *gestalts* of preservice teachers relative to their value judgments about teaching and learning. Specifically, the author advances the use of structured debate as a means of promoting preservice teachers' thoughtful engagement with the varying perspectives on critical issues in education as a precursor to creating their own balanced and well-informed knowledge on these issues. The two primary questions of the study are as follows:

1. What is the place of the study of the foundations of education in the preparation of teachers for the 21st century?
2. Did the use of structured debate provoke novice teachers' critical perspectives on educational issues?

The present study is significant for three reasons. First, it reiterates a concern in the field of teacher education about the increasing obscurity of preservice teachers' engagement with the discourse of social and philosophical foundations. Second, the author hypothesizes that when implemented with critical perspectives on educational issues as the focus, the study of social and educational foundations is uniquely situated in the knowledge base of teacher preparation as a crucial juncture for achieving the interdependence of theoretical and perceptual knowledge of teaching and learning. Third, the author proposes and demonstrates the use of structured debates as a teaching method for proactively engaging preservice teachers in the conversations on the prevailing issues that impact educational policy-making and practice. To contextualize the first question of the study within the established knowledge of the canon of educational foundations, the supplementary questions that arose are as follows: (a) Is there an agreed-upon knowledge base for the foundations of education (b) what are the enduring perspectives and purposes of this knowledge base, and (c)

how do these ideas and purposes contribute to the preparation of professional teachers in the 21st century?

The Place of Educational Foundations in the Preparation of Teachers

At first sight, the foundations of education may look incoherent because of the cross disciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the field (Tozer and Meaninich, 1986; Borman, 1990). The titles of educational foundations courses are far-flung and diverse on the educational landscape of programs of study for teacher education programs throughout the United States (Bartos and Souter, 1982; Butin, 2004). The courses that are subsumed in the foundations courses include, but are not limited to, the following: social foundations of education, current issues in education, school and society, philosophy of education, history of education and so on. The variety in the course names and titles notwithstanding, the contents that delineate the knowledge base of the foundations of education find common ground in the overarching purpose of inculcating in the novice teacher the perspective that the school is a product of the societal beliefs, norms, social, philosophical, and political systems that spawned it.

Beyond exposing novice teachers to the underpinnings of society that impact the commonplaces of teaching and learning, the foundations of education—at a higher level of intellectual engagement—furnish students with the inquiry skills to question the way things are and to negotiate equitable alternatives. In fact, according to Tozer and Meaninich (1986), this nonconformist conception, aimed at encouraging “critical questioning of the social and educational order rather an uncritical adaptation to it” was a defining feature that differentiated the *Second Draft* of the historical development of professional teacher education from 1920 to 1950 from the *First Draft* which began around 1890 (pp. 7-8). Along the same line, Beyer and Zeichner (1982) ascribed to educational foundations the “special province” of bringing forth critical questions about the norms of schooling and challenging the conformist, neutrality assumptions of the traditional approach to teacher education. The current definition and standards of the foundations of education published by the Council of Learned Societies in Education (CSLE), a federation of professional associations and societies in the educational foundations, educational studies, and educational policy studies fields in the United States, endorsed the critical questioning and inquiring purpose of the study of educational foundations in teacher education. While acknowledging that the foundations of education is “broadly conceived” and an offshoot of other academic disciplines, the CLSE (1996) states that “the purpose of the foundations study is to bring these disciplinary resources to bear in developing interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives on education, both inside and outside of school” (p. 4).

According to the CLSE Standards, a commitment to the perspectives on education represents the tie that binds in the study of the foundations. These three perspectives denote the scope of knowledge and inquiry in all the courses that are named foundations of education. The interpretive perspectives use concepts and theories within the humanities and social sciences in explaining the nature of education in different contexts. The normative perspectives assist students to explain education in terms of value orientations and encourage them to develop their own values about educational issues based on their own inquiry and

reflections. Finally, the critical perspectives assist students to develop inquiry skills to question educational policies and practices in light of their origins, influences and consequences. Taken together, the goal of the perspectives is to inculcate in students a heightened awareness and understanding of education and schooling in light of the complex relationships with the envionring culture. Moreover, the ultimate goal of the perspectives is to promote the development of a policy-making orientation in novice teachers that will spur them to ask important questions about and search for answers to educational problems and issues.

Some might argue that novice teachers' attainment of the knowledge of educational perspectives and policy-making should be better served by induction into the teaching profession and context. Cahill (2005) differed with this speculation. The culture of teaching has placed certain limitations on teachers' search for the meaning and nature of education. The major limitation has to do with the conception of authority and power in schools. According to Cahill, "ideas about education are usually edited by those with bureaucratic power in the schools before getting a hearing with teachers, parents, or students" (p. 3). The interpretive authority that schools exercise on their staff may have a tendency to reduce teachers' own interpretive ability and understanding of the ideas of education as they learn to accept the status quo. Another form of limitation that is concomitant with bureaucratic authority is the way in which educational research is disseminated to teachers in the form of what Cahill (2005) termed the *digest*: second- or third-hand insubstantial reading. Reacting to the limitation of access to intellectual inquiry into educational policy, culture, and curriculum, Cahill emphasized that "our discourse in schools should be about ideas in their full nature as subtle and complex expressions of research, thought, experience; and their reduction should seem ridiculous to us" (p. 5).

Given Cahill's thirty-five years and on-going tenure as a teacher, his viewpoint about the limitations of bureaucratic actions on teachers' understanding of educational perspective underscored Butin's (2004) assertion that "foundations courses must become a central component in the revitalization of teacher education" (p. 6). Rejuvenation in this instance should entail a deliberate focus on engaging preservice teachers in intellectual inquiry and debate of the conflicting viewpoints on major education policy and practice issues. The didactic approach of merely telling them about these issues would only acclimatize novice teachers to readily accept the summaries given to them by schools and thereby perpetuate the bureaucratic clamp on their understanding and interpretive ability. A break-the-mold approach of teaching that emphasizes critical perspectives on received knowledge by providing a discursive space to debate the conflicting sides of educational ideas should prepare novice teachers to weigh and scrutinize viewpoints before reaching informed conclusions on educational practice. Unfortunately, the deliberative implementation of the perspectives outlined in the CLSE Standards in the teaching of educational foundations to novice teachers, is still largely an exception, not the norm that it should be in many teacher education programs.

Today, the criticism against the study of the foundations of education in the preparation of teachers is not about its broadly-conceived characteristic and its kaleidoscopic nomenclature. Rather, the criticisms stem from questions about

what is taught in these courses, how it is taught, and to what end? For example, in a widely-acclaimed study of 16 teacher-training institutions in which Steiner (cited in Keller, 2003) faulted education as intellectually thin, one of the components of teacher education programming that came under scrutiny was the effectiveness of instruction in educational foundations courses. After examining the syllabi of 45 educational foundations courses in 18 programs, Steiner's study concluded, among other things, that the courses did not cover adequate knowledge of what was purported to be the disciplinary perspectives in the field. In a rejoinder to Steiner's findings, Butin (2004), after studying 89 social foundations of education syllabuses available on the internet in order to assess the accuracy of Steiner's claims, debunked the conclusion about the shallowness of the curriculum in social foundations of education. He concluded that novice teachers "are being exposed to the historical, philosophical foundations of education, and they are learning about contemporary educational policy debates" (p. 6). However, Butin pointed out two unflattering findings about the state of the teaching of social foundations to novices: (a) over-reliance on textbooks and scant use of primary sources, and (b) lack of opportunity to think through, question, and thereby develop a comprehensive picture of the educational system. He expressed disappointment with the state of instruction in the social foundations of education thus:

Rather, this analysis finds teacher preparation programs (at least as viewed through the lens of foundations courses) to be symptomatic of the educational status quo. They replicate reliance on teacher-centered, textbook-driven, and fact-based forms of schooling to the detriment of substantive inquiry, intellectual debate, and deep reflection. (p. 6)

The present study focused on the outcome of a social foundations course that implemented the structured debate method to evoke novice teachers' critical perspectives on educational issues. Therefore, the second guiding question of the study was simply this: Did the use of structured debate produce the development of interpretive, normative, and especially critical perspectives on educational issues from the novice teachers in the study? A related question was: If yes, what specific responses from participants supported this finding?

Fostering the Environment for Critical Perspectives on Educational Issues

Course structure

Critical Issues in Secondary Education was designed to promote novice teachers' analytical examination of the contending viewpoints surrounding policy-making and practice in contemporary American education. Since its inception in the fall of 2003, the course has employed various types of classroom discourse including interactive lecture, whole class and small group reflective discourse on critical issues in education, individual and team presentations, and reflective essays to elicit novice teachers' heightened knowledge and awareness of the affirmative and oppositional perspectives of educational issues. Course content is driven by, but not limited, to the ideas from Evans' (2002, 2005) *Taking sides: Clashing views on controversial issues in secondary education*. This textbook did not make

the list on Butin's (2004) summary of the textbooks used in foundations courses. Unlike the textbooks that made Butin's list, the Evans's text is a compendium of conflicting viewpoints on several educational issues, rather than a descriptive anthology of educational foundations topics. The scope of the book included controversial issues such as the role of religion in schools, school uniforms, zero tolerance policies in schools, high-stakes standardized testing, technology in schools, performance-based compensation for teachers, multicultural education, drug-testing of high school students, and so on. The roll call of contributors who presented clashing viewpoints on these issues included well-known respected voices in education such as Robert Hutchins, TheodoreSizer, Diane Ravitch, Jeannie Oakes, Robert Marzano, Alfie Kohn, Chester Finn and so on. Also, it is noteworthy to mention that the conflicting viewpoints on the issue of drug-testing of students consisted of the majority and dissenting opinions of two United States Supreme Court Justices—Clarence Thomas and Ruth Bader Ginsberg—in a case decided by the court in 2002 (Evans, 2005). For this reason, the required readings that informed the content of the course, although subsumed in a textbook, could be categorized as “primary sources” as defined by Butin (2004). As mentioned earlier, the content of the course was not limited to the educational issues on the pages of the Evans's book. Additionally, novice teachers' understanding of educational policy-making and practice issues was reinforced with background knowledge about school law, and the historical roles of federal, state, and local government in American education. By the same token, the readings in the course extended beyond the offerings in Evans to include many articles from educational journals selected by students to fulfill course writing and presentation assignments' requirements.

Put together, the reading selections and delivery methods of the course complimented the overarching goal of instruction which was to provide a discursive space for novice teachers to think through, raise questions and express skepticism about educational issues, rather than assuming a passive receptive stance to the way things are. Toward this end and to further streamline and deepen novice teachers' thought processes about educational issues, the debate approach was introduced as another model of communication in the course.

The structured debate method

The formal or structured debate is widely-acknowledged as an intellectual, active learning approach that fosters logical and critical thinking (Schroeder and Ebert, 1983; Moeller, 1985; Worthen and Pack, 1992; Scannapieco, 1997; Leonard, 1999; Beck, 1999; Estaville, 1988; Martunen and Laurinen, 2001). The essential function of a debate is to provide a forum where opposing ideas or solutions to problems can be articulated (Scannapieco). Debate is basically competitive as a procedure in which two or more people try to convince others to accept or reject a proposition as the basis for belief or behavior. The benefits of the debate approach of teaching include providing students with a thorough understanding of oppositional viewpoints in controversial issues (Schroeder and Ebert); reducing instructor and student bias on issues (Scannapieco); engaging students in meaningful dialogue with their peers as an alternative to the lecture method (Estaville, 1988; Leonard); sharpening students' research and communications skills; and motivating students to learn (Scannapieco). The formats of the debate

method range from a simple informal expository debate that may take a few minutes to a formal debate. Whether formal or informal, a debate is organized around a resolution statement or question that must be argued by two teams or persons. As an instructional process, formal or structured debate method requires four essential characteristics: preplanning, providing reference materials, establishing debate procedure, and grading students on their debate performances (Estaville; Moeller; Scannapieco).

Preplanning encompasses organizing students into debate teams at the beginning of the course, establishing the resolution statements or questions, and the dates on which they will be debated. Reference materials for the debate can be obtained from books, educational journals, and interviews with educational stakeholders in the community. Students are encouraged to do in-depth research on their debate issues. The general procedure of a structured debate is as follows:

- Each side (affirmative or negative) presents compelling well-grounded constructive speeches that support or contradict the resolution' beginning with the affirmative team.
- Each set of constructive speeches is followed by rebuttal speeches beginning with the negative team. Thereon, constructive and rebuttal speeches alternate between teams.
- Active participation from non-debating students is important to the success of a debate. Therefore, it is necessary to state the expectations for the members of the audience.

Finally, students receive an individual or a team grade based on their performance in the debate with regard to stated criteria. Grades may be actual scores or pass/fail.

Organizing and implementing structured debates

The debate format in the course followed the procedure described above. Students were organized into 10 debate teams during the first class meeting of the semester. All the teams except one—made up of two students—consisted of three or four students. Since the debate questions were derived from the selections in the Evans's textbook, the positive or negative viewpoint arguments of the authors constituted partial basis for developing constructive speeches for or against the questions. To buttress constructive speeches and rebuttals, the instructor furnished students additional reading materials. These sources were not exhaustive. Therefore, students were required to research other pertinent sources of knowledge on their debate questions. The debates were assessed based on the quality of the constructive and rebuttal speeches, the amount of research evident in the speeches (debaters were required to cite the sources of all statistics and factual information), and the smoothness, spontaneity and flow of conversation during the debate. Within a week after a debate, each member of a debate team was required to submit a reflection on the debate to the instructor. The reflective prompts were as follows:

- What literature did you read to prepare for the debate beside the textbook?

- How did the sources extend your knowledge of the yes or no viewpoints of the issue?
- What conclusion or resolution have you made about the issue?
- How did the debate presentation prepare you to make a balanced case for the issue to the educational community?
- If you were to present the debate again, what would you do or say the same or differently?

The implementation of the debates was structured to guarantee that each novice teacher enrolled in the course acquire superior knowledge of the yes and no viewpoints of one issue and proficient knowledge of at least four other issues debated. The proof of proficient knowledge consisted of students' production of four comprehensive papers on four debates out of the ten presented. In other words, *structure* in the implementation of a structured debate in this instance, entailed not only preplanning, and procedural rules of engagement, but also accountability for demonstrating balanced perspectives on debated educational issues.

Participants

Participants were 21 out of 31 second-semester, pre-student teaching secondary education students enrolled in an educational foundations course at a large urban university in southwestern United States. The population of course enrollees consisted of 11 male and 20 female students with teaching specializations in mathematics, language arts, history, and social studies. The participants in the study were 11 male and 10 female students.

Data collection procedures: Promoting critical reflection on educational issues

Data collection for the study originated from the proceedings of implementing a structured debate to teach critical issues in secondary education to 31 novice teachers during the spring semester of 2006. Data consisted of 21 debaters' reflections on the debates that they implemented.

Conceptual framework: Promoting critical perspectives on educational issues

The conceptual framework for the definition of critical perspectives in the study is the Council of Learned Societies in Education's (CLSE) statement of the purpose of educational foundations (1996). According to this definition, the development of critical perspectives is preceded by two intellectual operations: (a) interpretation of educational issues within their philosophical, cultural, social contexts; and (b) exercise of normative reflection on educational issues through careful examination of the ethical values and assumptions inherent in educational policymaking as a precursor to developing a well-informed position regarding education. These two operations are the antecedents to developing the skeptical frame of mind needed to question educational assumptions and recognize contradictions in educational policies and practice. Therefore, critical perspective on educational issues is first a function of interpretation of knowledge, and analysis of the contending values subsumed in a particular situation before making a balanced judgment on the issue. When used consistently, the operations of interpreting and analyzing knowledge about the nature of education enables

the student to think about educational issues in a critical rather than a passive, accepting way.

The reflective prompts for debaters in the study exemplified the CLSE's tripartite purpose of the study of educational foundations as follows:

1. Interpretive perspectives - What literature did you read to prepare for the debate in addition to the textbook? How did the sources extend your knowledge of the yes or no viewpoints of the issue?
2. Normative perspectives - What conclusion have you made about the issue?
3. Critical perspectives - How did the debate prepare you to make a balanced case for the issue to the educational community? If you were to present the debate again, what would do or say differently?

Data analysis and results: Debaters' perspectives on debated issues

The reflections that were analyzed for the study focused on seven debate questions as follows:

1. Are single sex classrooms better for students?
2. Is grade inflation a problem?
3. Should teacher pay be tied to student performance?
4. Is ethnocentric education a good idea?
5. Are abstinence-only programs the best approach to sex education instruction?
6. Is achievement level tracking of students a defensible practice?
7. Are school uniforms beneficial?

The question that each participant debated is shown on Table 1.

The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was used first to identify generative themes in debaters' written reflections on the prompts. Secondly, generative themes were further examined to identify categories and types of interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives in participants' responses.

Interpretive perspectives. The major generative theme for interpretive perspectives was the source of knowledge that informed a debater's interpretation of the viewpoints represented in the debate question. The categories of sources that emerged included the following:

- a. Acquired knowledge of debate question by default (textbook's conflicting arguments on the question).
- b. Recalled additional research on both viewpoints of debate question.
- c. Recalled additional research on position argued.

As shown on Table 2, all participants initially acquired knowledge of the debate question by default through the textbook's selections on the yes and no sides of the question. Moreover, 18 participants recalled extensive research of the viewpoints of both sides of the question beyond preset information presented in the textbook. Two typical statements that communicated recollections of

extensive inquiry into the debate questions were expressed by Cass #1 and Phil #11 respectively as follows:

- I read a multiple of articles to prepare for the debate. Additionally, I interviewed the principal of Phoenix Preparatory Academy over the phone, and surveyed students in one of the sophomore classes I am interning in....The articles helped me to form a solid view of each side and the issues surrounding both.... The preparation for my debate was extensive, but very informative.
- I read numerous articles on the internet for or against merit pay. I started my research by using Google... There were some very good articles for both sides.

Three participants recalled additional research beyond preset textbook knowledge that focused only on the debate positions that they argued. For example, the two articles that John #10 recollected in the following excerpt supported the affirmative position that he debated:

- To prepare for the debate, I not only read the text but I found some interesting articles.... One article that I found that was quite interesting was the 'The Truth About Grade Inflation' by Bruce Barlett.... I also read an article that talked about solutions that are in place to stop grade inflation.

Normative perspectives. The major generative theme for normative perspectives involved the relationship between the viewpoint that a debater argued and the debater's resolution on the question. The categories of relationship that came out were as follows:

- a. Expressed agreement with the position argued.
- b. Did not agree with the position argued.
- c. Shifted position as a result of research on and debate of the question.

The majority of participants (n=14) expressed agreement with the affirmative or negative debate position that they argued. These three excerpts from participants' reflections showed agreement with a debated position:

- I believe that abstinence-only programs are harmful and can only create more ignorance and problems. My opinion did not change from what I originally believed... (Trish #3).
- In regard to the issue itself, I am still firmly against the practice of achievement level tracking (Lee #18).
- Before this debate, I felt that single-sex schools/classrooms were effective, and after the debate, my support of single-sex schools is only stronger (Stella #19).

However, one participant indicated cautious agreement with her position on a debate thus:

- While I agree with certain aspects of performance-based pay . . . . In the end, I still am on the fence regarding merit pay. It is such a fine line between what should be done in our schools and the reality of the situation! (Mary #17)

Four participants debated a position that they did not support before and after the debate. For example, although Cass (#1) presented a well-grounded affirmative stance on school uniforms, she expressed unequivocal negative opinion on the issue as follows:

- I never stated my true opinion on the issue, which, just for information, is firmly against school uniforms.

Three participants articulated a shift in their erstwhile stance on a debate question. These participants attributed the change in their position to research on the issue before the presentation of their debates. Jane #4 represented the shift in her position on a debate issue thus:

- When I stated researching this topic my opinion changed.... I could not ignore the glaring evidence that single-sex education is a good thing.

Also, David #5 who argued against school uniforms explained the impact of research on his initial negative stance on the issue in this statement:

- Before reading the text or the additional articles, I was against school uniforms. ...I now believe that school uniforms would benefit any school....The articles that I found gave me a lot of statistics about schools where uniforms have made a positive impact.

Critical perspectives. The generative theme for critical perspectives portrayed the quality of the thought process that characterized a participant's resolution on the debate question. Three levels of critical perspectives were identified as follows:

- a. Demonstrated explicit critical perspective: A debater weighed and balanced arguments for and against the debate question before proffering a resolution.
- b. Demonstrated implicit critical perspective (Two characteristics): (1) A debater supported a resolution on a debated question and expressed aspiration for further study to crystallize viewpoint, and (2) a debater restated stronger support for a resolution on a debated issue.
- c. Demonstrated indistinct critical perspective: A debater simply reiterated a positive or negative opinion on the question debated.

As shown on Table 2, 12 participants' resolutions exemplified explicit critical perspective, six participants' resolutions showed implicit critical perspective, and three participants' resolutions exhibited indistinct critical perspective on debate questions respectively. Cass #1, who debated in the affirmative position on the question about school uniforms and expressed a

negative stance on the issue, offered an explicit critical perspective on the question as follows:

- Overall, my conclusion on the issue is based purely on personal philosophical beliefs. Yes, there is strong evidence to support uniforms in the classroom, but that conflicts with my beliefs that we are supposed to be preparing students for the future—in the real world. In my opinion, there are not many businesses that require full uniforms—unless it is out of necessity, i.e. mechanic—for the most part, it is dress codes that rule the world. Students need to learn to make good decisions regarding their dress [sic] depending on the situation they are facing. I understand the yes side, but I, personally, am for the no side. In many ways, it echoes Nazi Germany in my head....

Also, Stella #19, who debated in the affirmative position and maintained an affirmative stance on the question of single-sex schools, expressed the following explicit critical perspective on the issue:

- Truly, I feel confident in my understanding and knowledge of single-sex classrooms/schools. Also, my eyes were opened to the beliefs of the “no” side when my teammates presented their arguments and when my classmates posed questions in support of the “no” side. It was during this verbal interaction that I was able to fully see both sides of the argument.... The statistics documenting the successes of single-sex schools/classrooms are incredible .... However, I also strongly believe that it is imperative that single-sex schools provide equal opportunities and remain optional to students.

Trish #3 and Meg #15 communicated the two characteristics of implicit critical perspective on a debate question respectively as follows:

- I believe that abstinence-only programs are harmful....However, if I were to debate this again, I would have brought up more court case based [sic] facts, because I believe that those help cement people's cases. I believe that my partner did a very good job in being prepared and in countering my arguments.
- My debate presentation gave me a solid background on where merit pay started, the implications of using such a method, and ways in which the educational community can practice alternative approaches. I know that I will be well-prepared to argue the case should it ever come up during my career. The debate also reinforced my opposition to merit pay with actual statistics and personal testimonies. If I was to present the debate again, my stance would be even stronger and more convincing.

Finally, three participants reported indistinct critical perspective on the debate question. John #10 communicated this genre of critical perspective in the following excerpt:

- Through this debate, I have seen that grade inflation is a problem. It has allowed students to receive passing grades where they do not deserve

them at all.... If I was to go back and do the debate again, I would do or say nothing different except maybe try to relax a little more.

In addition to the generative themes and categories described above, a comparison of the components of interpretive and critical perspectives in the study yielded an important result. As shown in Table 2, the 3 participants whose interpretive perspectives on the debate question were informed by textbook knowledge and additional research on the position argued namely Jim #6, John #10 and Mary #17 also reported indistinct critical perspectives on their debate questions. In the present study, this outcome generated the inference that the sources of knowledge for interpretive perspective presupposed the level of critical perspective of a participant's resolution on a debate question.

Conclusion and Implications for Teacher Education

The Council of Learned Societies in Education Standards (1996) stated that the object of the educational foundations is the development of interpretive use of historical, philosophical, sociological, or cross-cultural knowledge of educational issues. The purpose of such knowledge acquisition is the cultivation of analytical skills which are believed to foster novice teachers' ability to evaluate educational policy and practice issues constructively (Dawson, Mazurek, and Deyoung, 1984). The present study sought to answer two questions relative to the place of educational foundations in the preparation of teachers for the 21st century, and the effectiveness of the use structured debate for provoking novice teachers' critical perspectives on educational issues. With respect to the first question, the study concluded that the didactic approach of teaching educational foundations in initial teacher preparation programs is in need of an overhaul. In order for novice teachers to properly implement their knowledge of the teaching profession and instructional processes in various societal contexts, they must be attuned to and be able to critically articulate educational policies that impinge on their work. This is the essence of being a professional educator. It is therefore, imperative that instruction in educational foundations must feature learner-centered approaches that facilitate the intellectual engagement of novice teachers in the discussion of the historical, philosophical, and social underpinnings of educational policy mandates or decisions.

In the present study, analysis of the reflections of 21 secondary education preservice teachers on the structured debates that they implemented in an educational foundations course showed attainment of interpretive, normative, critical perspectives on educational issues. Eighteen of the participants reported interpretive knowledge of debated issues beyond the textbook and the positions they argued. These participants executed the formal debate protocol of "understanding the opposition." In this way, the debate method precipitated in the majority of participants the need to gain balanced knowledge of an issue—through research—in order to convince others of the worthiness of a particular standpoint. When transferred to decision making on educational policy-making and practice, the ability to scrutinize issues from different viewpoints should position novice teachers for discriminating and constructive engagement with the questions and practices that are at the heart of their profession.

The analysis of participants' reflections for normative perspective showed that 14 out of 21 participants reported personal agreement with the affirmative or negative viewpoint that they argued. This finding did not depict participants' tendency to select the position of least resistance. First, as mentioned earlier, participants did not self-select the issues that they argued. Second, the ideal of normative perspectives is not in the product of a value position but in the thought process that engendered it and the richness of the interpretive knowledge on which it is based. It is noteworthy that four participants did not support the affirmative or negative position that they argued. This outcome underscored the effectiveness of debates as an instructional approach that provides novice teachers the opportunity "to stand on the other side of the fence" on controversial educational issues (Schroeder and Ebert, 1983, p. 267). Furthermore, three participants reportedly changed their affirmative or negative stance on an issue as a result of preceding research and the convincing arguments of their opponents during the debate.

Finally, 18 participants' reflections exhibited explicit or implicit critical perspectives on the issues that they debated. Conversely, three participants' reflections showed indistinct critical perspectives on debated issues. These participants' reflections portrayed interpretive perspectives based on textbook and other literature knowledge of the position that they argued. The obvious conclusion from this result points to a mutually-reinforcing association between interpretive and critical perspectives.

According to the CLSE Standards and the goals of the historical tradition of educational foundations, the purpose and the place of this core area in teacher education programming is the development of thoughtful practitioners of education. The use of structured debate in combination with other learner-centered approaches should facilitate the development of novice teachers' eloquent voices on educational issues. In this kind of setting, novice teachers must have the discursive space to assume the role of the "expert" on educational issues from time to time, rather than being consigned to slavish adherence to received knowledge. One observation that was a constant feature of the debates described in this study was that most of the questions that non-debating students posed to debaters were preceded with this phrase: "In your research on the issue, did you..." In this way, fellow students affirmed the expertise of the debaters on the particular issue at that point in time. Teacher educators who teach educational foundation courses would do well to organize learning opportunities that would allow neophytes to communicate researched and balanced viewpoints orally in the public space of the classroom.

Judging from the mood and feeling tone of the class on the days that course discourse featured a debate, the students seemed interested and attentive as they observed their peer-debaters present arguments and counterarguments on a controversial educational issue. The most interesting debates were the ones in which opposing teams matched each others' arguments constructive speech by constructive speech, and rebuttal by rebuttal. However, there were a few instances where debates were presented in a lopsided fashion, that is, a team or a debater contributed more or less than the other, as one participant reported:

- One of the major problems with the debate is my opponents....After we began, I realized it was painfully obvious that they had read one side of the issue and not really explored the opposite side....If I were presenting the yes side again, I would debate it for real–no “kid gloves.” I felt awful for the no side after my first volley and backed off because of it. I really would have liked to have had a true debate where my partners were prepared and could hold their own against my points and make some strong points on their own.

To prevent recurrence of this participant’s criticism, teacher educators who choose to engage novice teachers in debates might require them to show proof of optimal research on the affirmative and negative viewpoints of the issues to be debated before the debate (Estaville, 1988). The structured debate method with its schedule of constructive speeches and rebuttals ensures a regulated flow of concise and cogent arguments that are grounded in facts and statistics from all participants. In a situation where the flow of arguments is stymied, the problem as the participant above pointed out is a human error of lack of research, rather than the rules of engagement of the structured debate method. Moreover, the results of the present study, with respect to the association between the knowledge base that informed participants’ interpretive perspectives and the quality of their critical perspectives buttressed Schroeder and Ebert’s (1983) assertion that “research is an indispensable part of reflective decision making” (p. 268).

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Table 1

Participants' Debate Questions and Positions

Participants (N=21)	Debate Questions	Position Debated
1. *Cass	Are school uniforms beneficial?	Affirmative
2. Sam	Are abstinence-only programs the best approach to sex education instruction?	Affirmative
3. Trish	Are abstinence-only programs the best approach to sex education instruction?	Negative
4. Jane	Are single-sex classrooms better for students?	Negative
5. David	Are school uniforms beneficial?	Negative
6. Jim	Is ethnocentric education a good idea?	Negative
7. Jenny	Is ethnocentric education a good idea?	Affirmative
8. Mark	Is grade inflation a problem?	Negative
9. Joan	Is grade inflation a problem?	Affirmative
10. John	Is grade inflation a problem?	Affirmative
11. Phil	Should teacher pay be tied to student performance?	Negative
12. Alice	Is achievement level tracking of students a defensible practice?	Affirmative
13. Ron	Should teacher pay be tied to student performance?	Affirmative
14. Karen	Is achievement level tracking of students a defensible practice?	Negative
15. Meg	Should teacher pay be tied to student performance?	Negative
16. Leah	Should teacher pay be tied to student performance?	Affirmative
17. Mary	Is achievement level tracking of students a defensible practice?	Affirmative
18. Lee	Is achievement level tracking of students a defensible practice?	Negative
19. Stella	Are single sex classrooms better for students?	Affirmative
20. Eva	Are single sex classrooms better for students?	Negative
21. Cody	Is ethnocentric education a good idea?	Negative

*Names of participants are pseudonyms

Table 2

Debaters’ Perspectives on Debated Questions

Participants (N = 21)	Interpretive Perspectives Categories of knowledge:	Normative Perspectives Categories of relationship between viewpoint argued and resolution:	Critical Perspectives Categories of thought process for resolution:
	a. Acquired knowledge of debate question by default b. Additional research on both viewpoints of debate question c. Additional research on position argued	a. Expressed agreement with the position argued b. Did not agree with the position argued c. Shifted position as a result of research or debate	a. Explicit critical perspective b. Implicit critical perspective c. Indistinct critical perspective
*1. Cass	a, b	b	a
2. Sam	a, b	b	b
3. Trish	a, b	a	b
4. Jane	a, b	c	a
5. David	a, b	c	a
6. Jim	a, c	a	c
7. Jenny	a, b	b	b
8. Mark	a, b	b	a
9. Joan	a, b	a	b
10. John	a, c	a	c
11. Phil	a, b	a	a
12. Alice	a, b	a	a
13. Ron	a, b	a	a
14. Karen	a, b	a	a
15. Meg	a, b	a	b
16. Leah	a, b	a	a
17. Mary	a, c	a	c
18. Lee	a, b	a	a
19. Stella	a, b	a	a
20. Eva	a, b	c	b
21. Cody	a, b	a	a