Chapter 10

Developmental Trajectories, Disciplinary Practices, and Sites of Practice in Novice Teacher Learning: A Thing to Be Learned

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates the complex web of increasingly authentic experiences in a teacher preparation program. In particular, the chapter focuses on how guiding design principles inform signature pedagogies that extend teacher candidates’ experiences beyond the coursework and fieldwork experiences in which pre-service candidates typically engage. These signature pedagogies—disciplinary practices, video club, rehearsals, live actor simulations, and residencies—are shaped by the guiding principles of attention to a novice teacher developmental trajectory, commitments to learning in and through practice, and attention to equity and access to learning opportunities in educational contexts. The chapter

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INTRODUCTION

I thought learning to teach wasn’t really a thing to be learned; how hard can it be to stand up in front of class and share what I know about the content I love? I guess I had a student’s view of teaching and I didn’t know how very complex and really hard that it is. —Sophie, 2014

Much of the national conversation about teacher education focuses on questioning the value of teacher preparation, critiquing the preparation programs currently in place, and emphasizing the need for teachers in low-income and rural areas. This critique reveals misconceptions and shallow understandings of what it is that teachers actually do when they teach. Sophie’s question, how hard can it be? demonstrates one of the great challenges of teacher preparation—making visible the intellectual and socially constructed work of teaching. As Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage (2005) explained, “teaching looks simple from the perspective of students who see a person talking and listening, handing out papers, and giving assignments” (p. 1). Teaching looks simple; a great deal of the work of teaching—how teachers think about content and students, make pedagogical decisions, incorporate specific teacher moves, develop disciplinary practices, and respond in educative ways—is imperceptible to those who participate in those classes as learners. That active decision-making and use of teacher judgment can be invisible complicates the task of preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse and connected world.

Teacher preparation is an iterative process of re-examining how teachers are developing. Whether centered on a grammar of practice and teacher practices (Grossman et al., 2007), high leverage practices (Ball & Forzani, 2009, 2010), or ambitious teaching (Kazemi, Lampert, & Franke, 2009), the challenge is to make what teachers do visible and learnable for novices. Program faculty looking to strengthen teacher preparation must take up a significant design challenge: to move pre-service teachers along a developmental trajectory from a naïve image of teaching to a more nuanced understanding of the work of teaching so that they enter the teaching force safe to practice and ready to learn.

Safe to practice and ready to learn may seem too modest a goal for the project of professional education, but it captures a reality that all teachers acknowledge: one cannot fully master the task of teaching without years of experience. What can occur in a four-year preparation program or a fifth year licensure program is that a novice teacher learns to see what students are thinking, make sense of what students already know in light of curricular goals and standards, and respond pedagogically in a way that enables all students to think and understand in new ways. Developing this cluster of pedagogical dispositions—noticing, interpreting and responding to students—does not ensure that a novice teacher will always make the most generative instructional moves, but it does make it likely that the teacher will do no harm—because she is attending carefully to her students, their cultures and contexts—and it also makes it likely that the teacher will learn in responsive interaction with students informed by the ways her students learn and grow. Thus, an emphasis on careful attention, thoughtful interpretation, and caring response can actually be understood as an ambitious goal. Not only does this constitute what can actually be accomplished in a narrow time frame, but it also includes a strong base for a lifetime of learning in and through practice.
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