Development of a post-lesson observation conferencing protocol: Situated in theory, research, and practice

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Few known methods to educate teacher educators.
- Self-study results in improved practice and knowledge generation.
- Conferencing protocols support teacher candidate's self-assessment.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Since student teaching experiences are paramount, teacher educators' development of their own field-instruction practice should be studied. This self-study analyzes the five-year development process of my self-created post-lesson observation conferencing protocol. Story line methodology and personal/practical narrative inquiry were used to juxtapose key events with changes to the protocol over time. Through the analysis, gaps between my developing theoretical understandings and my actual practice were identified. The recognition of these misalignments resulted in two outcomes, (a) additional improvements to the protocol and my practice (b) production of a conceptual framework and protocol for conferencing with student teachers.

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1. Introduction

The public and private sector, and institutes of education are questioning the education of teachers (Ball & Hill, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Grossman, 2008; Strauss, 2013; Winerip, 2011; Zhao, 2011) and, in turn, the education and practices of teacher educators (Korthagen, Loughran, & Lunenberg, 2005; Loughran & Berry, 2005). Since clinical practice, field based learning, or student teaching, has been a prized component of most teacher preparation programs across the globe for decades, then teacher educators' own learning trajectories around providing field-based instruction should be carefully studied (Ajayi & Lee, 2005; Davenport & Smetana, 2004; Freidus, 2002; Griffin, 1989; Pena & Almaguer, 2007; Scheeler, McAfee, Ruhl, & Lee, 2006; Shantz & Ward, 2000; Veal & Rikard, 1998).

1.1. Importance of studying field-instructors' conferencing practices with preservice teachers

The experiential nature of the student teaching practicum alone will not teach preservice teachers how to learn from their teaching (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). In fact, teacher-candidates can become mis-educated (Dewey, 1938) by unmediated experiences (Soslau, 2012a, 2012b; Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1986). However, field-instructors can engage candidates in discourse exchanges during post-lesson observation conferences to provide critical learning opportunities (Soslau, 2012a, 2012b; Christensen, 1988; Clift & Brady, 2005; Roberts, 1990). Many claim that field-instructors' constructive feedback supports reflection and promotes candidates' self-assessment (Boydell, 1986; Lyle, 1996; Scheeler et al., 2006; Shantz & Ward, 2000; Stones, 1987; Tang & Chow, 2006; Wubbels, Korthagen, & Brekelmans, 1997). However, the field is less informed about how, and why, field-instructors enact specific practices aimed at supporting desirable outcomes.

To begin to critically examine both field instructors' practices and rationales for practice based on self-education, the field needs to

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develop an understanding of field instructors' practices and engagement in ongoing professional-improvement. A decade ago, Korthagen, Loughran, and Lunenberg's asked two critical questions, "What is the role of teacher educators as both consumers and producers of knowledge?" and "What do teacher educators do and how is their work constructed?" (2005, p. 109). Nearly ten years later, Loughran asks the still unanswered question, "What does it mean to professionally develop as a teacher educator?" (2014, p. 271).

Though some teacher educators have chronicled their own learning, (e.g. ; Basmadjian, 2011; Binks, Smith, Smith, & Joshi, 2009; Cuenca, 2010a, 2010b; Garcia & Roblin, 2008; Zeichner, 2005) for the purposes of assessing their practice, describing the trajectory of their development, and sharing promising instructional practices with the field, we need to know more about how field-instructors' develop conferencing practices, which support opportunities for teacher-candidate learning during the student teaching practicum, and how these self-developed practices can contribute to the teacher education knowledge base (Soslau, 2012a, 2012b; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Sawyer, 2006; Tang & Chow, 2007). Many have called for a clearer description of how teacher educators develop their own expertise by studying and refining their own practice toward addressing the paired goals of self-improved practice and generating new knowledge for the field (Binks et al. 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2003, 2005; Cuenca, 2010a, 2010b; Dinkelman, 2003; Fayne, 2007; Korthagen et al., 2005; Loughran, 2014; Loughran & Berry, 2005; Orland-Barak, 2005; Smith, 2005; Zeichner, 2005).

1.2. Purpose

The following paper is dual purposed. First, I aimed to engage in a systematic teacher educator inquiry (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Zeichner, 2007), often defined as self-study (Korthagen et al., 2005), to self-assess and improve my evolving practice of conferencing with student teachers. Second, since most teacher preparation programs across the globe include a required practicum or field based component supervised by a mentor, field-instructor, or supervisor, I am hopeful that a descriptive analysis of my post-lesson observation conferencing protocol, situated in the theoretical literature, will serve as a contribution not only to the development of local knowledge (Cochran-Smith, 2005) but to the field of teacher education.

The two aims of this manuscript answer Korthagen et al. (2005) and Zeichner's (2007) calls to connect self-study research with known theory, existing research programs, and related scholarly literature to adhere to the norms of the academy by contributing to knowledge growth. I also address two of Dinkelman's (2003) four outcomes of self-study; knowledge production to better understand how to "approach problems in [my] own immediate context," and knowledge sharing for "both local contexts and the broader teacher education research community" (p. 8—11).

Following Whitehead and Fitzgerald's (2007) inward (looking at my own practice) and outward (connecting with evolving theories) model; this self-study addresses the following two interrelated questions: What does the relationship between a field instructors' practice, and evolving theories about field instruction, look like over time? How does engagement in self-study inform the alignment between a field-instructor's practice and theories about how to best support teacher-candidate's reflection and self-assessment during post-lesson observation conferences? To answer these questions, I used qualitative methodology to analyze the five-year development process of my own self-created conferencing protocol. Specifically, I used story line methodology (Beijaard, 1999) and

personal/practical narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) to juxtapose key self-directed learning events over five years with revisions made to six versions of my conferencing protocol.

2. Theoretical framework and contributing literature

Field-instructors, who wish to develop their roles as practitioner-researchers, must align contextual-specific inquiry with more widely applicable theory (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Loughran, 2007, 2014; Zeichner, 2007). There are multiple theories that support my roles as a researcher and as a field-instructor. In the tradition of self-study and in honor of the dialectic between theory and practice, both sets of these theories are critical to my self-education and ability to generate local knowledge. The first set of concepts described below include the theories that govern the process of my self-development as a teacher educator. These frameworks include, working the dialectic, (Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2004), generative change (Ball, 2009) and transformation of participation (Rogoff, 2003)).

2.1. Dialectic as catalyst for praxis

2.1.1. Working the dialectic

Working the dialectic, a phrase popularized by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2004), denotes the deliberate blurring between researcher and practitioner roles. A special issue for *Teaching and Teacher Education* focused on the value of practitioner-produced research, in which Cochran-Smith further discussed the importance of *working the dialectic* to "capture the complete but generative tension of generating local knowledge of practice while … making knowledge accessible … and transforming it into public knowledge" (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 219—220). *Dialectic* denotes the "reciprocal relationship between researching or inquiring about the work of teacher education within the context of one's site of practice" (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 11). Others have called this "dialectical rationality" which views the relationship between theory and practice to be "mutually constitutive and interactive" (Torres & Mercado, 2004, p. 69). However, this synergistic relationship between research and practice needs to be unpacked. What does this relationship look like and how does the interaction promote changes that improve practice?

2.1.2. Living educational theory and praxis

Recognizing the necessarily ontological engagement of self-study researchers (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004; Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2007), Living Education Theory (LET) frames dialectics as two sets of forces which require practitioner-researchers to look critically at the difference between what they value and how those values differ from their enacted practices (Barry, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Whitehead, 2009). Living educational theory, when applied to self-study, requires that the practitioner-researcher ask, "How do I improve what I am doing?" (p. 87).

I apply LET to my work by comparing and contrasting the research about supporting student teacher learning with the field instruction practices that I actually enact and conceptualizing the reaction between the two as mutually informing; my practice is informed by theory, but my practice (through systematic reflection, self-assessment, collaboration with others, and practitioner-research) also informs theory. By situating field instruction practices that are likely to promote desirable student teacher competencies and my practice in the theoretical literature, I work towards praxis —enactment of theories during actual practice (Torres & Mercado, 2004). "The shift towards integrating theory and practice through dialectical processes of constructing [and] reconstructing … theory, assumes a view of learning to teach as the