

## **A Continuum of Critical Consciousness: Exploring One Resident's Concerns**

Jori S. Beck

Old Dominion University

### **Abstract**

In the United States, there is a demand for richer clinical teacher education experiences. Partially in response to this call, innovative new programs like teacher residencies are being developed. As teacher preparation programs are shaped by these mandates, researchers must respond to shifts in the field. The current manuscript includes data from a resident, or teacher candidate, enrolled in a residency program—specifically, his yearlong apprenticeship. Using interviews and other qualitative data, the author examined how the resident's concerns shifted and also how these concerns differed from those uncovered in previous research. Specifically, his concerns appeared to be more dynamic than previously reported and the residency program may have scaffolded more student-centered concerns. Implications for practice are provided.

*Keywords:* clinical teacher preparation, teacher residency, teacher concerns

The United States is witnessing a push for richer clinical experiences in teacher education (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2018; National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE] Blue Ribbon Panel, 2010). Partially in response to this call, new programs like teacher residencies (e.g., Solomon, 2009) have been developed and advocated widely (Thorpe, 2014). Indeed, teacher residencies have been funded at increasing rates by programs such as the United States Department of Education's Teacher Quality Partnership Grants (n.d.) yet little is known about the benefits of these programs beyond recruitment and retention (e.g., Papay, West, Fullerton, & Kane, 2012). Zeichner (2014) argued that research on different pathways to teacher certification is inconclusive and advocated researching various programs and maintaining the strongest evidence-based pathways to bolster teacher education. Thus, it is important to study the experiences of teacher candidates in all programs to understand how these programs shape teacher candidates.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the concerns of one resident, or teacher candidate, enrolled in a teacher residency program in an urban center in the United States. This study went beyond the stages of teacher candidates' concerns (Fuller, 1969) to examine one resident's critically conscious concerns—or those concerns related to an individual's social and cultural locations and how to use them to make change (e.g., Cross, Behizadeh, & Holihan, 2018)—since the program specialized in preparing teachers to serve marginalized populations via an asset-based approach. The research questions that guided this study were: How do the concerns of one resident change during his residency year? What is the nature of one resident's concerns?

### **Clinical Teacher Preparation**

In the United States, calls for closer relationships between schools and universities in the preparation of teachers can be traced to the Holmes Group's *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986). Since the publication of this document, clinically rich teacher education has been implemented inconsistently across teacher preparation programs (NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel, 2010). However, relationships between schools and universities are now mandated by the major accrediting body in the United States (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2015) and programs have developed innovative pathways to certification in response to this call such as teacher residency programs.

Teacher residencies are successors of the Professional Development School model that has been used around the world to build connections between universities and schools to prepare teachers (Berry, Montgomery, & Snyder, 2008; Clinard & Ariav, 1998). However, teacher residencies differ from Professional Development Schools in significant ways, such as requiring a yearlong apprenticeship in a classroom with a cooperating teacher. Perhaps most stark is the

explicit mission of teacher residencies to provide access to all students—in both urban and rural locations—to effective teachers and their asset-based approach to teacher recruitment (National Center for Teacher Residencies, n.d.a.) that highlights the strengths of communities (e.g., Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) rather than positioning communities as deficient. Possibly as a result of this explicit mission, as well as supports that the National Center for Teacher Residencies has put in place, these programs have been found to recruit a greater number of teachers of color and to retain teachers in urban schools longer than their counterparts who do not graduate from teacher residency programs (Papay et al., 2012). Academically, Papay and colleagues predicted that graduates of the Boston Teacher Residency would outpace their peers from traditional programs in math student learning after five years. Other research has conveyed how individual teacher residency programs have shaped their recruitment process to select candidates who reflect their vision of quality teachers (Bogges, 2010), provide contextualized teacher preparation (Matsko & Hammerness, 2013), and create new, hybrid roles for veteran teachers (Gardiner & Lorch, 2015). However, relatively little is known about the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of residents in these programs.

### **Theoretical Framework: Teacher Concerns**

Fuller (1969) conducted seminal work on teachers' concerns and uncovered a three-stage developmental model: a pre-teaching phase, an early teaching phase, and a late teaching phase. Within these phases, teachers' concerns moved from concerns about themselves to concerns about their influence on students. These concerns are significant for study since they influence teachers' actions in schools (Marshall, 1996). For example, Dunn and Rakes (2010) found a significant correlation between teacher candidates and their learner-centered concerns—as participants' learner-centeredness increased, so did their concerns about the effect of learner-

centered instruction on their students. The authors concluded that learner-centered teachers show a deeper interest in students and student outcomes. The authors cited their study as important because it demonstrates a malleable teacher characteristic and noted, “Teacher education programmes may also be designed to promote the development of higher-level concerns that promote the use of learner-centered innovations” (p. 520). In their qualitative study of teacher concerns, Cooper and He (2012) found variation in their seven participants’ concerns and the development of those concerns. They advocated that intentional scaffolds be built into teacher preparation programs to support teacher candidates’ development throughout their preparation to help them align their idea of teaching to reality. Teacher educators are critical in this work. Thus, there is evidence that carefully scaffolded and coherent programs may shape teacher candidates’ concerns, which may, in turn, shape their practices.

**Critically conscious teacher concerns.** Recently, research regarding teacher concerns has increased in response to both the changing nature of teacher preparation programs and the demographics of schools in the United States (Cross et al., 2018). I define critically conscious concerns in the same way that Cross and colleagues have: critically conscious educators are aware of their social status based on culture and socioeconomic status and can use their positionality to make societal change. In their study of teacher candidates’ concerns in a social-justice oriented program, Cross and colleagues found that very few of the concerns expressed by their teacher candidates demonstrated high levels of critical consciousness despite the explicit mission of the program. In the same vein, Marshall (1996) developed an instrument to measure multicultural teaching concerns including the following factors: (a) cross-cultural competence, (b) strategies and techniques, (c) school bureaucracy, and (d) familial/group knowledge. The author advocated further examination of these beliefs in light of the shifting demographics in the

student population while the teacher workforce remains White, female, and middle class. Thus, there is emerging evidence that social justice- or equity-oriented teacher preparation programs may struggle to foster critically conscious concerns in their candidates. More needs to be known about (a) how these concerns can be nurtured and (b) how these concerns manifest in teacher candidates and novice teachers since these concerns may determine what teacher candidates and teachers do in their classrooms.

### **Methods**

A longitudinal, qualitative case study was chosen for this investigation because this design would allow an in-depth understanding of the case with all of the complexities of a teacher residency setting (Stake, 2006). The unit of analysis for this study was one participant, an aspiring teacher, and his concerns during his residency year including during his summer coursework and his yearlong apprenticeship in an urban school. The study took place at the Fairview Teacher Residency<sup>1</sup> (FTR) during the 2012-2013 school year.

### **Research Setting**

The FTR was purposefully chosen for this study because it adhered to the criteria of teacher residency programs: targeted recruitment of residents, rigorous vetting of mentor teachers, preservice preparation focused on serving diverse students, induction support, and strategic hiring of graduates (National Center for Teacher Residencies, n.d.a.). The FTR is a partnership among three entities: Sinclair University (SU), an urban, research-focused University that is located in the heart of the city; the Center for the Development of Education Talent, which is affiliated with SU and develops teacher leaders; and Fairview Public Schools (FPS). Fairview City has a population of over 100,000 people of whom 40% identify as Black, 50% as White, 6%

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<sup>1</sup> All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

as Latino, 2% as Asian, and 2% as multiracial. However, the demographics of FPS show an overrepresentation of historically underrepresented students with 88% of FPS students identifying as Black and 74% of these students receiving free and reduced-price lunches.

At the time of this study, the FTR solely prepared secondary teacher candidates in its 18-month program. Candidates completed 18 credit hours between May and August before beginning their residency apprenticeships in September. Required coursework adhered to the prevailing state regulations but was tailored for the FPS and Fairview, specifically (Beck, in press), and included educational ethics and policy, teaching reading in the content areas, human development, secondary curriculum, classroom management, and educational psychology. Residents completed an additional 12 credit hours of content-area methods in the fall and spring while completing their residency experience. Residents were hired by FPS schools for the ensuing year as teachers of record, and the FTR provided induction support during this time. Residents also completed a Community Study Project during their residency year. The purpose of the project was to acculturate residents to Fairview through exploring the assets of the community (e.g., Moll et al., 1992).

### **Participant**

The participant in this case study was chosen through purposive sampling based on several criteria. Since it was a foundational goal of teacher residencies to home grow teachers, it was appropriate to select a resident with ties to the area. The participant, William, is considered a typical case (Patton, 2002) of a candidate whom the FTR recruits due to his commitment to Fairview, FPS students, and social justice, which are qualities that the FTR vetted candidates for during Resident Selection Days. William was chosen among a cohort of 16 residents; since I am a former English-Language Arts teacher, I wanted to interview an English-Language Arts

candidate so that content did not serve as a barrier to understanding his story. Out of the four English-Language Arts candidates, William was the only resident who had grown up in the Fairview area and was my first choice for this study in accordance with my sampling criteria. I submitted for Institutional Review Board approval for this study at my home institution and the study was considered exempt. William provided written consent to participate in the study and to be audio recorded. I offered William a \$10 gift card after each interview but he declined compensation.

At the time of this study, William was 23 years old. He is a White male who grew up in the suburbs of Fairview City. He majored in criminal justice in college and minored in English and did not decide to become a teacher until his senior year. It is common for residency programs to attract college graduates and career changers since they are graduate-level programs and are designed to reduce barriers of entry into teaching (National Center for Teacher Residencies, n.d.b). William explained his rationale for his decision to pursue teaching as a career:

But education, I was told, was the only thing that can make a difference. And all of my sociology professors, they're like, "Actually the only real answer to any of these things isn't more police officers, isn't community policing, it's just education."

After completing his undergraduate degree, William looked for alternate route to licensure programs and discovered teacher residency programs and applied to two programs including the LTR. He spent his residency year at Frederick Douglass Middle School in a Grade 6 English Language Arts classroom. This school served approximately 300 students in grades 6 through 8 who were predominantly African American. William's coach (mentor teacher), Danielle, was a White woman in her late 20s.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews and document collection. William's first interview took place in May 2012 when residency coursework had just begun for his cohort, and these interviews continued on a monthly basis throughout the 2012-2013 academic year. Research concluded in July 2013 after he graduated from the FTR with a master's degree in teaching and had earned a teaching position within FPS for the following year. The entire study took 15 months to complete and 14 interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted between 33 and 70 minutes resulting in 11 hours and 32 minutes of audiotape. In keeping with the emergent design of this study, interview guides changed monthly but were always based on the research questions. Documents collected for this study included rubrics and other evaluation materials from Resident Selection Days, course catalogue descriptions, the FTR's Gradual Release Calendar that dictated when residents should be co-teaching with their coaches or solo teaching, and an ethos statement from the FTR regarding the mission of the program.

## **Data Analysis**

A constant comparative approach was chosen for data analysis due to the ongoing nature of this study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Analysis began with transcription and multiple rounds of coding were conducted (Saldaña, 2009). After each interview, I transcribed the audio file verbatim and highlighted seemingly significant words and phrases during transcription which some qualitative researchers have dubbed “pre-cod[ing]” (Layder, 1998 cited by Saldaña, 2009, p. 16). Additionally, every three to four months, I would conduct a line-by-line coding of the data, organize chunks of data into themes, and write a brief memo about these themes and their manifestation in the interview transcripts.

At the conclusion of the study in July 2013, I began to analyze the data as a whole including relevant documents. Because there were hundreds of pages of data, I broke the data into phases and completed an open coding of each transcript. During this second round of coding, the types of codes that I used included descriptive, in vivo, and values coding (Saldaña, 2009). I then used memo writing to synthesize the themes from these data as part of a particular phase through memo writing. For example, the first phase of data collection occurred between May and August 2012 when William was completing coursework and had not yet entered an FPS classroom. Keeping the study's research questions in mind, I reviewed my codes, noted significant themes in a theme matrix (Stake, 2006), and wrote a memo to synthesize the main points from the data and to make sense of what they meant (Saldaña, 2009). This process was repeated for phase two (i.e., September, October, November, and December 2012 interviews), phase three (i.e., January, February, and March 2013 interviews), and phase four (i.e., April, May, and July 2013 interviews). I included a summary of each phase in each memo, which was particularly useful in synthesizing the data for reporting purposes. I then looked across these four memos and the theme matrix to identify the most significant themes to organize the findings according to Fuller's (1969) phases of teacher concerns.

### **Credibility**

To ensure the credibility of this research, what Maxwell (2013), refers to as validity in qualitative research, I used multiple approaches including rich data; respondent validation; and intensive, long-term involvement. In all, I collected 392 pages of interview transcript data, 692 minutes (11 hours 32 minutes) of audio recordings, and 21 pages of relevant documents. The second method I used to ensure the credibility of my interpretation was respondent validation, or member checking. Specifically, I embedded member checks into the process of data collection

(Sandelowski, 2008) when I conducted interviews with William. During these member checks, I would share with William what I saw as patterns in the data so that he could confirm, correct, or elaborate on my analysis. The following example is taken from our interview on December 20, 2012:

Researcher: When I was looking at these data the other day, it seems like the seminar series is the most pivotal element of the program? Would you agree?

Participant: I mean, that is the most like steady part of the program. We don't really do get together or anything so that part of the cohort isn't really there. I would say the seminars are definitely how they keep tabs on us, how we can ask questions of them ... kind of like the glue that keeps the whole thing [program] intact.

In this instance, William does not simply agree with my interpretation but instead provides nuance to my observation and corrects my nascent understanding. A member check was also included at the end of the study when the participant read through a draft of the manuscript and confirmed my interpretation. Maxwell (2013) noted, "In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done" (p. 91). Because I spent months getting to know William, our relationship was honest and open and he felt safe in correcting my understanding to ensure a credible research product.

### **Limitations**

Unfortunately, FPS would not allow me access to observe William, so data collection was limited in this regard. This limitation is troubling since teacher residency programs have an explicit mission to build relationships. My status as an outsider to Sinclair University and the school district likely raised suspicion; at the same time, this outsider status also provided me with objectivity in conducting this investigation not evident in previous studies of teacher residencies

(e.g., Gardiner & Lorch, 2015). To gain insight into William's teaching without actually observing him, I adapted Flick's (2000) episodic interviewing technique. This interviewing technique taps into episodic knowledge, which is "linked to concrete circumstances (time, space, people, events, situations)" (p. 77). For example, I asked William what he would do if I were a student in his classroom who was being openly defiant and to describe the steps he would take in order to resolve the situation.

### **Findings**

The findings are reported as a narrative that begins with William's coursework before he began his residency year (i.e., pre-teaching concerns) and concludes with his residency year (i.e., early teaching concerns). Fuller's (1969) model of teacher concerns is used to report the findings (a) because this work is germinal, (b) to convey how my findings extend previous work, and (c) because the nature and sample of my data collection align well with this developmental model. Both of the phases of teacher concerns reported here respond to my research questions: How do the concerns of one resident change during his residency year? What is the nature of one resident's concerns?

#### **Pre-Teaching Concerns**

According to Fuller's (1969) work, pre-teaching concerns were typically disconnected from the actual work of teaching. In the summer before his residency year, William grappled with the ideas presented in his coursework and his upcoming residency year including work with his coach. His concerns were directly related to teaching which contradicts Fuller's findings. However, throughout his stages of development, I found that William's concerns tended to be more dynamic than represented by Fuller's model. At first, William expressed being overwhelmed by the ideas about teaching presented in his coursework,

So I find myself, not coming from an education background, kind of buying into almost everything that I'm reading. Because a lot of them [authors] are very persuasive with their writing and their arguments ... It's kind of hard to mold your own [educational philosophy], just right now, because I'm getting so many convincing arguments...

Thus, the intensity of summer coursework may have caused concerns for this new teacher who was not yet able to apply this information to his own classroom. However, at the end of this summer experience he noted, "We're [residents] also wanting to actually get some real-world experience to apply to what we've learned. So it's [residency year] coming at the right time." Thus, this particular scaffold may have prepared William and his fellow residents for their yearlong apprenticeships.

William also expressed concern about his upcoming residency year and, in particular, his work with his coach. He hoped that his coach would allow him to "ease into things ... give me some responsibilities so I'm not just like the guy in the corner ..." He also hoped that his coach would also allow him to develop his own teaching identity. He recognized that building relationships with students individually was a strength for him while he worried about his presence in front of an entire classroom. He also worried about his qualifications to be a teacher,

Just with being the age that I am. And I've had discussions with some of the older people in the cohort ... who am I to have no life experience and be in front of the classroom?

I'm only 23 years old and haven't really been anywhere. Haven't had any really big experiences. But it's going to be my job to be ... responsible for people's education.

Which is a huge responsibility ... did I do this at the right time?

Thus, William wondered whether he was even qualified to be a teacher and lead a classroom of students. William also noted that this summer was the first time in his life that he had

conversations about race. However, he did not describe these conversations or his concerns about race in depth. In contrast to Fuller (1969), who found that pre-teaching concerns were disconnected from the work of teaching, William's concerns at this stage were related to teaching but conveyed an uneasiness related to his career and developing knowledge.

### **Early Teaching Concerns**

In Fuller's (1969) work, early teaching concerns differed little from pre-teaching concerns and the teachers tended to focus on themselves. During William's residency year, or yearlong student teaching (August 2012 through June 2013), William's concerns shifted sharply away from his coursework, "It's tough to put those in a priority. I mean, because your *real* day is in the classroom and you're planning for that" (original emphasis). His concerns in this stage again demonstrated a movement forward and backward in his development. This phase of data collection showed nuance in the development of William's concerns regarding relationships with students and classroom management and thus shifted almost entirely to his students.

William felt he was good at developing individual relationships with students but worried about how this would translate to his leadership in the classroom. Moreover, he was concerned with how students would view him in the classroom—a concern that Fuller (1969) identified previously. William elaborated,

It was important to us [William and his coach] to kind of just establish my presence in the classroom because ... if I start off too slow then when it comes time for me to be the lead teacher then I'm kind of two steps back and they won't see me as an assertive voice in the classroom. So even though she [coach] was definitely the lead teacher, I was like *always* involved in every part of the class. (original emphasis)

This concern was compounded by the fact that William had classes on Friday and was not at Douglass on those days which he felt was a setback in his goal to build his teacher persona and rapport with his students. Indeed, William's concerns about relationships with his students were twofold: he was concerned about his students' perceptions of him as a leader in the classroom while he also wanted to ensure that he was building productive relationships with his students. In November, he reflected that his identity as a White male might have prevented him from connecting with his Black male students who could instead identify with the Black male authority figures in the school. This sentiment is notable because it indicated his understanding of the importance of representation for his students but also seemed to identify William as an outsider. William's concerns about his relationships with students turned into his greatest reward in teaching, "I would say with me getting positive feedback from the students is good because that's the part of it that I'm putting into it the most is the relationship-building." Thus, his concern transformed into his strength. William was student centered in his approach to teaching both in how he interacted with students and in his teaching methods, and he was beginning to think critically about his relationships with his students.

William also became concerned with classroom management during his early teaching. In September a student defied him and he took the student into the hall to have a conversation. He wondered, "What am I going to say to this kid out in the hall?" These concerns grew and changed during the year. By October he was struggling to reconcile his relationships with students while in the role as teacher, which required him to be more assertive; for example, his coach encouraged him to work on his "empty consequences." However, his coach was also a source of concern while he was developing his classroom management repertoire. William felt

compelled to conform to her style even while he was still grappling with competing ideals from his coursework,

She [Danielle] does not like chaos in the room. And that's kind of rubbed off on me now where I think coming off of [SU coursework] I would have been like, "Alright, a few pockets of talking here, who am I to say ... like [students] shouldn't be talking about other things." [chuckles] But now like I find myself being like, "There's no talking!"

Thus, William seemed concerned about adopting his coach's style even though it was not comfortable for him.

By December, student behavior was William's primary concern. There had been an increase in the number of fights at Douglass since November. He was also making several phone calls to parents during class and pulling many students for hall conferences. His struggles with behavior continued throughout the year; in January, William thought he had classroom management under control and then, "the last two days I'm like, ugh!" In March, he described how this was, at times, a gendered issue for him,

I think I've found it easier to deal with the guys ... if the guys give me attitude I know how to handle that, but with the *girls*, [if they] decide to cuss me out or, you know, lose it a little bit, then I don't know how to handle that as much. So I'll usually just let the parent handle that at that point. (original emphasis)

Although William developed a larger repertoire of classroom management practices, and he noted wonderful experiences with his students, he still expressed moments of what he felt to be defeat, "You make all these big moves with kids and then you can't be with them at all times." Such a stance is dangerous in that it can presume that the White teacher is there to save the poor, Black child (Chubbuck, 2010). In contrast to Fuller's (1969) model, William's concerns at this

stage wavered between himself and his students and were fluid rather than static. Fuller depicted teachers' early teaching concerns as more steadily focused on the new teacher rather than students.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Teacher preparation in the United States is shifting toward a clinical model (AACTE, 2018). As a result of these calls, programs such as teacher residencies have placed teacher candidates in schools for extended periods of time. Moreover, some of these candidates are now spending increased time in schools with diverse populations of students, and their beliefs may change due to scaffolds provided in these programs and/or interactions with students. Teacher concerns can influence practice and, thus, are worthy of in-depth exploration (Marshall, 1996). The current study conveys the concerns of one resident during his summer coursework and residency year at a teacher residency in the southeastern United States.

My findings extend previous work on new and novice teacher concerns in at least two ways. First of all, in contrast to previous reporting of the phases of teacher concerns (e.g., Cross et al., 2018; Fuller, 1969), I found that William's concerns were not static but instead moved in a Z-wave pattern which Baily and Katradis (2016) have described as, "two steps forward, one step back" (p. 224). For example, although William was student-centered in his concerns and his teaching practices, which is in line with the research on teacher concerns (Marshall, 1996), he also conveyed a savior view (Chubbuck, 2010) at times that did not seem to be remedied or challenged. Thus, these views about students in need of saving likely held him back from being consistently student-centered in his concerns and practices.

Second, my study extends previous literature by examining critically conscious concerns as an inherent element of new and novice teacher concerns. Previously, these have been studied

as a separate construct (Marshall, 1996), which perpetuates the notion that critical consciousness is outside of teacher education. In a study focused on critically conscious concerns specifically, Cross and colleagues (2018) conveyed how, even in a program focused on social justice, teacher candidates' concerns can still manifest in dangerously dysconscious ways. William expressed a continuum of critically conscious concerns that shifted throughout his summer coursework and residency year. Further research should follow teacher candidates into their beginning years as teachers of record to examine how these concerns evolve at the individual level to build on Fuller's (1969) model. As student populations grow and change demographically so too do new and novice teachers' concerns about these students and their teaching. Teacher educators have a responsibility to explore these shifts as the field innovates.

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