Chapter 15
Embedding Elementary Teacher Education Coursework in Local Classrooms: Examples in Mathematics and Special Education

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ABSTRACT
Accrediting bodies and research have noted the divide between coursework and experiences pre-service teachers (PSTs) have during field placements. To address this issue, three teacher educators have integrated McDonald et al.’s (2013) cycle of learning to embed their teacher preparation coursework in the areas of mathematics and special education into local elementary school classrooms. These instructional activities consisted of PSTs experiencing or learning about the activity in the college/university classroom, co-planning and rehearsing the activity at the college/university with the teacher educator, enacting the activity individually or in pairs with whole class or small groups of elementary students at the elementary school, and then debriefing as a group with the teacher educator and classroom teacher after working with the elementary students. The three courses summarized in this chapter, and the subsequent student reflections, validate the effectiveness of this practice and signal a need for broader adoption in other content areas across teacher preparation programs.

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INTRODUCTION

The education of teachers in the United States needs to be turned upside down. To prepare effective teachers for 21st century classrooms, teacher education must shift away from a norm that emphasizes academic preparation and coursework loosely linked to school-based experiences. Rather, it must move to programs that are fully grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses. (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010, p. ii).

To address the concern noted above and the divide between teacher preparation coursework and the experiences teaching candidates have in the field (Grossman Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Lampert & Graziani, 2009; McDonald, Kazemi, & Schneider-Kavanagh, 2013), teacher educators have situated teacher preparation coursework within the context of purposefully observing, planning, rehearsing, enacting, and reflecting on field-based experiences with elementary students in a local school setting, providing pre-service teachers (PSTs) with the most authentic experience to support their development of ambitious teaching (Virmani et al., in press). “The move from discussing what one might do as a teacher to actually taking on the role of the teacher is a critical one, allowing novices to assume the role and persona of the teacher while receiving feedback on their early efforts to enact a practice” is a crucial, and often missing, piece in a preservice teacher’s development of ambitious teaching practices (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 283). Additionally, embedding teacher preparation coursework in local classrooms affords teacher educators unparalleled opportunities to engage their PSTs in authentic situations for enacting theoretical ideas from the teacher education classroom with actual students while providing real-time feedback and debriefing opportunities on experiences (Virmani et al., in press).

The authors’ work is grounded in instructional activities that support pre-service teachers in college- or university-based teacher education programs to develop knowledge of and experience with enacting ambitious teaching practices through learning about, rehearsing, enacting in real classrooms, and debriefing pedagogical “chunks” that can then be transferred to novel situations (Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Lampert, Beasley, Ghousseini, Kazemi, & Franke, 2010; McDonald et al., 2013). According to Kazemi, Franke, and Lampert (2009) “Ambitious teaching requires that teachers teach in response to what students do as they engage in problem solving performances, all while holding students accountable to learning goals that include procedural fluency, strategic competence, adaptive reasoning, and productive dispositions” (p. 1). It is defined by educators’ and educational reformers’ aim to meet ambitious learning goals: for all students to develop complex ideas and proficiencies (Lampert et al., 2010).

Instructional activities are tasks that intend to support novice teachers learning important pedagogical moves while maintaining flexibility to work with students by attending to the specific structures of how teachers and students interact with content (Lampert & Graziani, 2009). In these instructional activities, pedagogical moves “can be represented as a set of routine steps—an action protocol—that is used to structure teacher-student-content relations around some authentic disciplinary problem” (p. 499). The activities embody all the complexities of ambitious teaching, but they limit what is required of novices in any given moment by routinizing the interactive structures between the teacher, the student, and the content. These structures provide novices with ways to elicit and respond to student thinking developing novices’ own professional judgment. “Rehearsing, enacting, and debriefing these routines make it possible for novices to develop this judgment while holding many other aspects of interaction constant” (Lampert & Graziani, 2009, p. 500). The rehearsing, enacting, and debriefing of the instructional activity
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