Chapter 27

Pose/Wobble/Flow: Designing Connected Learning Opportunities for Preservice Teachers in the Era of the Common Core

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how culture, technology, and standards intersect to create a complex environment for preservice teachers that shapes their understanding of how to teach composition. The authors draw on the cases of two undergraduate students engaged in immersive digital writing experiences to present a model called “Pose/Wobble/Flow.” This model attempts to capture the non-linear, recursive nature of teachers’ professional growth by acknowledging and interrogating uncertainties, positional-ity, and cultural privilege. The authors recommend the creation of virtual and face-to-face communities of practice wherein preservice teachers can take up stances, or poses, toward their practice and reflect on areas in which they “wobble” with the intent of attaining provisional moments of progress in their teaching. They conclude that engaging preservice teachers in cycles of Pose/Wobble/Flow increases the likelihood that they will in turn construct learning experiences for their students that include robust opportunities for digital composing and interaction.

INTRODUCTION

It showed me how difficult it can be, I think, to apply some of those theories and those practices, but at the same time how natural it can come in the moment. (Brittany Belmarez, preservice teacher)

Developing digital pedagogies. Learning effective strategies for teaching English Language Learners to write. Figuring out how to meet challenging instructional standards. Any one of these tasks can be challenging for preservice teachers and teacher educators alike, but in many schools today, none of them occurs in isolation. As you can
see, however, Brittany, the preservice teacher we quote above, describes the process of taking on all three challenges at once as feeling “natural... in the moment.” We believe that she developed the ability to embrace the difficulties inherent in these simultaneous tasks through her participation in the “Saving Our Stories Project,” a youth writing program sponsored by the Colorado State University Writing Project (CSUWP). This ongoing program connects preservice English teachers, K-12 teachers across content areas, and elementary English Language Learners (ELLs) for the purpose of meeting an actionable need, in this case the preservation of stories from the local Latino community that might otherwise be lost.

In this chapter we describe the multifaceted design of the Saving Our Stories (SOS) Project and related coursework from our respective reading and writing methods courses for preservice teachers. We outline the conceptual framework that informs those projects, including the principles of “connected learning” (Ito, Gutiérrez, Livingstone, Penuel, Rhodes, Salen, Schor, Sefton-Green, & Watkins, 2013) and a model for teacher growth and development we call “Pose/Wobble/Flow.” To illustrate these principles and the model, we present the cases of two preservice teachers—Brittany and Chelsea—and describe the role digital tools in particular have played in enabling their development into more culturally proactive teachers. We conclude the chapter by suggesting practical strategies that teacher educators might use to design similar professional learning experiences for preservice and practicing teachers in their respective contexts. Likewise, we suggest that these practices have become invisible to them.

From Digital Literacies to Connected Learning

As teacher educators who embrace technology use in our personal and professional lives, we understand our responsibility to model these dispositions for our preservice teachers. Even more important, we strive to demonstrate through our own teaching how technology can be used in the classroom to amplify students’ learning and composing practices. We are ambivalent about the now ubiquitous term “digital native” (Prensky, 2001) because it sets up a binary opposition that implies technological prowess as a fixed natural attribute related solely to age, artificially homogenizes youth experiences with technology, and also disregards access issues experienced by less affluent youth (Bayne & Ross, 2011; Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010; Helsper & Eynon, 2009). Yet we have found that our university students, who have ready access to technology thanks to the exorbitant technology fees they pay each semester, feel almost universally comfortable using digital literacies in their everyday lives—so much so that these practices have become invisible to them.

The same is likely to be true for their future students according to recent research (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Magill, 2008) that reports that adolescents do not view texting, instant messaging, posting to Facebook, and other networking practices in mostly out-of-school spaces as legitimate tools for composing that might support their academic learning. Even when students participate extensively in informal digital learning communities outside of school where literacy practices are central—fan fiction sites and “massive multiplayer online games,” for example—they see their participation as ancillary, at best, to the composing they are required to do in school. This tendency can be especially true for ELLs (see Black, 2007). Furthermore, this participation in digital environments can be invisible to their teachers, who may only