

Reframing one's teaching: Discovering our teacher selves through reflection and inquiry

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Abstract

Learning to teach is a highly complex and multidimensional process. This self-study, conducted collaboratively by a preservice teacher and a teacher educator, traces one preservice teacher's development and growth over a 2-year period. The study examines the complexities of learning to teach, as well as the complexities of assisting preservice teachers on their journey to becoming teachers. The data were derived from multiple sources including observation notes, journal reflections, dialogue journals, and the student's action research/self-study paper. The results provide insight into how preservice teachers think, the conflicts they experience, the fears they encounter, and the benefits they derive from systematically examining their teaching and their students' learning. The article describes specific attitudes and dispositions that can impact growth and development. In addition, it discusses a variety of activities to foster reflection and inquiry.

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1. Introduction

“The journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in seeing them with new eyes” (Marcel Proust). This quote is posted on my university office door. I thought I understood what these words meant until recently when one of my preservice teachers helped me see “with new eyes”.

This is a story of discovery. It is a story that resulted from a challenging, and at times, frustrating journey with one of my students. Bruner (1990) believes that creating stories is a human and natural response for making meaning or comprehending events in our lives. He argues that stories are often created around puzzling, surprising, confusing or frustrating episodes in our work. This story was created as a result of a confusing, challenging experience. Conle (2003) contends that the act of telling one's story is very important because we may come to understand our own story anew through the retelling. Researchers have

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reported on the power of narrative in making students' lives more meaningful as well as influencing changes in their personal and professional lives (Conle, 1999; Postman, 1995).

The story starts with Ryan, my student. During his 2 years in the Master of Education in Teaching (MET) program, Ryan struggled to find his identity as a teacher. His story of professional growth and development as a teacher represents a highly complex, emotional, and personal roller coaster ride. Intertwined with Ryan's story is my story. As Ryan systematically examined his teaching experiences, I had the opportunity to use his journey as a mirror to reflect on my work as a teacher educator. This study represents a unique opportunity to gain insight into my teaching and my student's learning through a collaborative self-study.

Ryan's honest, reflective account of his struggles in the program became a vehicle for Ryan and I to closely examine the process of learning to teach. It was because of his desire to reflect and inquire into his teaching that I was able to reflect upon his thoughts, learn from him, and come to a deeper understanding of the struggles and obstacles in which student teachers engage.

Ryan's inquiry combined the methodologies of action research and self-study as a means of examining his practice. The object of his action research was himself and his teaching experiences. In his paper, written after he completed the program, Ryan stated:

Only recently I learned to appreciate the value and importance for a good teacher to reflect on himself or herself. Reflection was difficult for me because it did not conform to my scientific paradigm.

Ryan's honest reflections provided me with the opportunity to hear what he was thinking and feeling. Through multiple data sources, we had the opportunity to revisit events and incidents that occurred over the 2-year period and to frame and reframe (Schön, 1983, 1987) those events. We had the opportunity to co-construct a knowledge of our teaching practice.

An important reason for telling this story is to invite the reader to see connections to similar

experiences and gain deeper insight into the complex nature of learning to teach. This self-study helped me see more clearly the kinds of individual challenges and private struggles student teachers encounter. Gaining insight from the preservice teacher's perspective helped me reframe my thinking about my role as a teacher educator and better understand the barriers to learning that some preservice teachers encounter.

2. Background

Ryan was a student in the 2-year MET program at the University of Hawaii. The MET program consists of university-based professional studies seminars, field-based experiences, and site-based seminars. The program emphasizes inquiry, reflection, and collaboration, and involves extensive field experiences in the context of a professional development school setting.

The (MET) preservice teachers spend three semesters at the professional development school and are considered junior faculty. During the first semester, preservice teachers observe and participate in a variety of classrooms, and interact with the teachers and students. In the second semester, preservice teachers continue to participate in the schools for 15 h/week and teach two 3-week units. During the third semester they teach three classes for the entire semester under the guidance of a mentor teacher. The fourth semester consists of a paid internship in which students are placed in openings in the Department of Education schools and teach full time. During their internship, the preservice teachers receive support and guidance from two intern mentors and the university professor.

I am one of the three faculty members who teaches full time in the program. The MET faculty teach core courses, advise students, and supervise the preservice teachers for 2 years. Since the program is small, the faculty get to know all of the students well. A primary objective of the program is to weave theory and practice together throughout the four semesters. This is enhanced by immersing the students in partnership schools from the beginning of the program. The program is small and cohesive and the faculty work closely

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