

Role of multiple contexts in TEP students' development of teaching identity, interest and commitment to learning to teach

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We have recently completed two years of study on our inquiry into the development of preservice teachers' identity and teaching practice. Specifically, over the last two years, we have studied how preservice teachers develop their identities as teachers; what motivates them to learn aspects of teaching; and how they adapt practices they learn in various parts of their teacher education program to their preservice and inservice teaching contexts.

Our study has been framed by sociocultural approaches to the process of learning to teach (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004) and to identity development (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), which acknowledge that motivation and identity are constituted by the meanings that are made and practices that are activated in specific social contexts.

We have used ethnographic methods to study four math and four social studies teachers as they participated in TEP classes, observed and taught in their field placements, and had conversations with their cooperating teachers and university supervisors. We have also interviewed (and continue to interview) these teachers several times over the last two years, focusing at each iteration on the themes of the past, present, and future. Because we view identity and practice as situated in social contexts, we have interviewed the individuals who create learning opportunities for our teachers: TEP instructors, University Supervisors, and Cooperating Teachers. Our participants have graduated from TEP and are currently in their first years of teaching, so we have taken a slightly different approach to data collection: occasional intensive visits in order to get a sense for the daily life and full breadth of their teaching context.

Through detailed analysis of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and artifacts, we have developed a theory of teacher identity, learning and motivation that includes:

- A sociocultural model for preservice teacher identity development, which envelops a student teacher's past, present, and future teaching identities.
- The mechanism of *motivational filters*, which student teachers use to decide which ideas and practices to adopt or adapt as they learn to teach, and which to learn only well enough to pass evaluations.
- A redefinition of the "gap" between the university and school teaching and learning contexts as *productive* and *potentially positive* space. We found that a small amount of dissonance for our teachers created the need to adapt practices

into new teaching contexts, which led us to construct “recontextualization chains” as a unit of analysis.

- *Recontextualization chains* trace a “practice” of teaching from its to its articulation in TEP courses to its implementation by our teachers in their student teaching contexts to its reflection by our participants in post-lesson interviews. Teaching contexts are never isomorphic; nor are teaching practices. Using this analytic approach allows us to see the changes in practices from one context to the next, and how and why teachers in fact recontextualize practices.

Current work: Studying our teachers in their first years of teaching provides crucial cohesion to our work in the preservice domain. Few studies have been able to closely study the learning of preservice teachers (in programs of teacher education) and their consequent development of practice as beginning teachers (exceptions are Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000 and Steele, 2001). What practices have been successful for our teachers? What opportunities did they have to learn and work on these practices in their TEP? How have these practices been recontextualized? How can this knowledge help teacher educators, then, refine their own practices to better prepare teachers for their dynamic work?

References

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