Chapter 5

A Teacher Educator’s Meaning-Making From a Hybrid “Online Teaching Fellows” Professional Learning Experience: Toward Literacy Practices for Teaching and Learning in Multimodal Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a two-part, hybrid “Online Teaching Fellows” faculty development initiative and the tensions and transformations one faculty participant experienced. Case study and self-study research methodologies were utilized to systematically document and explore, from an insider’s perspective, the lived experience of professional learning related to the design and delivery of online courses. This chapter identifies and describes tensions and transformations that contributed to professional learning and concludes with a discussion of how literacy practices in the design of frameworks for teaching and for learning may contribute to understanding how instructors read and make meaning from experiences in the context of professional learning. Implications extend Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading and writing to multimodal online teaching and learning contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Within the burgeoning context of the distance education boom, opportunities for prospective and practicing teachers to take online courses abound. However, the teacher educators who are asked or expected to design and/or teach online courses are often unfamiliar with learning online. There is a need to consider training that facilitates professional learning experiences and prepares teacher educators to design and deliver online instruction that reflects recognized quality standards (e.g., Quality Matters, 2014) and DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6322-8.ch005
principles for “good teaching” (e.g., Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Sorcinelli, 1991; Tobin, Mandernach, & Taylor, 2015), that addresses concerns for teacher learning and development for using digital media (cf. Selwyn, 2013; Barton & Lee, 2013), addresses the increasing focus on learning and the learner in higher education, and provides learning opportunities that are interactive, relevant, personalized, and accessible (Brown, Dehoney, & Millichap, 2015; Dumbauld, 2014; Long & Mott, 2017; Online Learning Consortium, 2016; Online Schools Center, 2017; Zimmer, 2017).

In the area of teachers’ continuing professional development, several models exist for structuring and organizing teachers’ learning opportunities. Kennedy (2005) identified nine models: training; award-bearing; deficit; cascade; standard based; coaching/mentoring; community of practice; action research; and transformative. Throughout the literature in teacher education, there has been consensus that traditional professional development—training that is transmissive in nature, based the “banking concept of education” (Freire, 1970;1998) in which instructors, researchers, or experts “deposit” knowledge by covering curriculum, providing weekend workshops, or bringing outside research into schools and tell educators what to do—have not been successful (Freidus, Feldman, Sgouros, & Wiles-Kettenmann, 2005).

In teacher education literature, there have been calls for models for teachers’ professional development that is meaningful, agentive, constructivist, collaborative, sustained, and documents making a difference in the work teachers do (e.g., Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Freidus, Feldman, Sgouros, & Wiles-Kettenmann, 2005; Bostock, Lisi-Neumann, & Collucci, 2016; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Lotherington, Fisher, Jenson, & Lindo, 2016; Kopcha, 2010). Bostock and colleagues (2016) call for a paradigm shift from professional development to professional learning. They assert:

*Professional development for teachers, typically referred to as activities such as continuing education, study groups, or in-service workshops designed to enhance professional growth, helps teachers to not only learn new teaching approaches but also develop new insights into pedagogy and their own practice. Oftentimes, professional developers identify the desire to change (Guskey, 2002; Stein & Wang, 1998) or “transform (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuecky, 2014) teachers and their practice as though there is something lacking in teachers or something needing to be improved in how they understand and do things. Recent literature in the field, however, offers additional suggestions regarding ways to foster the authentic continuing education of teachers so that opportunities for teacher learning are directly relevant to teachers and their classroom and, therefore, more effective (p. 44).*

While professional development may be improvement aimed, both in teacher education and in higher education, professional development often addresses or assumes a perceived deficit on the part of the participant (Bostock, Lisi-Neumann, & Collucci, 2016; Kennedy, 2005; Persellin & Goodrick, 2010). Teacher education faculty need opportunities to learn as professionals and as adults (Brancato, 2003; Lawler, 2003) in online and hybrid contexts through collaboration and questioning in communities of practice (Hjalmarsone, 2017; Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, & Hewson, 2010); they also need to understand those professional learning experiences in ways that support their own ability to generate meaningful online learning opportunities for the prospective and practicing teachers whom they instruct in the online environment.

Edge (2015) has argued that part of the problem in preparing teachers is the orientation that reality is only “out there” in (brick and mortar) classrooms, rather than wherever one presently is. Drawing on