

Experiencing Reflection IN Action

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VEXTATION

Last year, my Crossroads venture focused on changing field experiences for novice teachers. This was driven by a vexation about how reflections by novices seemed relatively superficial. In response, I asked novices to examine their practice from the perspective of an artist's studio. Using the artist's studio analogy helped me consider how novices learned to enact, interpret, and represent teaching. Now, I have attempted my venture (to a limited degree) and an alternative. My own reflection is that both ventures were modestly successful, though not reaching my goal. Looking at novices' representations of teaching from my initial venture, I felt their interpretations remained mostly descriptions of events rather than attempts to analyze and explain those events. In that venture I focused on transforming novices' reflective product. In the alternative venture I led a radical version of science methods instruction in which my students collaborated with a section of literacy methods to build an outdoor classroom at our participating school. The experience of building an outdoor classroom resulted in greater transformation of my students, as well as their representations of teaching. Based on that experience, novices' representations of teaching in that context revealed their considerations of how, what, and why things happened in that experience. Additionally, there was a transformation of novices from university students to intellectual leaders. Thus, not surprisingly, accomplishing my goal requires transformation of both the experience and the activity of interpreting and representing that experience. Unfortunately, building outdoor classrooms is not sustainable every semester. Furthermore, there are still areas that need improvement in terms of the overall goal.

I remain vexed about learning to think about or interpret teaching. While I report on some successes above, the novices often failed to appreciate the subtleties of the change they made in action. The vexation is rooted in my belief that teaching and learning to teach involve more than reflection on practice; it also involves an action occurring in the moment of teaching. I admit that this is not a novel idea (see Jackson, Schon, and others). But for me, the vexation is about helping novice teachers learn to reflect on *and* in practice (see Schon to elaborate on this distinction). I continue to pursue this vexation because I think this kind of reflection provides young women and men one dimension of social capital of teaching. There is the social capital of gaining professional abilities to act. There is also social capital in using reflection as points of departure in discourse about teaching. In terms of individual professional ability, I have begun thinking more about the notion of ability to think about teaching in the moment – reflection *in* action. But this kind of thinking in the moment, especially about science teaching, is not readily captured or easily learned. Some might argue that it is unrealistic for novices to attempt to think about their teaching in action. This argument arises from the notion that you need a sufficient body of knowledge and experience in order to actively reflect *in* practice. Furthermore, to add my goal of a representation of teaching that is akin to work in an artist's studio adds complexity. However, I believe it is possible to learn to reflect *in* action and represent teaching from an interpretive and artistic stance. There are some challenges to being successful. First, novices need to recognize their moment-to-moment decision-making. In those moments, the art, craft, and intellect of teaching intersect in a fertile context for analysis, interpretation, and representation. If novices fail to perceive those moments as problematic or interesting, the only thing to do is describe the events. This introduces the second dimension of social capital; reflection as a point of departure in professional discourse. If novices learn to appreciate the value and benefit of analysis of these moments, they gain access to professional discourse and engagement with peers around problems of practice. So, novices need to learn skills that will enable analysis, interpretation and representation, and they need means to enable professional discourse around those interpretations and representations.

VENTURE

My venture continues to be about helping novice teachers learn to think analytically and critically about their practice. However, in this particular venture, I am thinking about novices learning to think carefully and explicitly about their reflections *in* action. I am thinking about the ways that, as Jackson points out, teachers make on the spot decisions to alter and change plans based on information in the current context. This can involve monitoring and adjusting practice. But it can also involve fundamental changes and redirection based on unforeseen outcomes. As a result it can also become an opportunity to examine and reveal the actions based on assumptions that teachers make about students and their responses to learning experiences. The common thread is reflection *in* action – the act of thinking about and acting deliberately, based on observations and inferences in the moment, with the intention of affecting a learning experience so that it will be responsive to the learners in that specific context.

To begin this venture, I need to help novice teachers recognize moments of reflection *in* action. They need help realizing that they may change their intentions during a lesson and act based on information in context. It could be argued that novices do not engage in altering intended actions. I suspect that they always make changes, but fail to identify those changes or appreciate the ways that changes are important. Thus, there need to be mechanisms to facilitate documentation of comparing intentions and actions. One approach involves a structured peer observation. Peers would meet prior to a lesson to clarify the teachers' intentions. Then they would observe one another teaching and record the instances that seem like deviations from intentions. Finally the teacher and observer would discuss the changes that occur. An alternative model is more personal and individual. The prospective teacher would write out their own intentions and then have a mechanism (I am still trying to figure this out) to record the changes they make during a lesson. The challenge for each of these is to make a record of practice and also the changes that occur in action so that these can become texts that prospective teachers can examine. In terms of these options, I am leaning toward the first. This is because it engages novices in discussion with peers. This challenges both the observer and observed to develop social capital of teaching.

I remain convinced that documentation and representation— which in most cases becomes a form of reflection *on* action — remains vital. However, I want to connect ideas about reflection *in* action with analysis, interpretation, and representation of teaching. Building the outdoor classroom helped me realize that a powerful experience is important. But, the experience is not sufficient; it remains important to analyze those experiences. I remain convinced that video documentation is powerful because the actions of the teacher are more vividly evident. Yet, I have begun to think that the experience of video analysis has become too distant and academic for the prospective teachers I teach. Effective reflections on action are as much good stories as good analyses. Therefore, I am thinking of a second, but related venture that would involve video-based autoethnographies of practitioner development. I am thinking that these will include personal confessionals, clips of teaching, and syntheses of ideas that are compiled in a meaningful storyline about development of teaching practice.

I hope these two ventures will combine to support prospective teachers' reflection *on and* in practice. My hope is that this will be an experience that builds teachers social capital of teaching — becoming reflective practitioners. I see this as developing social capital in terms of developing professional abilities and also developing professional discourse. I also hope that it will challenge prospective teachers to consider their own actions around their perceptions and assumptions about their students. Ideally, this will lead to teachers who have greater potential to become positive advocates for children. As science teaching and learning become increasingly absent in the curriculum of public elementary schools, it seems that there is potential that students will miss opportunities to develop social capital for engaging in scientific discourse. My hope is that through implicit experiences of this venture, it may impact novice teachers' thinking about science teaching and learning, and as a consequence children's opportunities to learn science.