#whyIteach: A Content Analysis of Eight Early Childhood Teacher Vignettes

## Statement of the Problem:
A new Pre-K-Grade 3 certificate alongside existing EC-Grade 6 certificate in the state of Texas challenges undergraduates to choose their teaching range. How can teacher educators help them choose wisely?

## Literature Review:
The NAEYC Power to the Profession seeks “a shared framework of career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, and compensation that unifies the entire profession” (2016). The special issue of Early Years (TxAEYC, 2016) focused on four aspects of this endeavor: professional development, credentials and degrees, future directions, and early childhood teacher vignettes.

Identity as an early childhood teacher lies at the heart of our work with young children, and must infuse the Power to the Profession initiative with professional development, credentials and degrees, future directions, and early childhood teacher vignettes.

## Research Questions:
1. What characteristics distinguish high-quality early childhood teachers from high-quality elementary teachers?
2. Who knows and can identify these characteristics that distinguish high-quality early childhood teachers from high-quality elementary teachers?
3. How can identification of characteristics of high-quality early childhood teachers help new teachers select their preferred age/grade level?

## Participants:
At the time of the publication of the special issue of Early Years “Pathways to Becoming an Early Childhood Professional”, the experience of the eight authors ranged from mid-career, mature career, to recently retired. Two are male, six are female; one identifies as African-American, one Hispanic, and six Anglos. Some are still in classrooms with young children, some in administration of programs for children, and some are higher education faculty. All had extensive time in Texas schools and classrooms.

## Methodology:
Researchers triangulated interpretive readings of eight vignettes, noting manifest and latent meanings (Bengtsson, 2016). Coding categories (Lincoln and Guba 1985) emerged from deconstructing the eight texts, the 6337 words in 341 sentences (Hamad, et al, 2016).

These were charted, weighed by frequency, and placed in cross-comparison. Finally, researchers triangulated data for explicit themes summarizing the corpus of vignettes as a whole (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017), seeking theoretical frames to describe the data, diagramming to make sense of theme connections, documenting formation of hierarchies of concepts and themes, and providing thick descriptions of context for interpretations.

Dell Hymes (1969) provided an organizing template useful for analysis of these data:
- Discover a relevant frame or context
- Identify the items which contrast within it
- Determine the dimensions of that contrast

The relevant frame is the collection of teacher vignettes written by eight early childhood educators, collected together in a special issue of Early Years, all on the theme “Pathways to Becoming an Early Childhood Professional”. The items of contrast were ferreted out by the researchers, and the dimensions of contrast were derived through robust analysis and weighted comparisons.

## Results:
More than 100 keywords were recorded on the first, overt analysis of the eight vignettes. Manifest meanings were transcribed from quotes taken directly from the authors. After segmenting at the sentence level, researchers coded 21 categories.

## Conclusion:
There is no single definition of an early childhood professional. The work of this analysis of eight teacher vignettes did produce a robust discussion around various themes and keywords. Identifying compassion, competence, collaboration, creativity, and curiosity as five salient features of the early childhood professional helps to future the conversation, perhaps with elementary teachers, to contrast their identities around these five components.

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