

# **Student Teachers' Thinking Revealed in Self-Reported Dilemmas**

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**The Problem: How can we “see” our student teachers’ thinking about complex ideas such as:**

**what their students must think about in order to understand a scientific concept?**

**the point at which their students’ struggles with a problem diminish their motivation to solve it?**

**what their students’ academic work reveals about their levels of meaningful understanding?**

# What research grounds the study?

<i>The Research Base</i>	<i>Grounding our Intentions to:</i>
<b>Carter, 1990; Clark &amp; Peterson, 1986; Connelly &amp; Clandinin, 1990; Elbaz, 1983; Ericsson &amp; Simon, 1980; Lampert, 1985; Munby, 1986; Schön, 1983; Shulman, 1987; Tobin, 1990.</b>	<b>understand teacher thinking about complex ideas.</b>
<b>Evans &amp; Tribble, 1986; Fuller, 1969; Fuller &amp; Brown, 1975; Haritos, 2004; Kagan, 1992; Veenman, 1984.</b>	<b>identify student teachers' thinking about their practices.</b>
<b>Lampert, 1985, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Marland &amp; Osborne, 1990; Tomanek, 1994, 1996.</b>	<b>use teachers' dilemmas as windows for viewing their thinking.</b>

# The Research Questions

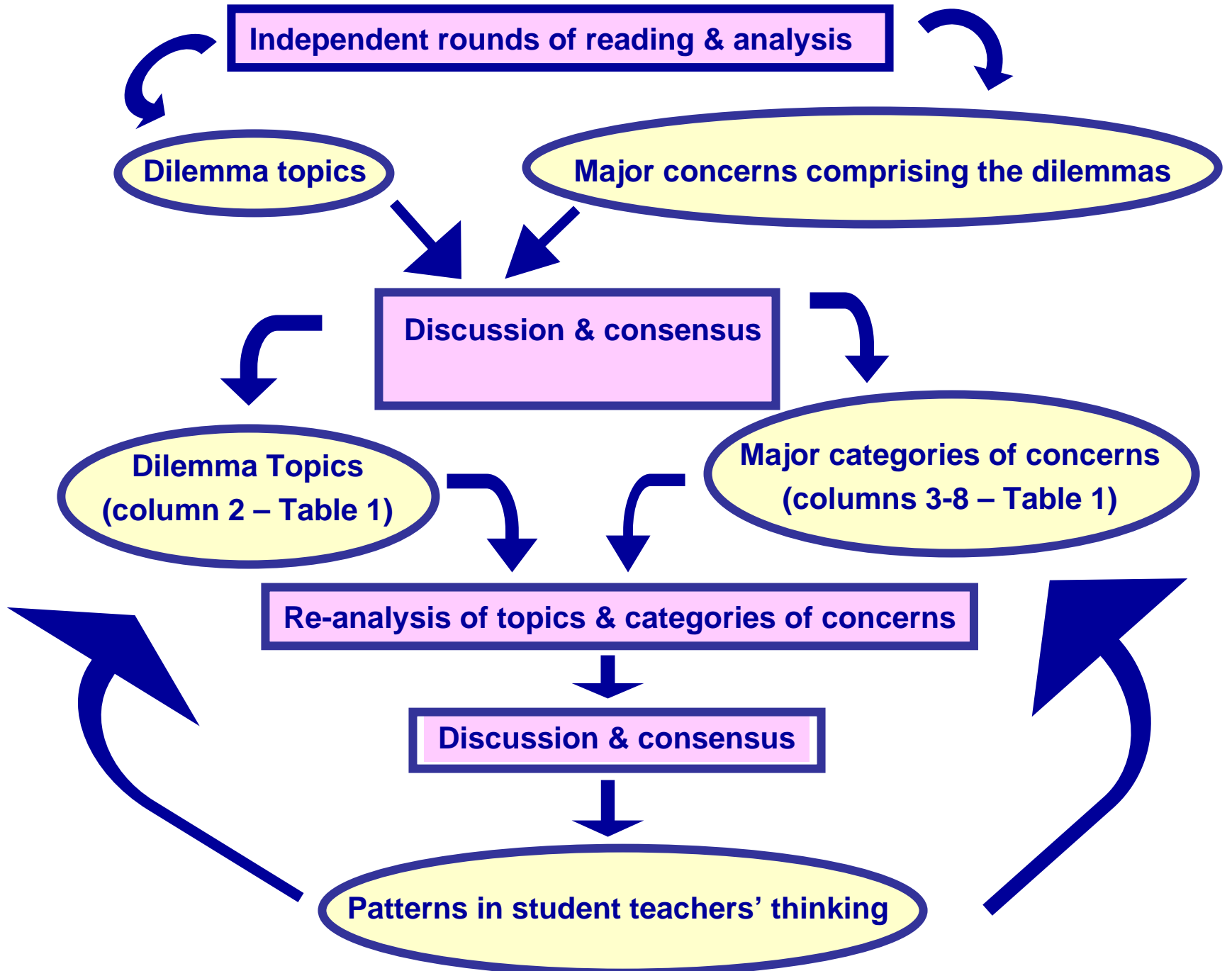
- **What do student teachers identify as dilemmas in their teaching practices?**
- **What self-reported concerns comprise the dilemmas?**
- **What does dilemma analysis reveal about student teachers' thinking about their practices?**

## **Box 1. Dilemma Analysis Instrument.**

**Identify a particular issue related to teaching or learning that has caught your attention during your student teaching and carefully analyze it. Select an important dilemma for you as a teacher that has made you reflect on a problem that has forced you to make a decision. Build your analysis in a narrative form addressing the following questions:**

- 1. What was the problem or dilemma?**
- 2. Why was it important or relevant to you?**
- 3. How did the dilemma emerge? How did it develop?**
- 4. How did you try to solve the problem? What was the rationale for your decision?**
- 5. How did the dilemma influence your beliefs about teaching or learning?**
- 6. What would you do the next time?**

**The assignment should be clearly written and well organized. It should be composed on a word processor, with 1'' margins, single-line spacing and a letter font-size between 11 and 12 points. The narrative should not exceed 4 single-sided pages.**



## Findings

**What do student teachers identify as dilemmas in their teaching practices?**

**\*Column 2 (Table 1)**

**What self-reported concerns comprise the dilemmas?**

**\*Columns 3-8 (Table 1)**

# Major Categories of Concerns (sample data)

## 1. Student Motivation

***“A problem that I encountered dealt with students that had lost their motivation and no longer cared about school. I had several students in my classes that simply did not want to be there so they refused to do any of the work. . .I was not sure what more to do to keep them engaged.” (Group 1, teacher Ic\*)***

***“A few weeks ago, in the middle of a review over balancing chemical reactions, a bright, curious, yet unmotivated, student called out, “Miss, why do we have to learn this? I was stunned. I was not stunned by the question, which was valid despite its inappropriate timing. I was stunned by my own lack of a proper response.” (Group 2, teacher llh)***

## **2. Student Success & Achievement**

*“The frustration I felt trying to accommodate students who were not willing to attend classes, unable to participate in classes, or to understand the class due to language barriers became almost unbearable as the semester progressed.” (Group 1, teacher Ij)*

## **3. Task and Classroom Management**

*“So I had some mixed feelings of what I should do towards this problem of students failing the class. So I decided that I needed to do everything I could for the students that would help them learn and enable [them] to pass the class, except do the work for them. . . I do not want my students’ grades to fail, because they were not given enough opportunities to show their strengths.” (Group 1, teacher If)*

## **4. Students' Emotional and Social Well-Being**

***“When it came time for progress reports I realized that while student of the month recognizes students that have improved or those who are doing well and those involved in athletics are often mentioned on announcements, nothing is done to acknowledge those students who are succeeding in academics.” (Group 1, teacher Ia)***

## 5. Curriculum & Instruction

***“One of my biggest dilemmas I had this semester was deciding what content to teach to my Systems Biology class. Included in that big dilemma were many smaller problems, like, ‘How in-depth should I teach this subject?’ and ‘In what order should I teach the different human body systems?’ and ‘How much time should I allow for each system’ “ (Group 2, teacher IIg)***

## 6. Student Learning & Understanding

***“I don’t think many of my students’ grades are an accurate representation of their level of understanding. . . .I was noticing that we were giving students a lot of busy work to do in class and out of class and then simply grading that work mainly based on completion of the assignment. We didn’t really even look at the answers to see if they got them correct. We were more concerned with whether the students actually completed the assignment.” (Group 2, teacher IIa)***

# What does dilemma analysis reveal about student teachers' thinking about their practices?

- As earlier research has revealed, student teachers concerns are largely focused on “pupils and teaching situations”.
- **Personal beliefs about teaching and students ground student teachers' thinking about complex dilemmas.**
- **Student teachers negotiate what they perceive as externally imposed constraints on their practices that they have little control over.**
- **Student teacher thinking focuses more on extreme, rather than commonplace, classroom events.**
- **Student teachers in middle schools and high schools demonstrate different thinking about strategies for dilemma resolution.**
- **Student teachers exhibit a compartmentalization of their thinking about complex teaching dilemmas by reducing the number of variables comprising the dilemmas.**

## Acknowledgements

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